



# Declining (the) Subject: Immunity and the Crisis of Masculine Selfhood in Modern France (1870-2000)

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**Declining (the) Subject:  
Immunity and the Crisis of Masculine Selfhood  
in Modern France (1870-2000)**

A dissertation presented

By

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to

The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Declining (the) Subject: Immunity and the Crisis of Masculine Selfhood  
in Modern France (1870-2000)

**Abstract**

I locate my dissertation at the critical intersection of philosophy, medical discourse and literature, and anchor it around five intertwining concepts: modernity, subjectivity, masculinity, immunity and Frenchness. I contend that immunity, as a concept at which life and law converge, offers an alternative and largely overlooked *episteme* shaping contemporary French literary consciousness as a primary regulator/negotiator between health and sickness, belonging and not belonging, volition and involition, and, finally, self and other. I treat immunity metaphorically and scientifically, and then trace the *episteme* through the works of three French authors—Émile Zola, Albert Camus and Hervé Guibert—all of whom adopt the medical novel as a way of addressing the relationship of the individual to society and to the self.

Anne-Marie Moulin frames the immunological revolution as an ever-evolving "semantic event." In this vein, I devote my first chapter to examining how immunity instituted itself as a common trope of "becoming" embraced—and left naturalized—by post-structural thinkers grappling with their corporal limits. This rhetorical turn culminates in Jean-Luc Nancy's characterization of the immune system as the body's "physiological signature," inhibiting the potential of man to transcend his biology. In my second chapter, I move from the metaphor of immunity to a brief exposition of the history of the science, ending my survey with Elie Metchnikoff (and his legacy), the "father" of cellular immunology who envisioned the internal

body as a dynamic, every-changing structure. I focus the next three chapters of my study on literary examples where the male protagonist's immunity has been compromised. For my first two examples—*Le Docteur Pascal* by Emile Zola and *La Peste* by Albert Camus—I analyze the portrait of the supposedly immune doctor, considering what the “costs and benefits” of this immunity are and how this “exceptional status” is destabilized. Then, in my last chapter, I switch perspectives from the doctors to the patient, examining the texts of Hervé Guibert who, I argue, models his writing strategy on the retrovirus's tactics, challenging literary conventions so as better to exteriorize his experience and “contaminate” (in the etymological sense as “touch together”) his readers.

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Life is naturally tattered, infested, bitten off, bitten into.  
The stem with a broken leaf, like an animal with lesions on  
its internal organs or less-than-glossy feathers, is more normal  
than its unscarred counterpart. An unblemished animal—  
or person—is idealized and fictional, like the advertisements  
showing a solitary traveler at the Eiffel Tower. It doesn't really  
exist except in our imaginations. Disease is part and parcel of  
how we are supposed to look, of how we are supposed to live.

--Evolutionary biologist Marlene Zuk in *Riddled with Life*

Je parle de compassion: mais ce n'est pas une pitié  
qui s'attendrit sur elle-même et se nourrit de soi.  
Com-passion: c'est la contagion, le contact d'être  
les uns avec les autres dans ce tumulte.  
Ni altruisme, ni identification:  
l'ébranlement de la contiguïté brutale.

--Jean-Luc Nancy in *Être singulier pluriel*

## Introduction: The Purell Imperative

Purell is ubiquitous. In hospital clinics, bathrooms, restaurants, casinos, cruise ships, libraries, shopping malls, classrooms—any place where germs might possibly lurk, a vigilant tug on the anti-bacterial lever, with its measured dispensation of the clear, harsh smelling liquid, magically coats hands as it promises protection against contaminants. Purell has become such a mainstay of modern life (worthy of a Barthesian *mythologie*) that it warrants having its own verbal form. New parents insist that relatives “Purell” before reluctantly handing over their squirming newborn to aunts and uncles teeming with eager microbes. Resist "Purelling" at your own peril: this is the message that can be inferred from any of the numerous scary films to come out about disease, infection and epidemics where every point of contact (door handles, elevator buttons, dirty dishes or glasses, telephones, ATMs, handshakes) can lead to a quick and gruesome demise.<sup>1</sup> We live in a world where, in an extreme (though not uncommon) fantasy, we would never touch anything or anyone (a fantasy that is quickly becoming a reality as we spend more and more of our lives interacting virtually behind a screen—though keyboards, mice and smartphones are some of the worst offenders for harboring unwanted “guests”). But when we do have to touch, Purell, with a single squirt, forms the invisible shield to keep germs at bay. Even if only briefly, Purell makes us pure again.

Scientifically speaking, made primarily of alcohol (60-90% depending on the strength), Purell breaks down proteins in bacterial cells lingering on the skin’s surface and leaves hands inhospitable (i.e. too slippery) to “enveloped viruses,” such as influenza and HIV. While some

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Soderberg’s 2011 mockumentary “Contagion” is the most flagrant example. “Contagion” follows the path of a deadly viral strain, part bat-part pig, as it spreads across the globe and, according to the website, claims the lives of 263,000,000 and counting. The spread might have been contained if only those people had Purelled their hands more religiously!

controversy has arisen as to whether the use of Purell (or other alcohol-based hand sanitizers), like the widespread use of antibiotics, increases the risk that “supergerms” will develop, David Owen, in his recent *New Yorker* article, lays these fears to rest: “Alcohol kills germs in a different way, by disrupting cell membranes, a process to which organisms are almost as unlikely to become immune as humans are to become immune to bullets.”<sup>2</sup> Owen’s vocabulary is aptly chosen. To expand on and deepen his metaphor, Purell acts as a bullet-proof vest precisely *for* our immune system, catching the germs before they can “catch” us, infiltrating the body and unleashing their rampage. If we could, we would pour Purell over our heads, immerse ourselves in its transparent viscosity, and thus enact a modern baptismal rite to assure our terrestrial salvation from the grime, grit and gunk waiting to assail us.

At the heart of our Purell obsession is anxiety about exposure: our immunity is threatened, and we are vulnerable. It is no coincidence that, while Gojo industries originally developed Purell in the late 1980s, it wasn’t until 1996 that the company garnered enough interest to be able to launch Purell on the consumer market as a topical “wonder drug,” of sorts.<sup>3</sup> Public discourse about immunity was at its height at this time as the global spread of HIV/AIDS was peaking. People lived in fear of contracting the then poorly understood virus (retrovirus, to be exact) that invariably led to complete immune collapse, leaving the AIDS-ridden body open to invasion by any and all opportunistic viruses and bacteria. In the span of 15 years, HIV/AIDS had ravaged the gay community, infected millions of “normal” heterosexuals, and spread to become a world-wide epidemic decimating communities across the globe.

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<sup>2</sup> David Owen, "Hands Across America," *The New Yorker* 89, no.3 (March 4, 2013): 34.

<sup>3</sup> Owen observes the remarkable influence Purell has exerted in conditioning the way people in Western society conceive of tactile interaction: "...[L]ess than fifteen years after its introduction, [Purell] led America’s main public-health agency to dramatically change its recommendation for how doctors should clean their hands. A pill with the same potential to reduce hospital-infection deaths would be viewed as a wonder drug” (ibid.).

As it paradoxically happened, the year of Purell's release marks an optimistic watershed moment in the history of HIV/AIDS: in 1996, Dr. David Ho was chosen as Time Magazine's Man of the Year for his discovery and development of combination retroviral drugs. At the 11<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Convention in July of that year, Dr. Ho presented his findings about HAART or "highly reactive antiretroviral therapy" (what would informally become known as the AIDS tritherapy "cocktail"), the only treatment that had so far proven effective in suppressing (though not eliminating) the virus by reducing the HIV viral load in the body. From this moment forward, HAART "commuted" the sentence of thousands of people from death to a life of chronic disease management.<sup>4</sup> And yet, while the AIDS cocktail calmed people's worst fears, it still, to this day, has not brought about a cure or vaccine. Lingering HIV/AIDS paranoia coupled with the advent of new, potentially deadly viral strains that have surfaced (SARS, Bird Flu, H1N1 or Swine flu, to name only a few) have only amplified the urgent imperative to Purell.<sup>5</sup>

But what does Purell have to do with late nineteenth and twentieth century French literature? Purell, as the most banal of remedies slathered on throughout the day to "reseat"

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<sup>4</sup> The juridical language is not gratuitous: as Susan Sontag reminds us, unlike cancer, AIDS does not strike randomly. In the Western imagination (and particularly in the "early days" of AIDS in the 1980s and early 90s), a person is *guilty* of contracting the illness, having willfully engaged in behavior deemed "indulgen[t]" or "delinquen[t]." Particularly for people who contract the virus sexually, AIDS is framed as a punishment: "With AIDS, the shame is linked to an imputation of guilt...Few wonder, Why me?...Indeed, to get AIDS is precisely to be revealed, in the majority of cases so far, as a member of certain 'risk group,' a community of pariahs...The unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency—addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant." Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1989), 112-13.

<sup>5</sup> One of the undercurrents in Owen's article is the push to enforce compulsory "Purelling" in hospitals, adding a decidedly Orwellian note to his piece. Gojo is currently working on an electronic system that would keep track of the number of times a particular person "pulls the trigger" with the goal of identifying health care professionals who fail to clean their hands as frequently as they should. Quoting the current CEO of Gojo, Owen writes: "Right now, we know, in one way, that we should wash our hands. But if you are a health-care worker, running between patients, working hard, doing your best, it's hard for you to know where the germs are lurking, and it's easy to forget. Once hand cleaning can be monitored and failures automatically pinpointed, dangerous behavior can be eliminated. Germs are not visible now...They will become visible through information." See Owen, "Hands Across America, 34.

(heal) the individual, repeatedly enacts the fantasy of purification and reasserted autonomy. It offers an entry point into verbalizing my assertion of (imperiled) immunity as one of primary epistemological and ontological vectors shaping what we have come to recognize as the modern embodied self, and particularly the modern masculine self in France as reflected in theory and literature from this period.

In my work (below and in the first chapter), I examine the concept of modernity through the writings of several theorists/philosophers. The understanding of man's life as defined by his corporal finitude, his biological ends (birth and death), serves as a baseline for all of these formulations, a shared assumption Margaret Lock eloquently summarizes:

With modernity, ideas about life and death and associated beliefs of transcendence were disentangled from the realm of the sacred. As part of this transition, from the middle of the 19th century, death and its legal determination were made into a medical matter. The pronouncement of death by a physician signaled the simultaneous demise of body and person for all but the pious, and biological death became, ipso fact, the end of all life...[W]ith secularization, keeping death at bay became a source of meaning in life--the ideas about transcendence were internalized and individualized, and the 'soul' was displaced by the self-reflective, rational mind so characteristic of modern society in the West...[T]he life course of individuals began to be conceptualized as a finite unit of biological time, rather than, as formerly the case, as contributing primarily to transcendental intergenerational ties linking the living and the dead.<sup>6</sup>

Through the ages, one of the poorly understood forces that imparted meaning to life by virtue of sparing it was immunity: the biological mechanism by which some people fought off illness while many others perished. In the pre-modern world, surviving an epidemic or plague was framed as divine providence—God's will. Once God had been pushed out of the picture, however, man was eager to find an explanation beyond just dumb luck for discrepancies in

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Lock and Vihn-Kim Nguyen, *An Anthropology of Biomedicine* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 236-37.

disease resistance. The science of immunology arose, in part, out of questions regarding the idiosyncratic response to illness or other external “invasion.”

Illness, once explained as divine intervention or justice, fell into the doctor’s capable (or not so capable) hands. The writer (and novelist in particular), intrigued by this figure mediating between life and death, picked up the physician by his pen and spun tales out of him and his exploits. Accordingly, a paradigm of the medical novel (i.e. narratives privileging illness and adopting a “scientific” vocabulary as a way of addressing the relationship of the individual to the larger social context) was established as part of the French literary canon.

Two mirror lines of inquiry have guided my research as I toggle with these discursive overlaps. Put simply: How have understandings of biological immunity inflected the French literary imagination? And conversely, how have cultural contexts, reflected in literature, framed the scientific articulations of immunity (as a biological mechanism with epistemological and ontological import)?<sup>7</sup> This mutual interplay between science and cultural production grounds my dissertation, which I locate at the critical intersection of philosophy, medical discourse and literature, and anchor around five intertwining concepts: modernity, subjectivity, masculinity, immunity and Frenchness (“Frenchity”?). I contend that immunity offers an alternative and largely overlooked *episteme* shaping contemporary French literary consciousness, as both science and metaphor, as a primary regulator/negotiator between health and sickness, between

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller points to the mutual interdependence of science and language in *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death*: “... [T]he course of science is mediated by its sources of external support by institutional self-reinforcement, and by language. Language simultaneously reflects and guides the development of scientific models and methods. It also helps shape the ends toward which science aims, if only because we gravitate to problems we’re equipped to formulate and solve. But language is hardly free. What counts as a usable, effective, and communicable representation is constrained, on the one hand, by our social, cultural, and disciplinary location, and on the other hand, by the recalcitrance of what I am left, by default, to call ‘nature.’ The language of scientists is limited by what they learn to think and say as individuals, as members of a discipline, and as members of one or, more usually, several larger communities; it is simultaneously limited by what they can do, individually and collectively, in their ongoing material interactions with the objects of their inquiry.” *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender, and Language* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

belonging and not belonging, between volition and involition, and, finally, between self and other. While interdisciplinary studies in literature and medicine have proliferated over the past decade, and while inquiry into the historical, metaphorical and philosophical ramifications of immunity, as we shall discuss, have been considered, a project focusing exclusively on the concept of immunity and its relationship to the *literary* self—and particularly the *literary masculine* self—within the contemporary corpus of literature written in French has not been undertaken.

### **Modernity and Metaphorical Immunity**

*Not your grandfather's modernity: "All that is liquid..."*

In terms of defining modernity, I see Purell as a point of convergence with—or, rather, an exemplary manifestation of—Zygmunt Bauman's characterization of "liquid modernity." Bauman, a Polish sociologist, employs the vocabulary of phases of matter to discuss "modern society," problematizing the term "modern" in terms of solid or liquid (or gas, eventually). Bauman's chosen metaphor gels nicely with my reflection on the implications of the Purell imperative. He splits modernity into two phases: the first phase was dedicated to "melting" (a term Bauman lifts from *The Communist Manifesto*) all of the "pre-modern solids," the social structures under the *Ancien Régime* (as they are so patiently described by Tocqueville). These structures, explains Bauman, were already in a state of disrepair after the Revolution (the "birth" of modernity), but were still inhibiting social movement toward the end of the nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Obsolete hierarchies, both political and religious, undue familial and moral obligations, etc. all had to be liquefied and liquidated. The goal was to wipe the slate



clean of these impediments, so as to construct “new and improved solids” designed to withstand the test of time in ways earlier structures had not. These “new” solids, founded on principles of rationalization, homogenization and economic expediency, were heavily associated with material tangibility (capital accumulation) and space (the growth and prosperity of the nation state). The social structures erected during this period calcified, tending toward a totalitarian rigidity, which limited any variance from severely imposed norms: “The totalitarian society of all-embracing, compulsory and enforced homogeneity loomed constantly and threateningly on the horizon—as its ultimate destination, as a never-fully-defused time-bomb or never-fully-exorcised spectre. That modernity was a sworn enemy of contingency, variety, ambiguity, waywardness and idiosyncrasy, having declared on all such ‘anomalies’ a holy war of attrition; and it was individual freedom and autonomy that were commonly expected to be the prime casualties of the crusade.”<sup>8</sup>

“Individual freedom and autonomy” are the buzzwords here, and, ironically, these “totalitarian” wars, which culminated in the erasure of the individual, were often waged in the name of protecting him: *his* right to prosper, to own, to lay claim to land, to raise a family, *bref* to serve as a properly behaving constituent who benefits from all the society provides (namely protection to pursue these “dreams”) while towing the line of what this “belonging” and “protection” entail. The magic of these *régimes* (exemplified, according to Bauman, by the Fordist factory, Weber’s bureaucracy, the Panopticon, Big Brother, and, most horrifyingly, the concentration camps) lay in their ability to convince the individual to see himself (and the use of the gender pronoun is intentional) in the projected ideological image of the “everyman.” In

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<sup>8</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 25.

short, Bauman's solidly-modern individual eagerly "drank the kool-aid," glimpsing his future in the realization of the society promised by the ideological imperatives he imbibed.

Bauman goes on to argue that, once these totalitarian regimes broke down (precisely because of their inflexibility and the lengths to which they had to go to maintain their absolutist visions), the societies moved into a second phase of modernity. While this phase is commonly mistaken as a form of "post-modernity"—even a "post-history" (though, in light of all that has happened in the last few decades, the discourse, precipitated by the fall of communism, proclaiming the "end of history"<sup>9</sup> and triumph of liberal democracy toward the end of the 1980s and into the early 90s has abated)—Bauman insists on a continuity between the phases, highlighting the likeness this "new," lighter (purely liquid) version shares with its "liquid-solid" predecessor:

...[A]t the threshold of the modern era we have been emancipated from belief in the act of creation, revelation and eternal condemnation. With such beliefs out of the way, we humans found ourselves 'on our own'—which means that from then on we knew of no limits to improvement and self-improvement other than the shortcomings of our own inherited or acquired gifts, resourcefulness, nerve, will and determination. And whatever is man-made, men can un-make. Being modern came to mean, as it means today, being unable to stop and even less able to stand still...Being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression...[I]t also means having an identity which can exist only as an unfulfilled project. In these respects, there is not much to distinguish between the plight of our grandfathers and our own.<sup>10</sup>

The modern man is indebted to no creator other than himself; indeed, as Nietzsche's madman reminds us: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him...Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"<sup>11</sup> The godless man is forever in the

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<sup>9</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181-82.

process of self-creation (usually entailing some form of destruction, self directed or otherwise), which comes to its term only through death. The end approaches more quickly with each passing second; there is no place for stillness or idleness on this quest to become—and to overcome—what one is.

Bauman does, however, identify two characteristics, the second flowing out of the first, that distinguish “our” modernity from our “grandparent’s” modernity: 1) the complete disillusionment with any posited ideological/idealized utopia. In the “lighter” modernity, there is no *telos*, no imagined state of perfection to be reached as a society. Man is on his own to forge his personal paradise with or without the participation of those around him, and sometimes (often) at their expense; 2) with the detachment of the individual from the collective comes the push toward deregulation and de-communalization. Everything is individualized, privatized. With this transition, priorities and values shift: fast and light become the operative words. Nomadism is privileged over sedentariness; cosmopolitanism over national citizenship; disposability over permanence; instant over delayed gratification; ideas over objects.

One of the most notable changes, under this lighter version of modernity, is the way in which power is expressed and channeled. In liquid modernity, as Bauman writes:

Power can move with the speed of the electronic signal—and so the time required for the movement of its essential ingredients has been reduced to instantaneity. For all practical purposes, power has become truly *exterritorial*, no longer bound, not even slowed down, by the resistance of space...people operating the levers of power on which the fate of the less volatile partners in the relationship depends can at any moment escape beyond reach—into sheer inaccessibility...The prime technique of power is now escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement with its cumbersome corollaries of order-building, order-maintenance and the responsibility for the consequences of it all as well as of the necessity to bear their costs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 10-11 (emphasis in the original).

Not only is power unlocatable, it is also faceless. Bauman labels this configuration of authority as “post-panopticon”; it obviates the need for personal engagement since there is no “real” physical confrontation. But, in other ways, this form of control is the ultimate realization of Foucauldian power; it takes the middle man out of the equation. Power has been both fully internalized (people voluntarily “confess” their deepest secrets on their facebook page—there is less and less need to monitor, or, rather, a computer monitor is all that is required) and depersonalized to the extent that the sites from which power emanates disperse into the ether, absorbed by virtual entities that are both fully autonomous, yet inextricably interconnected by virtue of their lack of spatial rootedness.<sup>13</sup> Under this order, natural resources become an afterthought, gobbled up by the most privileged and powerful. “What water is there for us to clean ourselves?,” asks Nietzsche’s madmen, with God’s blood dripping from his knife. “Purell,” answers the jetsetter. No water is needed with the quickly evaporating, barely there liquid. It has never been easier (either literally or figuratively) to wipe dirt from *les mains sales*.

Importantly, political discourse has shifted from creating a strong, collective body to ensuring the “state” does not encroach on the rights of the individual. Bauman notes the linguistic shift concerning the ethics of this fundamental change in priorities: “This fateful departure has been reflected in the relocation of ethical/political discourse from the frame of the ‘just society’ to that of ‘human rights’, that is refocusing that discourse on the right of individuals to stay different and to pick and choose at will their own models of happiness and fitting life-style.”<sup>14</sup> In American society, the necessity to assure the individual’s right to assert

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<sup>13</sup> The economic crisis of 2008 offers the perfect example where risky ventures, made possible only by the instantaneity of information, brought the world to the brink of a *global* market collapse. The culprits of this terrifying economic standstill (a decidedly unmodern term) were banks deemed “too-big-to fail” because of their interconnectedness while remaining seemingly person-less, and, therefore, unprosecutable.

<sup>14</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 29.

himself (and I continue to emphasize the use of the masculine pronoun, particularly in this case) has been pushed to an extreme hitherto unseen in states having recently passed bills guaranteeing “fetal personhood,” granting “human rights” to embryos from the moment of fertilization. These laws, if accepted by the voters (in North Dakota, the measure will appear as a yes/no option on the ballot in November 2014), amend the state constitution to declare that “the inalienable right to life of every human being at any stage of development must be recognized and protected.”<sup>15</sup> The measure would ban abortion and other kinds of birth control regardless of the health of the mother or the “conditions” (consensual sex, rape or incest, it makes no difference) under which the egg was fertilized. It could also potentially affect the legality of stem cell research and, paradoxically, in-vitro fertilization. This is a flagrant example of how the “rights of the individual”—as conceived by and for men—always come at a cost, often to women who, unlike men in this instance, only questionably have a “right” to “own” and “defend” their body as they see fit.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Laura Bassett, “North Dakota Personhood Measure Passes State Senate,” *Huffington Post*, March 22, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/north-dakota-personhood\\_n\\_2934503.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/north-dakota-personhood_n_2934503.html). For an in-depth investigation into how the fetus has entered into political, social and medical debates in the United States, see Sara Dubow, *Ourselves Unborn: A History of the Fetus in Modern America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> This formulation of defense is inspired by Ed Cohen’s brilliantly argued exegesis of the notion of immunity. Cohen traces the notion of the body as property—something one owns and controls—to Hobbes and Locke. Cohen writes: “The idea that our lives and bodies are ‘things held in propriety’ radically reimagines the nature of human existence. It introduces the idea that the immanence of human existence cleaves between proprietor and property...[T]he person now emerges as a duality that relates to itself, by way of a legally recognized relation called property as the owner of itself. In this formulation, *to be* a person means, first and foremost, *to have* a body, where the ‘being’ of the person resides (literally) in the ‘having’ of the body...John Locke explicitly draws out the implications of this conclusion in his famous statement in *Two Treatises of Government*: ‘Every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any right to but himself.’” *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 55.

### *The Immunitary Paradigm: Declining Death in Life*

The bio-medical valence of these reflections bridges Bauman's work on liquid modernity to Roberto Esposito's theorization of what he calls the "immunitary paradigm." Esposito, a contemporary Italian philosopher, hangs the bulk of his theoretical reflections "on the tangential line that links the sphere of life with that of law."<sup>17</sup> He opens his text *Bios* with a discussion of a controversial French legal proceeding from 2000-2001, litigated over the span of thirteen years. In this court case, the mirror opposite of the right of personhood is at stake, namely *the right to death* of the unborn. Nicolas Perruche, 18 at the time the case was being decided, was born severely handicapped. His mother had contracted German measles during her pregnancy and had expressed her desire to abort in the event her illness would compromise the fetus. Her doctor misdiagnosed her and discouraged her from getting the abortion. The doctor was taken to court and was found guilty of allowing the boy to be born; or, put another way: the physician was "condemned for not having killed."<sup>18</sup> Esposito uses this case to exemplify the undecidable intersection in the law "between biological reality [*sic*] and the juridical person...between natural life and a form of life."<sup>19</sup> He makes a contentious connection between the decision the mother would have had to make (to abort regardless of her choice, to "eliminate" the fetus as part of her "preventive duty", so as to avoid "obstruct[ing]" the person—her fetus—to his future right to claim is "life proper" as he sees fit) to "eugenic *caesure*," the court-sanctioned decision that

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<sup>17</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 45.

<sup>18</sup> Marlise Simons, "French Uproar Over Right to Death for the Unborn," *New York Times*, October 19, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/19/world/french-uproar-over-right-to-death-for-unborn.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>19</sup> Esposito, *Bios*, 3.

deems one form of life as more “valid” than another life (what, in Nazi parlance, becomes identified as a “life unworthy of life”) (3-4).

Esposito locates the notion of “biopolitics,” extensively examined by Foucault, at the heart of this case (one among several he cites) where law is superimposed on both life and death. He asks: “Why does a politics of life always risk being reversed into a work of death?” (8). According to Esposito, Foucault attempted to answer this question but failed to move past a fundamental aporia when he tried to account for Nazism and Stalinism, hesitating on whether to consider the policy of using death to preserve life espoused by both of these ideological regimes as an exception or inevitable *telos* to modernity. Esposito provides what he calls the “missing link” to Foucault’s reasoning that binds biopolitics to modernity. He introduces the concept of immunity/immunization (the process by which one becomes immune), to account for the superimposition between man as an individuated, biological entity who struggles and competes to survive, and man as a social, political entity who works to attribute meaning to his “bare” existence. Esposito theorizes the convergence of these two imperatives around the nexus formed around immunity and community, showing how the two terms, with their shared etymological root *munus*, instead of working dialectically as opposites, in fact fold into a logic of reciprocal inscription; one term gives rise to the other, keeping it “in check.” Esposito pins the historical moment when what Bauman calls “heavy” or “solid” modernity began to fall apart in Western Europe as the culmination of this model whereby totalitarian imperatives to homogenize the social body in the name of self-preservation and life concomitantly necessitate the extermination of “heterogeneous” elements (euphemistically speaking); death is used to stamp out “living” death to perpetuate life. This logic, as Esposito shows, results in a self-destructive, autoimmune

turn by which the life of the collective body is internally compromised by its very efforts to sustain it.

As we will discuss in chapter one, the definition of modernity I espouse (one upon which all of these philosophers can agree) fundamentally hinges on the limits of man as defined by his temporal and spatial existence where any hope of spiritual transcendence is barred. Ed Cohen succinctly sums up the political stakes of man's earth-bound ontological state: "...[W]ithin modernity...the attachment of the person to the body supersedes its attachment to the soul. Concomitantly, the distinct personal statuses of body and soul denominate distinct *political* ontologies. Modernity births the modern body, and the modern body makes modernity matter."<sup>20</sup> Esposito further elaborates on the ramifications of this terrestrial grounding, the fact that, in the modern world, "politics has no other object than the maintenance and expansion of life" (9). Under the life-promoting regime of modernity, the most desirable *political* and *biological* ontology (to borrow Ed Cohen's term) is the state of immunity.<sup>21</sup>

Ed Cohen deftly traces the "metaphoric migration" of the word "immunity" at the end of the nineteenth century from the juridical and political context into the bio-medical realm.<sup>22</sup> Esposito, then, examines the progressive convergence of the two spheres under the same word in

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Nikolas Rose extends the logic, showing how the "maximization" of life made possible through biomedicine, has instituted itself as a guiding *ethical* principle in Western societies composed of "somatic" individuals (those who identify selfhood as being intimately tied to embodiment as articulated by biomedical discourse): "...[T]he ethic of active citizenship has taken shape in advanced liberal democracies. This is an ethic in which the maximization of lifestyle, potential, health, and quality of life has become almost obligatory, and where negative judgments are directed toward those who will not, for whatever reason, adopt an active, informed, positive, and prudent relation to the future." *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ed Cohen, "Figuring immunity: towards a genealogy of a metaphor," in *Singular Selves: Historical Issues and Contemporary Debates in Immunology*, ed. Anne-Marie Moulin and Alberto Cambrosio (Paris: Elsevier, 2001), 180.



mid-twentieth century totalitarian regimes. Before considering the bio-medical usage, I will focus on the juridical/political domain out of which immunity as a concept arose to better evaluate the convergence proposed by Esposito.

Immunity, derived from the Latin word *immunitas*, etymologically implies an exemption for someone from performing a communal service; as Esposito glibly asserts, it is that which occurs when one is treated “as an exception to the rule that everybody else must follow.”<sup>23</sup> It is generally deemed a privilege, something “enjoyed” by a very few. Much of Esposito’s analysis approaches the notion of immunity by unpacking the rich polysemy of *munus*, the etymological root of both immunity and community. *Munus* has several connotative layers: *onus* (obligation, burden, duty); *officium* (service, office, employment); and *donum* (gift). For Esposito, *munus* is, in fact, an intensified expression of gift-giving by which it is incumbent upon one who “receives” to then “return” the service or obligation, an energetic “give-and-take” that puts the public self at risk of dissolution. Immunity, within this logic, arises to protect the self, and thus to limit the imperatives of *munus*:

Tracing it back to its etymological roots, *immunitas* is revealed as the negative or lacking form of *communitas*. If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation, jeopardizes individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas*.<sup>24</sup>

The isolation/freeing established by immunity’s dispensation is concomitantly conferred to a body considered to be a part of the larger community, thus umbrellaed under the community’s jurisdiction and protection. In this way, immunity assumes community while it negates it, shielding itself (the self) from the burden of communal participation.

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<sup>23</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Esposito, *Bios*, 50.

Esposito makes clear that immunization—the process by which one gains immunity—is a shady business; it ensures life through the subterfuge of exposure, an internalization of the “noxious” element so as better to fend against it.

...[I]mmunization is a negative [form] of the protection of life. It saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective, to which it pertains, but it does not do so directly, immediately, or frontally; on the contrary, *it subjects the organism to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand*. Just as in the medical practice of vaccinating the individual body, so the immunization of the political body functions similarly, introducing within it a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself. (46)

Immunization operates by the logic of the *katechon*, a restraining force that keeps the “malady” at bay by keeping it contained within. In this respect, the *katechon* is somewhat of a Catch-22: it holds the “undesirable” (however it happens to be designated: as illness, evil, or, in the Christian tradition, the *Antechrist*) at arm’s length, but, because it still holds onto it, the “undesirable” stays present. It, thus, also constrains the growth or expansion of the “proper” body in which it has been internalized, since the “proper” body—the “immunized” body—will never be fully free from it.<sup>25</sup>

Esposito details how the Nazi regime drove the paradigm of immunization to its paroxysm. This historical moment coincides with the “tipping point” (or rather falling off point) of heavy modernity in Bauman’s terms, the moment after which the desire to maintain the individual overrode the necessity to keep the collective body intact. As Esposito clarifies, the dividing lines between self (equated with “life”) and pathogenic other (“death”) became so fixed and so literal under Nazism that coexistence between self and pathogen was rendered impossible: the *katechon*, framed as the “Jewish virus,” had to be expelled in one way or another to “restore”

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<sup>25</sup> Esposito fully discusses the logic of the *katechon* and the migration of the term from the biblical (in which it is initially conjured) into the political context through the writings of Carl Schmitt (*Immunitas*, 52-79).

the health of the German national body.<sup>26</sup> As Esposito convincingly argues, the aim of the “final solution” was not to kill life, but rather to kill death seen to inhere in “inferior,” “degenerate” bodies:<sup>27</sup> “The disease against which the Nazis fight to the death is none other than death itself...The only way to do so seemed to be to accelerate the ‘work of the negative,’ namely to take upon oneself the natural or divine task of leading to death the life of those who had already been promised to it. In this case, death became both the object and the instrument of the cure, the sickness and its remedy” (137-38).

But ending life was not sufficient. Esposito dwells at length on the measures taken to prevent the *creation* of life, an example of the most literal and the darkest form of biopolitics—a “thanatopolitics”—by which the doctor and the state, medicine and governance merged to enforce comprehensive prophylactic measures; *naissance* and nation share a common etymology, and, in this case, were conceived as inverse functions of the other (the birthing of “undesirable” elements resulted in the diminishing of the nation and vice versa) (169). The Nazi practice of both “positive” (leading up to the war, there was a strong pro-natalist campaign to regenerate and strengthen the German population) and “negative” eugenics (the brutal sterilization of thousands of men and women) spilled into what was conceived as “therapeutic” genocide. As Esposito makes clear: “[The] implementers [of genocide] were convinced that only extermination could lead to the renewal of the German people. As emerges from the pervasive use of the term *Genesung* (healing) with regard to the massacre in progress, a singular logical and semantic chain links degeneration, regeneration, and genocide: regeneration overcomes degeneration

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<sup>26</sup> Hitler, himself, employed the immunological metaphor: “‘The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions of this world. The battle that we fight every day is equal to those fought in the last century by Pasteur and Koch’” (Esposito, *Bios*, 117).

<sup>27</sup> The discourse of degeneration was resurrected, at this time, from nineteenth century treatises mixing morality and medicine. These texts portrayed “degeneracy” as a pre-determined somatic and psychological condition hereditarily passed down, eventually posing a threat to the entire society as more and more people were affected. We will address theories of degeneracy in greater depth in the third chapter on Zola.

through genocide” (143-44). Death and life were superimposed just as body and ego collapsed into one: “Suspending life was too little—one needed to annul the genesis of life, eliminating all posthumous traces of life...nullify[ing] life in advance” (145).

Esposito takes the reader through his careful examination so as to set the stage for his articulation of a radically new, “affirmative” vision of biopolitics. As compelling as his narrative of the immunitary paradigm is as an explicative frame for Nazism, his “alternative,” based on a notion of continual rebirth, causes pause in the reader. Esposito writes an ode to pregnancy, though not by glorifying the symbiotic beauty of the mother/child union. Instead, mother and child are warring factions: “The mother is pitted against the child and the child against the mother, and yet what results from this conflict is the spark of life. Contrary to the metaphor of a fight to the death, what takes place in the mother’s womb is a ‘fight’ to life,’ proving that difference and conflict are not necessarily destructive. Indeed, just as the attack of the mother protects the child, the child’s attack can also save the mother from her self-injurious tendencies...” (*Immunitas*, 171). Both mother and baby are bellicose; however, the child is excused for its “temper tantrums”: it’s only a baby, after all. The mother’s body, on the other hand, is just as tempestuous, choleric--colicky—as the child’s with the added characteristic of being stereotypically unstable and self-destructive: according to this account, the baby “saves” the mother from herself.

This battle between mother and child requires the intervention of the father who steps in—with his “difference”—to trigger the mechanisms necessary to ensure the “spark of life” is lit:

How does it manage to happen? How can the fetus, encoded as ‘other’ based on all normal immunological criteria, be tolerated by the maternal antibodies?...Women develop certain types of antibodies permitting the embryo to survive by *hiding the signals it secretes* indicating that it is foreign...Far from being inactive, the immunity mechanism is working on a double front, because if on the one hand it is directed toward controlling the fetus, on the other hand it is also controlling itself...But *even more significant* is the fact that [the] production [of the antibodies]—necessary to prevent the fetus from being recognized as foreign and, therefore, rejected—*depends on a certain degree of genetic foreignness of the father*: if too similar to the mother, the antibodies will not be generated, resulting in miscarriage. The antinomic picture this creates is clear: *only if the paternal sperm is foreign enough to produce the blocking antibodies will the mother be able to tolerate the foreignness of the fetus*—by ignoring it; so much so that to avoid miscarriages, the woman’s body is *inoculated with the father’s antigens*. This means that what allows the child to be preserved by the mother is not their ‘resemblance’ but rather their *diversity transmitted hereditarily from the father*. (170, my emphasis)

In the upside down world of pregnancy, where immunity in conflict leads to protection, radical, paternal “difference” permits life to continue precisely by “blinding” the woman’s body, tricking it into thinking the difference is not there. This “difference” is conferred by the father, the real hero in the drama Esposito evokes: to put it glibly, the father “knocks up” so as to “inoculate” the mother. He endows the fetus with his “strangeness” (i.e. its “foreignness” from the mother; if it resembles her too much, her body—prone to self-destruction—will abort) to ensure that the mother’s body maintains enough passivity to “ignore” the fetus inside of her. Though Esposito does not fully revert to the ancient metaphor of the mother as passive vessel (indeed, through the ruse of the father’s dissimilarity, her immune system assumes a double role of containment), he certainly does not spotlight her active role in determining the child; rather mother and child are presented as two half-siblings quibbling in the backseat as the father drives the car and distracts them just enough to prevent them from causing too much of a ruckus.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Moira Howes strongly critiques the vision whereby mother and fetus are seen to be at odds with each other. She seeks to finesse the argument, highlighting the ways in which the woman’s immunity contributes, and,

Esposito, in line with many other philosophers/theorists we will discuss in chapter one (namely Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari whose “organ without bodies” is animated by the “vital” material ripped away—thus dis-appropriated—from the mother), resorts to what Alice Jardine calls a feminine “horizon”<sup>29</sup> while essentially excluding the woman as agent. At the same time, the male body remains virtually invisible. He “transmits” his “hereditary diversity,” but not in any sustained physical way. The reflection of his image—his genetic imprint—is enough to trigger the corporal changes in the mother.<sup>30</sup> Esposito’s vision upholds the fantasy of an active male subject, subjecting the woman’s body to his whims as he pokes in and out, leaving the messy body business to her.

### **The “Immunocompetent” Masculine Subject: Clean, Proper, and Invisible**

Timothy Campbell, in his rich introduction to Esposito’s *Bios*, adds a gendered lens to the analysis of the immunitary paradigm: “Immune is he—and immunity is clearly gendered as

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indeed, is beneficial to pregnancy. She ties hypotheses regarding maternal antagonism to a continuing social desire to negate the positive, determinative role of the mother during pregnancy. “Hypotheses about maternal antagonism are rooted in and strengthened by problematic medical and social assumptions about mother and fetuses, assumptions which are themselves partially responsible for the marginalization of certain features of women’s biology in research—such as those features where there is active maternal involvement.” Moira Howes, “Conceptualizing the Maternal-Fetal Relationship in Reproductive Immunology,” in *Crafting Immunity: Working Histories and Clinical Immunology*, eds. Kenton Kroker, Jennifer Keelan, Pauline M.H. Mazumdar (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 265.

<sup>29</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 25. I will discuss Jardine’s *gynema* in more depth in Chapter one in which, instead of focusing on the “feminine horizon” as the projection of infinite becoming, I keep my gaze firmly fixed on the dusty remains of these “post-modern” writers and thinkers who find themselves at a loss when attempting to come to terms with the “real” spatial site escaping their control, the male body in decline.

<sup>30</sup> We will discuss in the chapter on Zola how the mother’s power to “imprint”—i.e. determine—the child has long been a source of consternation in Western culture. As Wendy Doniger and Gregory Spinner demonstrate, theories have abounded in canonical texts from both the Western and Eastern traditions (everything from the Bible, to Joyce’s *Portrait of a Young Man*, to the *Mahabharata*) examining the role, on the embryo/fetus/child, played by perceived or, simply, fantasized images that the mother receives or conjures at the moment of conception. See Wendy Doniger and Gregory Spinner, “Misconceptions: Female Imaginations and Male Fantasies in Parental Imprinting,” *Daedalus* 127, no.1, *Science in Culture* (Winter, 1998): 97-129.

masculine in the examples from classical Rome that Esposito cites—who is exonerated or has received a *dispensatio* from reciprocal gift giving. He who has been freed from communal obligations or who enjoys an originary autonomy or successive freeing from a previously contracted debt enjoys the condition of *immunitas*.<sup>31</sup> While Esposito, himself, does not dwell at length on the question of gender (in fact, if anything he uncritically reifies stereotypical gender categories, as we saw from his proposition of an “affirmative biopolitics”), the close association between masculinity and immunity cannot be overlooked. Esposito’s evocation of the complicated interplay between visibility and invisibility (the more “different” the father is from the mother, the more effective his powers of evasion), however, does provide a useful segue into considering a superposition of heterosexual masculinity and what Catherine Waldby calls the “immunocompetent body.”

In contrast to the woman’s pregnant body with its confusion of visibility/invisibility as well as its condition as an ‘in-between,’ neither fully singular or double (or, what Howe labels as “not-one-but-not-two,”<sup>32</sup>) the “immunocompetent body,” in the anatomical imaginary, has crisp clear lines demarcating inside and outside, self from other. Its defining features are its “self-enclosure, singularity and cleanliness.”<sup>33</sup> In the job description Waldby draws up for it, the immune system serves as “the delegate of what is assumed to be a self-protecting and self-identical consciousness...[It] offers a way for this consciousness to implement itself at a molecular and cellular level in its body...Its task is to ensure the internal homogeneity of the body, to secure the body as a place for the proliferation of self-sameness, represented by the

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy Campbell, “*Bios*, Immunity, Life: The Thought of Roberto Esposito,” in Esposito, *Bios*, x-xi.

<sup>32</sup> Howe, “Conceptualizing the Maternal-Fetal Relationship in Reproductive Immunology,” 249.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic: Biomedicine and sexual difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 70.

body's infinitely multiplying 'unique' signature..." (71). The phantasm of the competent immune system admirably exercises these tasks, reassuring the ego of its integrity, self-reliance, and existence in the "perfect separation from and exclusion of other bodies" (72).

In reality, however, this claim to self-created and self-sufficient individuation must constantly be reaffirmed through repetitive tasks—"psychic prophylaxis"—designed to eliminate the specter of contamination (compulsive Purelling, for example) and quell anxieties about contagion (72). Waldby elaborates on her usage of "individuated" as "a particular, hegemonic way of organising [*sic*] bodily coherence which confers subjectivity through the assertion of rigid body boundaries" (*ibid.*). She reads "immunocompetency," in this framework, as the biologicized ideal of Julia Kristeva's "clean and proper body," which expels—abjects—all it does not manage to assimilate effortlessly into self. As Kristeva makes clear, the object is that which "perturbs an identity, a system, an order."<sup>34</sup> Maintaining identity stability entails perpetual denegation and repression, since the self is constantly running into or involuntarily producing things (both psychic and physical) that it fails to enculturate and, thus, to integrate "properly" —unconscious thoughts and desires in the psychic realm and uncontrollable secretions, embarrassing emissions and disconcerting projectiles in the physical.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), 12 (my translation).

<sup>35</sup> Calvin Thomas emphasizes the difficulty masculine subjectivity has in integrating semen, for example. The porn industry's fetishization of "the money shot"—the moment when the man ejaculates on the woman—is a symptom of this inability to secure its bodily "projections" within a stable frame of self. The "money shot" maintains the ruse of valorizing what amounts to an involuntary expulsion of abjected waste (on par with any of the other bodily productions—fecal matter, urine, snot,...)—"unproductive expenditure." The ejaculate, through forced contiguous association, is made to stand in for the woman's (invisible) *jouissance* as it becomes safely "feminized." This feminization conceals the admission of its "powerlessness," the acknowledgement that it has "failed" in fulfilling its "rightful" task ("properly" used semen remains invisible as it vigorously undertakes the task of insemination well within the deep caverns of the woman's body). The camera cuts before the spectator can ever see what then *happens* to the cast-off semen, once it has ceased functioning as the compensatory mark meant to reassure the insecure male ego. Its gets wiped off and discarded, an act that underscores its gratuitousness and disposability. Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 22-23.



The fantasy of an immunocompetent body—like a fortified, narcissistic ego—cordons off and disavows anything that compromises biological self-sameness. As the psychical and physical boundaries merge, the “I” is overlain on the body’s visible surface. Its skin, a “seamless armour [*sic*]” (71), prevents seepage as well as excessive leakage. It keeps the surplus fluids in check by containing them just as it makes sure the vulnerable “micro-environment” (to borrow a term from a trade book on the immune system from the early 1990s) is kept “sacrosanct.”<sup>36</sup> In the fantasy, the armor is not just skin deep; it extends inside as well, sealing off the sacred cavities from orifice to orifice like an inorganic, non-reactive metal, “a sort of inner skin, that[*sics*] protects us from mouth to anus” (ibid.).

The fantasized immunocompetent body is a perfectly closed body. However, the palpable anxiety in Dwyer’s quote, his emphatic insistence on the impermeability of the internal passage reflects the apprehension surrounding the ingresses and egresses of the body, sites of vulnerability that cannot be sealed off since the continuation of the life depends on them. The gaze must be diverted from these sites to the only acceptable manifestation of masculine visibility: phallic erection. The phallus “makes meaning” as it hardens (we will discuss phallic “meaning making” abilities at length in chapter 1). It stands (quite literally) in opposition to the abject (the vulnerable, the non-assimilable) as it hyperbolizes the ego and sanctions, if not violence (though in many cases the phallus goes hand in hand with heinously violent, even murderous behavior), then at least self-positioning meant to enhance the perception of power, of domination, and of resistance. It is the foil for the anus, which (returning to the question of immunocompetency), though always a site of anxious speculation in regards to masculinity, has particularly insisted as a source of anguish over these last thirty years marred by HIV/AIDS

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<sup>36</sup> John Dwyer, *The Body at War: The Story of Our Immune System* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 5

(witness Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?"). While the phallus has the power to generate meaning (phallogocentrism) and thus to consolidate the subject, the anus threatens self-coherence. As Hocquenghem, one of France's first gay theorists succinctly states: "Only the phallus dispenses identity; any social use of the anus, apart from its sublimated use, creates the risk of a loss of identity."<sup>37</sup> Freud, himself, designated the "anal" as "the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life."<sup>38</sup> As such, it fails to be incorporated into the "imaginary anatomy" of the immunocompetent body.

And yet, the phallus is not a reliable weapon to ward off impending dangers to self-sameness. We noted that Purell came on the market the year when concerns about HIV/AIDS contraction were at their height. 1996 was also the year Viagra was patented. Released two years later, "Viagra madness" set in.<sup>39</sup> The use of drugs targeting male erectile dysfunction has skyrocketed across the globe since Pfizer first introduced its little blue pill. We are a culture obsessed with making sure we can "get (it) up" and brandish our weapons when needed, just as we are obsessed with being able to invisibly wipe our hands clean after the "brandishing" is completed. Indeed, nothing says "immuno-*in*competent" quite like flaccidity—except, of course, castration.

Questions regarding castration, impotence, and abjection abound (body parts being cut off, failing to perform or separating the self from self in a way that disrupts any imaginary sense of unity) along with speculation on how the self can best "fight off" these moments of vulnerability and exposure. But, aside from these predominantly sexualized lines of inquiry, the

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<sup>37</sup> Guy Hocquenghem quoted in Thomas, *Male Matters*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Freud quoted in Thomas (23).

<sup>39</sup> Chris Conway, "Recalling the Madness," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2008.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/weekinreview/30word.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/weekinreview/30word.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

rest of the masculine internal body has escaped scrutiny, remaining naturalized and neutralized. Heidegger commented on the difficulty of accounting for and conceptualizing the body: “The bodily in the human is not something animalistic. The manner of understanding that accompanies it is something that metaphysics up till now has not touched on.”<sup>40</sup> Luce Irigaray qualifies his statement, putting accent on the gender specificity in question: “The bodily *in man*,” she quips, “is what metaphysics has never touched.”<sup>41</sup>

The “underbelly” of man is protected by his armor. It resists representation, especially representation outside of the “hard sciences” where a more laicized vocabulary threatens to see behind his shield (perhaps even glimpsing his behind). Margaret Lock remarks on the lack of treatment the internal body has received: “Even as we write at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the interiority of the body remains notably absent from most social science literature, suggesting rather graphically that researchers continue to subscribe to a nature-culture dichotomy in which the material body, an assumed universal, is fully consigned to the domain of the biological sciences, where it most appropriately belongs.”<sup>42</sup> And this is particularly true of the heterosexual, masculine, “normopathic” body, the only body that has any chance at laying claim to the fantasy of immunocompetency. Unlike women or gay men, whose imaginary anatomies are “sexually receptive” (i.e. penetrable, i.e. always already “infected”), the armored “normopath” defies visibility—and, thus, permeability. And the normopath has a dirty little secret, engaging in a form of purification (which permits it to maintain its invisibility and impenetrability) that is much more sneaky—and pernicious—than Purell.

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, with Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles H. Seibert (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama press, 1979), 146.

<sup>41</sup> Luce Irigaray quoted by Alice Jardine, “Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo Or Compagnons de Route?,” in *Men in Feminism*, eds. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Routledge, 1987), 61.

<sup>42</sup> Lock, *Anthropology of biomedicine*, 58.

Evelyn Grossman offers this definition of the “normopath”:

...[A]ffects gelés ou forclos, représentation verbale pulvérisée (pas de mots pour l’émotion), corps coupé de la psyché, ils dissimulent derrière leur soumission aux formes...la douleur psychique enkystée qui les étouffe. La normopathie est un formalisme. Entendons par là: une *maladie de la forme*...un cadre vide, rigide, une gangue caractérielle, *une écorce calcifiée coupée de son substrat vivant*...la création d’un faux ‘*moi-peau*’, *carapace* narcissique qui non seulement les protège des risques d’effractions douloureuses venues de l’extérieur mais surtout leur épargne l’angoisse de l’affrontement au vide intérieur. Rien n’entre ni ne sort, ou si peu.<sup>43</sup>

The normopath is braced, reinforced to deflect all psychic encounters that could potentially upset the fragile homeostatic balance, just as it squelches any internal emotional misfires that risk betraying him. Similarly, the immunocompetent body struggles to keep the external carapace inviolable and “unproductive.”<sup>44</sup> But through this continual, forever recommencing process of hardening, of effectively emptying “form” of content, it is not only the self’s affect that is compromised. Indeed, Teresa Brennan theorizes the disastrous effects maintaining this psychic (en)closure has not only on those being forced to “empty” themselves, but especially on those “absorbing” the bi-products of this process of “unproduction,” a dynamic she calls the “foundational fantasy.”

Drawing on psychoanalysis (primarily Freud, Klein and Lacan) as well as Derridean deconstruction, Brennan hypothesizes on the manner in which the ego (the psychic, normopathic “armour”) is able to assert and preserve its sense of separateness—its identity. To properly seal and protect its borders, the ego engages in “dumping”: the unconscious transfer of “bad” feelings

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<sup>43</sup> Evelyn Grossman, *La Défiguration: Artaud, Beckett, Michaux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2004), 14-15. The most literal biological manifestation of “normopathy” would be a body afflicted by an autoimmune condition called scleroderma characterized by an overproduction of abnormal collagen, leading to scarring and a hardening of the skin and/or internal organs.

<sup>44</sup> I use the word “unproductive,” borrowing the meaning Calvin Thomas (quoting Baudrillard) gives to the notion of “production”: “to render visible, to cause to appear and be made to appear. *producere*” (*Male Matters*, 34).

or “affects”—the psychical object—onto another (the [m]other).<sup>45</sup> Brennan, following Freud, genders the active subject—the “projector”—as masculine and the passive recipient (“fixed” and thus objectified by the projection) as feminine, clearly noting, however, that anyone—male, female, young or old—may occupy the “object” position: “Femininity constitutes a passive overlay on an originally passive experience, and this passive overlay is not restricted to the female sex.”<sup>46</sup>

Brennan describes at length the price paid by the projecting subject: “The acting out of the foundational fantasy (which founds the subject in its sense of superiority and separation) passifies the self or the other...The person projecting the judgment is freed from its depressing effects on him or herself. However, he or she is dependent on the other carrying that projected affect, just as the master depends on the slave” (111-12). The resulting ego’s dependence on the “object” remains not only unacknowledged but denied out of consciousness. At the macro level, the denial of the (m)other’s role, both as the necessary, passive repository of affect as well as the original active source of loving attention, represents the hallmark of patriarchal society: “...[T]he price of denying the mother is that the denial of dependence is inbuilt even when it seeks to combat this denial in other ways...The denial of maternal origin marks a patriarchal society.”<sup>47</sup>

I would like to suggest how we might tie Brennan’s account of ego/subject formation to the phantasm of immunocompetency. Just as our commonplace understanding of immunity as “protection” (internally oriented) elides its original meaning as “exemption” (blurring internal/external boundaries), the ego’s role as “protector of the self” in the “masculine” case

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<sup>45</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 37.

<sup>46</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 32.

<sup>47</sup> Teresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 158.

covers up its dependence upon an objectified, feminized other from which it has had to “exempt” itself (remaining both within and without her “boundaries”). In this respect, a tentative analogy can be drawn between the immune system and the ego since both are constructions, one physical, one psychical, charged with ensuring the integrity of the subject by appearing to maintain impermeable boundaries. As Brennan concedes: “The ego...is not only a response to imaginary threats based on imaginary comparisons. The ego is also the vehicle for preserving the organism.”<sup>48</sup>

Commonly understood, both constructs “defend” the self from invasion. The immune system does so, at least in the most widely accepted narratives, by “attacking” intrusive microbes that pose a potential threat to the body. Similarly, the ego maintains subject coherence by deflecting experiences (words, judgements, events) that could potentially prove damaging, energetically managing the borders it has established by redirecting the affect and then repressing this redirection (i.e. “turning something away, and keeping it at a distance; from the conscious”).<sup>49</sup> Conversely, both are complementarily conceived as purification systems, ridding the body or the self of contaminating elements. On a psychical level, as we have seen, with its power of projection, the ego is able to effectuate a regular *rinçage*, ridding its energetic channels—and perhaps its internal organs—of the muck and crud accumulated as it navigates from fixed point of projection to fixed point (i.e. from one “receiving” object to the next), acting in the world seemingly under the invisible coat when, in fact, its invisibility is only achieved through the frequent use of an affective trash chute, a dumping that leaves the self—and the body—squeaky clean, though ultimately vulnerable. The “privileged,” purified immune position means that the subject is bound to the (m)other—and, by extension, to the community (here we

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<sup>48</sup> Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, 111.

<sup>49</sup> Brennan, *Interpretation of the Flesh*, 119.

find the Foucauldian dialect placing subjecthood on the sliding scale between subjectivity and subjection). He cannot extract himself from these relationships—and is, in this way, limited, constrained, not autonomous, not sealed—in short, not self-sustainingly competent, immuno or otherwise.

Calvin Thomas, who is clearly influenced by Brennan’s philosophy (even though he only mentions her in passing), speculates on the functioning of the perfectly clean, proper and invisible body: “And what fantasy of absolute mastery...might be inscribed in the rigidly structured assumption of a subjective armor, a self-alienating identity that protects itself from self-contamination precisely by alienating itself, but only in a certain way—by spitting itself out, but at the other, by sending itself out through the agency of its own gaze, but in the aggressive if not deadly form of a wave of passivity aimed like a bullet (ultimate condensation of liquid into solid) at the body of the other? A look, in other words, that kills.”<sup>50</sup> Taken to the extreme, the perfect embodiment of the clean, proper and invisible body would be none other than death itself, “the ultimate, invulnerable subject position, the deadly a(r)mour of the most proper *corps propre*, a clean machine in search of the killable other. For although ‘death itself’ never dies, it remains, itself, deadly: it produces death without remains” (108). Perhaps death lingers at the heart of the immunocompetent fantasy—or, at least death’s immortality. Indeed, the liquefying of culture back into nature—the return to “pure,” filthy life—is the greatest fear haunting the egoic, immunity-searching, garbage-spewing, Purell-slathering, productive “unproductive” subject: the terrifying realization that its dissolution by the elements, its sinking and dispersion back into earth is inevitable regardless of how fortified its armor appears to be.

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Male Matters*, 110.

## Immun/commun-ications

I have discussed modernity and life's limits, as well as the way masculinity and subjectivity knot around the immunocompetent fantasy of the clean, proper and invisible body. But where is the "real" body in this discussion? How does *biological* life enter into the picture? And what does any of this have to do with France and French literature? Grossly stated, the scientific theories proposed to explain the fundamental mechanisms of biological immunity toward the end of the nineteenth century can be broken into two national camps: the German and the French. Briefly (I will give a lengthier account of the scientific history in chapter 2), the German school embraced what has been labeled the "humoral" perspective. Born out of a reductionist tradition from the nineteenth century and led by Paul Ehrlich into the twentieth,<sup>51</sup> the humoralists believed immunity resulted from invisible, purely chemical neutralizations: to give a pithy summary of the theory, the body produces "antibodies" that bind to "toxins" so as to "deactivate" them. These interactions occur without the intervention of cells or any other unpredictable bodily element deemed "vitalistic." They are observable—and reproducible—through test-tube experiments with blood serum, the liquid component of blood from which cell matter has been entirely removed.

The French school, meanwhile, through the work of Russian embryologist Elie Metchnikoff (who had come to Paris to work with Louis Pasteur), was pursuing more "organismal" hypotheses, framing immunity as a result of "live," observable cells acting upon

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<sup>51</sup> See Alfred Tauber's discussion of German reductionism in *The Immune Self, Theory or Metaphor?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 53-68.



other cells in a dynamic process.<sup>52</sup> This understanding of immunity "won out"; after World War II, the science emerged from the "Dark Ages of Immunology"<sup>53</sup> or, alternatively, "Purgatory"<sup>54</sup> and returned to the French school's *cellular* explanation of immunity. Eventually, immunity, framed as a biological as opposed to a chemical mechanism, led to the articulation of the immune system as the biological definer of self, a self whose "proper" boundaries (*propre*—the word in French connoting cleanliness and ownership) are constantly renegotiated and destabilized by both its inner and outer interactions.

The interaction between the outside and inside of the body had long figured as scientific and literary obsession in France. It animated the work of Claude Bernard, the "father" of experimental medicine, during the 1850s and 60s, and subsequently Louis Pasteur who, soon after the success of his rabies experiment in July of 1885,<sup>55</sup> established his eponymous Institute in 1887 as the preeminent site for scientific research relating to vaccines and pathogens. At the time; the literary and scientific worlds were closely intertwined, each informing the other. Questions of heredity, vaccination, virus, microbe and inoculation (and immunity, by extension) entered into the French literary imagination and trickled into the vocabulary.

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<sup>52</sup> Eileen Crist and Alfred I. Tauber, "The phagocyte, the antibody, and agency in immunity: contending turn-of-the-century approaches," in *Singular Selves: Historical Issues and Contemporary Debates in Immunology*, ed. Anne-Marie Moulin and Alberto Cambrosio (Paris: Elsevier, 2001), 129-130.

<sup>53</sup> Tauber uses this expression to qualify the period between the early twentieth century, when German chemical explanations triumphed over Metchnikoff's cellular hypotheses, and the time immediately following World War II when Frank McFarland Burnett returned to Metchnikovian cellular immunity and posited the self/non-self paradigm for explaining the primary functioning of the immune system (*Immune Metaphor*, 113).

<sup>54</sup> Anne-Marie Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine: Histoire de l'immunologie de Pasteur au Sida* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 390.

<sup>55</sup> Pasteur claimed to have cured a young boy who had been mauled by a rabid dog by vaccinating him (administering to him a lab-generated, "weak" form of the virus). This claim, however, could not be proven since it was not clear whether the boy had actually contracted rabies in the first place. Still, Pasteur's assertion was enough to establish him as France's foremost man of science, a legacy still very much alive today.

Proust offers a perfect example of an author, in the early twentieth century, who weaves the science of the day into his literary imaginings. In his correspondence with Gaston Gallimard, describing his own physical difficulties, Proust draws inspiration from Metchnikoff's description of the digger wasp:

D'autres que moi et je m'en réjouis, ont la jouissance de l'univers. Je n'ai plus ni le mouvement, ni la parole, ni la pensée, ni le simple bien-être de ne pas souffrir. Aussi, expulsé pour ainsi dire de moi-même, je me réfugie dans les tomes que je palpe à défaut de les lire et j'ai à leur égard les précautions de *la guêpe fouisseuse sur laquelle Fabre a écrit les admirables pages citées par Metchnikoff* et que vous connaissez certainement. Recroquevillé comme elle et privé de tout, je ne m'occupe plus que de leur fournir à travers le monde des esprits l'expansion qui m'est refusée.<sup>56</sup>

Proust establishes a bleak comparison between himself and the digger wasp so dear to Metchnikoff.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to the scientist who sees plenitude and harmony in the wasp's self-contained and self-sufficient state (for Metchnikoff, the digger wasp is a model of "natural" harmony), Proust experiences only loneliness and deprivation. He has been "expulsed" from himself (abjected), reduced to retreating into the materiality of books (not even their words—they are only "touched," not read), as he attempts to give them (the books? the "others" still able to enjoy life?—the indirect object "leur" is ambiguous) a sense of growth "in the universe" to which he no longer has access.

In this letter, Proust creates a tight associative weave, overlaying the biological and the literary in a way reminiscent of his excursions into ekphrasis. The digger wasp, Metchnikoff's specimen of perfect "harmony," is its own beautiful work of art (represented "admirably" by

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<sup>56</sup> Marcel Proust, "Lettre à Gaston Gallimard (1922)," in *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb, t.21 (Paris: Plon, 1970), 494.

<sup>57</sup> In his correspondence, Proust refers several times to Metchnikoff. See Proust, *Correspondance*, t.6: 57; t.15: 236-37; t.21: 494; 679; 680.

Fabre, quoted by Metchnikoff) with which the writer deeply identifies; he psychically takes refuge in the cramped conditions of embodiment he imagines for this creature. In his communication with Gallimard, Proust is assuming a shared reference—Gallimard "must know" these pages. As with so many of the allusions Proust makes, memory and knowledge bind with affect, creative impulse and desire in complicated ways. Analyzing Proust's hermeneutics of art, Christie McDonald writes:

The laws of ekphrasis presented here are those of a heuristics of creation and repeat the structure of love for Proust: from indifference to hope and desire and back to indifference. The constitution of the self comes through the affect rendered intelligible. And this self, the only one capable of involuntary memory and creating art, goes beyond and yet depends upon rational thought. That is why love—of mother, lover, and art—as the force of desire to create defines the artist's will. Realism in description becomes a foil, permitting the fabric of an inner vision to emerge.<sup>58</sup>

Communication, etymologically meaning "to impart, to share, to make common," like immunity and community, holds *munus* at its root. In the passage quoted above, Proust's communicative endeavor—and notably his ability to pull it off—proves ambivalent. Within the evolution of affect McDonald charts, it would seem the writer is in the last phase, waning back into indifference without yet having petered out. He can no longer tap into the modes of self-expression—movement, words, thought, simple well-being—to stave off suffering in the material world, and yet the desire to communicate lingers on. Even in his hunched over, recoiled, Kafkaesque state, the writer imagines drawing on his last remaining reserves to use the "world of spirits" to "supply" the "expansion" eluding him. If this isn't love, I don't know what is.

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<sup>58</sup> Christie McDonald, *The Proustian Fabric: Associations of Memory* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 147.

The conflicted associative enmeshment between biology and love also surfaces in *La prisonnière*. If Proust's prose is any indication, by the early twentieth century, immunity had entered into the literary bloodstream. In this passage, the arresting reaction triggered upon discovering a loved-one's lie (a normally harmless "agent pathogène") is likened to anaphylaxis:

Quelle chose plus usuelle que [le mensonge]...Il est l'instrument de conservation le plus nécessaire et le plus employé. Or c'est lui que nous avons la prétention de bannir de la vie de celle que nous aimons, c'est lui que nous épions, que nous flairons, que nous détestons partout. Il nous bouleverse, il suffit à amener une rupture, il nous semble cacher les plus grandes fautes, à moins qu'il ne les cache si bien que nous ne les soupçonnions pas. Étrange état que celui où nous sommes à ce point sensibles à *un agent pathogène* que son pullulement universel rend inoffensif aux autres et si grave pour le malheureux qui se trouve ne plus avoir *d'immunité* contre lui!"<sup>59</sup>

While we, in our day, are used to having figurative "allergic reactions," the pairing in Proust's writing at the time must have seemed iconoclastic; indeed, the association, tied together using "state-of-the-art" biomedical vocabulary, blurs the Cartesian divide and inscribes selfhood into corporality in a radical new way. McDonald speaks to the risks and rewards of such incongruous conceptual pairings, the way they forge new paths of expression while at the same time threatening standing referential structures: "...[Proust] queries whether, by mixing perceptions together, associations may not result in misconceptions and deceive. 'The associations of ideas', he writes in a sketch, 'have the force of beliefs, error.'...And yet he senses that a process of mental wandering...underlies the emergence of all new thought; that only by upsetting habit and conceptual certainty can change occur. Such a destabilizing activity puts everything into question: rationality, causality, the order of discourse and analogical thinking."<sup>60</sup> McDonald goes on to explain that the way Proust mitigates the dangers is by remaining loyal to an initial

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<sup>59</sup> Marcel Proust, *La prisonnière*, in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. P. Clarac and A. Ferre, t.3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 170 (my emphasis).

<sup>60</sup> McDonald, *The Proustian Fabric*, 5.

endeavor "which, while always different, will always be the same" (ibid.). She is, of course, speaking particularly of his writing project, of his endless *Recherche*, but I wonder if the strategy could not be productively extended to include any verbal construction of selfhood, the quintessential undertaking (before the body is "undertaken") which is also always both different and the same.

The projects of selfhood with which I am concerned are ones, like in Proust's passage from above, that meld disparate discursive strains and linguistic registers while still remaining more or less committed to what McDonald calls a "realism in description." Most of the literary texts I analyze can be placed within a continuum of works that explicitly treat biomedical illness as one of, if not *the* primary textual generator. The three authors I discuss—Émile Zola, Albert Camus and Hervé Guibert—all lean toward a certain "realism" with a commitment to depicting the "everyday" habits (in the widest sense of the word, as we shall discuss in the chapter on Camus) of their time. However, in each case, there are flirtations (or sometimes great trysts) with excess—whether in character development (as in Zola's *Le Docteur Pascal* or in Camus's *La Peste*) or in genre (Guibert's *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*)—that displace the narrative center sufficiently to compromise the immunity of the text (and, with it, the reader), breaking its "seal" to leave open just enough space (what Guibert calls "[la] marge d'imprévue réservée à l'écriture vivante"<sup>61</sup>) to render communication possible. Real communication requires vulnerability and exposure, as Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker make clear when they tie "communication" into the metonymic chain with contagion (and contamination, we could add): "Contagion signifies the dangers circulating in social bodies and in populations—actual viruses and bacteria, 'contagious' morals and ideas, social dangers re-thought as bodily infectiveness.

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<sup>61</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Le protocole compassionnel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 198.

But it is not always about danger. It is telling that what used to be categorised [sic] as 'contagious' diseases are now most often categorised [sic] as 'communicable'... Quite literally, according to its etymology ('con': together, 'tangere': touch), contagion can put us in touch."<sup>62</sup>

The language of immunity insists within the framework of contagion present in all of these texts. The poorly understood workings of Zola's *Heredity*, which marks Pascal's *innéité* as a state exempted from carrying the family *fêlure*; *La Peste*'s indifference and capriousness in terms of its targets, which leaves Rieux untouched; and HIV's "perversity," which reconfigures the genetic makeup of Guibert's *writing* as much as his body, make reading a risky business by virtue of the mechanisms by which it "works." It is an activity that requires entering into the story, puncturing the skin and slipping under the parchment to see, rearrange and reinterpret the text's genetic code beyond the page. Reciprocally, the text's words enter the reader via the eyes (or through the fingers for the blind) and from there whip around the body taking unpredictable turns and twists (through consciousness, through the unconscious, through blood, lymph, and bones). Words make the heart race, the skin sweat, tear ducts well up, muscles clench, neurons fire and, likely, lymphocytes activate: they have material consequences. Reading is a bilateral internal process. From this dynamic, both the text and the reader emerge changed, mutually "infected," "contaminated," or, perhaps, "communicated."

Anne-Marie Moulin frames the immunological revolution as a "semantic event."<sup>63</sup>

Immunology changed the way the body—and thus the Self—was seen to evolve, to become, to insist, to be. And each time the science, itself, underwent a paradigm shift, so too did the

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<sup>62</sup> Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker, "Contagion, modernity and postmodernity," Introduction to *Contagion: Epidemics, history and culture from smallpox to anthrax*, edited by Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 425.

language used to talk about its "object": the "immune" body. In this vein, I devote my first chapter to examining how immunity instituted itself as a common trope of "becoming" embraced—and surprisingly left naturalized—by post-structural, deconstructionist thinkers who were grappling, each in his own way, with how to come to terms with his corporal limits. This rhetorical turn culminates in Jean-Luc Nancy's characterization of the immune system as the body's "physiological signature": "Identity applies to immunity. One is identified with the other. To weaken one is to weaken the other."<sup>64</sup> The logical extension of Nancy's formulation is that immunity *is* self. Jacques Derrida, one of Nancy's close friends and interlocutors, also turned to immunity—and particularly autoimmunity (Derrida, as I will discuss, did not fully differentiate between immunity and autoimmunity, a startling—and revealing—lack of precision)—in his later writings to describe what he viewed as the primary, self-destructive mechanism working at the heart of our modernity. I open my reflection on these post-structuralist thinkers to demonstrate how, while these theorists have no qualms about discursively penetrating the female body, and appropriating it for their own aims, they have resisted performing a similar excursion into the male body, perhaps because doing so would make clear how very susceptible it has become. The masculine subject's once privileged position has come under threat as he has found himself progressively deposed as the dominant producer of discourse (displaced by the rise of feminism and queer theory which challenged phallogocentric discourse, by the fall of empire and end of colonization which gave voice to the previously subjugated "other," and by the time, space and mind-altering effects of increasing globalization which unhinged and continues to destabilize not only the most "traditional" incarnations of subjectivity but all subjectivity). One way the white, self-same masculine subject has attempted to maintain his standing is by retreating—both literally and figuratively—into the ramparts of his body, forcibly putting up his

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<sup>64</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), 33.

shields as he attempts to render himself invisible and thus all-powerful. It remains to be seen whether the forces working to dislodge him render his self-protective tactics and strategies worthwhile, futile or even counterproductive.

In a second chapter, I move from the metaphor of immunity to a brief exposition of the history of immunity and immunology. I compare and contrast three visions of how the internal body interacts (or doesn't) with the "outside" within the French scientific tradition. I begin with Claude Bernard and his non-reactive *milieu intérieur*, move to Pasteur's passive terrain, and culminate with Metchnikoff's dynamic *phagocyte*. I then trace Metchnikoff's legacy into the late twentieth century. I highlight the concept of *le terrain* as a privileged, French imagining of the internal body born out of a holistic, agricultural tradition; it is a soil with its own inherent properties, which are more or less "cultivable."

The only way to gauge and appreciate fully the effects conferred by a particular ontological state is to disrupt it. I will thus focus the next three chapters of my study on literary examples where the male protagonist's immunity has been compromised in one way or another. For my first two literary examples—*Le Docteur Pascal* by Emile Zola and *La Peste* by Albert Camus—I will analyze the portrait of the supposedly immune doctor, considering what the "costs and benefits" of this immunity are and how this "exceptional status" is destabilized. Then, in my last chapter, I will switch perspectives from the doctors to the patient. It was the advent of AIDS in the beginning of the 1980s that truly invested the larger public's interest in the immune system. For the first time, the world was confronted with an illness that targeted—and destroyed—the immune system directly; the body's mechanisms of protection, themselves, were under siege. For years, doctors were impotent to curb the illness's progression. AIDS testimonies proliferated as entire populations succumbed to the syndrome's lethal powers of self-



undoing. My third example, then, examines the literary work of Hervé Guibert, one of the first gay novelists in France to write about his experience with AIDS. The HIV retrovirus “rewrites” the subject’s genetic code, implanting its destructive “message” into the DNA of its host. I argue that Guibert models his own writing strategy on the retrovirus’s tactics, challenging literary conventions so as better to exteriorize his experience and “contaminate” (in the etymological sense suggested by Bashford and Hooker) his readers.

In *The Embodied Mind*, a text devoted to debunking Cartesian dualism, Francisco Varela, perhaps the most impressive example of the immunologist-philosopher, gives this explanation to the vicissitudes of human experience: "All loss and gain, pleasure and pain arise because we identify so closely with this vague feeling of selfness that we have."<sup>65</sup> Through the last half of the twentieth into the twenty-first century, the "feeling of selfness" has become both more concrete (as selfhood has increasingly "gained flesh," so to speak, in all disciplines—it is no longer feasible in any serious academic space to deny the tight imbrications of conscious and corporal existence) and more elusive (with discourses aimed precisely at "de-centering" the subject, prying "him" from any "stable" core). As such, we have entered the age of Purell when bolstering or acquiring immunity (the “goal” of all reality tv shows—to give but one mainstream example) has come to be understood as an indispensable survival technique of any body. My dissertation analyzes how the notion of immunity—once so novel—has embedded itself in the cultural imagination as one of the primary structures for understanding not only how the body works and interacts with its surroundings, but indeed what the embodied self is and how it gets

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<sup>65</sup> Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 63. No scientist carried on the tradition of the immunologist-philosopher quite as richly as Francisco Varela. Born in Chile, this founding member of the "Paris School" settled in France in 1986 and devoted his research and work to articulating relationships between the mind and body. He became a practicing Tibetan-Buddhist in the 1970s (I would have enjoyed reading his glosses to Metchnikoff's allusions to the Buddha) at the time he was developing the theory of autopoiesis, weaving immune to neurological functions, definitional biology to cognitive perception. Varela defied disciplinary boundaries as he deftly intertwined heteroclitic discourses, investigating the vagaries of consciousness in the embodied subject.

expressed. I focus on the French literary tradition, which has established a sustained interest in interrogating the interactions between the outside and inside of the body's boundaries. However, I strongly believe the quest for immunity as an ideal ontological state characterizes the most profound experience of selfhood in Western society today. As with all ideologically driven quests, it is dubious whether a perfectly sanitized state can be reached and, more pressingly, whether it should be.

## Chapter 1: Modern Becomings of Immunity

Devenir: “Passer d’un état à (un autre), commencer à être (ce qu’on n’était pas).”  
(*Le Petit Robert*)

"Perhaps we require a new grammar, for the self is neither subject, nor object, but is actualized in action...The self becomes, on this view, a subject-less verb, or perhaps a predicate."<sup>1</sup>

“...[L]a modernité commence lorsque l’être humain se met à exister à l’intérieur de son organisme, dans la coquille de sa tête, dans l’armature de ses membres, et parmi toute la nervure de sa physiologie...”<sup>2</sup> In the second part of his groundbreaking *Les mots et les choses*, Michel Foucault methodically lays out what he calls the “modern *epistémè*,” contending the modern period (which, for him, extends up to the time he was writing at the end of the 1960s) epistemologically organized itself around the notion of “Man.” As we see from the quote above, this Man is a decidedly interiorized, embodied being residing “in the shell of his head, in the armor of his limbs, and amongst all the veins of his physiology.” The rise of modernity in France, driven by the triumvirate of secularization, industrialization and democratization, crystallized questions involving masculine selfhood and subjectivity. While theorists haggle over when and with whom “modernity” began or how best to characterize it, one definitional element upon which many can agree, including Foucault, is the way in which modernity brought man—and, in employing this term, I am firmly holding onto his gender—face to face with his “ends,” the limits of his being. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth century, and particularly during its last quarter, man emerged with more defined—and finite—borders, disabused of hopes of spiritual transcendence, conditioned by the hardships of material life and

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred I. Tauber, *The Immune Self*, 178.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 328-29.

yet cautiously fortified by promises—decreed in the wake of the Revolution, then politically and legally pursued under the fledgling Third Republic—of liberty, equality, fraternity and prosperity. When external and historical conditions made it such that man had to confront the reality of his earthly limits, the purpose of his life efforts shifted. From here on forth, he dedicated himself to ensuring the perpetuation, prolongation (both temporal and spatial) and, most importantly, the protection of his own, individuated person now inextricably tethered to bodily existence.

The etymology of “self,” derived from the Indo-European root “s(w)e-“ meaning “separate, apart,” evolves out of an originary action of division. And, in fact, the modern self is a victim of multiple scissions. Modernity, suggests Foucault, began when man, grappling with his limits, extracted himself from the outside and sealed himself into an individualized, contained subject. The quality of transcendence, originally attributed to God, was sucked into human form; the subject looked onto the world as if he were outside of it all while still being bound by its constraints. At the same time, this coalescence into immanence resulted in a secondary break. Man, already a privileged observer, became the observed, *par excellence*, an object of study for other similar—though not identical—sealed-off human entities. Finally, even within the solid confines of the body, further splitting occurred; the seals between body and self, between self and self proved anything but hermetic. At the heart of modern selfhood lurks the creeping suspicion that the “self,” consciously actualized, is somehow cut off from and at odds not only with the outside world around him (with its threats of disease, alterity and misfortune), not only with his peers, but with a deeper, “truer,” unknowable core responsible for holding the reins of destiny.

The unconscious is one of the mechanisms Foucault identifies by which, if not a “truer,” then at least an “other” self emerges. The unconscious, in other words, is the prime example of one of the “unknown knows” at the heart of selfhood, “‘knowledge which doesn’t know itself.’”<sup>3</sup> I will argue that the immune system (and the immunity conferred by it), as it is constructed in philosophical, medical—and, as we shall see, literary—discourse in late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in France, has been conceived as a similar force unhinging the self from the inside out, a biological unconscious, we might be tempted to say, and the prime source, we will argue, of biological becoming.<sup>4</sup> While Foucault uses the word “becoming” sparingly, he underscores the extent to which “*devenir*,” as noun and verb, anchors the modern condition. For Foucault and for our analysis, the age of modernity, the age of Man, is synonymous with the age of “becoming(s)”; this includes corporal becoming, in which the immune system is discursively a key player. The way the body “becomes,” even unbeknownst to it, strongly shapes the way the self “becomes” and vice versa. Hiding under the guise of its role as the bodily system responsible for ensuring protection and integrity (and thus operating as an epistemological actor responsible for “knowing” the self so as better to keep boundaries sound), “the immune system,” parallel to the neurological system with its own “memory” and incessant modifications through external stimulation, in fact *determines* the self’s bodily transformations. It surreptitiously defines and redefines man’s corporal limits, effectively “deciding” what is and is not biologically part of him. The immune system, as the system of biological becoming, undermines any possibility of stable identity; or, rather, it functions ontologically, forever in the process not only

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<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek quoting Jacques Lacan, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 95.

<sup>4</sup> I will persist in using the word “become” as opposed to “evolve,” for example, to avoid suggesting a positivist direction in becoming. Another clear aspect inherent to the modern *epistémè* is the realization that not all becoming, transformation, movement is progressive.

of *knowing* but of *constituting* the subject in response to the internal and external stimuli it encounters.

In this chapter, I will interrogate the theoretical foundations out of which immunity emerged in “post-structuralist” discourse and, increasingly, to which post-war theory turned to frame issues of the self, the individual and the subject. In my discussion, I see post-structuralism and the post-modern as an extension of modernity, not as a break but as a continuation. Discussing the “language” of immunity and its implications will illuminate and add depth to my exposition, in the next chapter, of the history of the scientific paradigms of immunity; I will trace their evolution over the course of the “modern” period as the paradigms were articulated, embraced or, at times, rejected in France’s scientific community at *L’Institut Pasteur*. To proceed toward immunity, I will first examine how the structure of the male body has been considered. The female “structure,” persistently associated with pathology, has carried the burden of marking difference, thusly serving as an insistent site of inquiry over the ages (and especially during the nineteenth century with the rise of medical culture). Alice Jardine, in *Gynesis*, shows how, in the post-war writings of many of France’s theorists, the feminine was embraced, pathology and all, as the “horizon of becoming,” that toward which “we” should be tending. Through this discourse, the male body retained its invisibility and its normative function. In a word, it remained virtually structure-less.

Inspired by Foucault, I, too, turn to linguistic analysis, the power of words as analytic and constitutive tools, to construct—so as better to deconstruct—the male body’s structure. I will reveal the dark underbelly lining Jardine’s careful examination of the projected feminine horizon, reading the post-structuralist writers whom she targets (and one she doesn’t) to see what they have to say about the male structure: its origins, its transformations, its ends. Two of the

thinkers, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy both arrive at immunity (or, in Derrida's case, autoimmunity) as the concept responsible for deciding self constitution. At one point, Nancy makes a striking formulation: "Identity applies to immunity. One is identified with the other. To weaken one is to weaken the other."<sup>5</sup> The (onto)logical extension of Nancy's assertion is that immunity *is* self. My goal is spell out the ramifications of this asserted ontological equivalence. I will first situate the discourse of immunity using Foucault's exposition of the modern *epistémè* with the accent he places on the "birth of Man" out of the "death of God"; on the importance of "organization"—the *functioning* relationships between parts—over the parts themselves as the principle ordering knowledge; finally, on the primacy of corporally restrained "becoming" over transcendence.

Foucault concludes *Les mots et les choses* by ruminating on the promises of linguistic analysis to come to terms with Man as structure; a structure, he claims, on the brink of disappearance. His proclamation of the end of man has been readily metaphorized as the "death of the subject." Christine Howells wisely reminds us that no such "death" has moved beyond the figurative realm, translated into a more tangible change: "When we reflect on human mortality, we are usually light years away from the so-called 'death of the subject'; where death is used as a metaphor...to refer to a complex epistemological change in which one conception is gradually, or even suddenly, replaced by another. We have not been able, of course, really to *think* the death of the Subject, or the death of Man, or even the death of God. The Subject, Man and God are still with us in diverse guises."<sup>6</sup> While the "end of Man" does not mean a literal vanishing of an entity, nor does it negate or somehow overshadow the very real condition of transience to

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Howells, "Moral Subjects: Sartre, Derrida, Nancy," *Paragraph* (2009): 156.

which all of humanity is subject, it does signal a tremendous shift in the way Man is positioned as well as the way knowledge is conceived, organized and expressed; above all, it threatens Man's status as ultimate knower. Part of this transition involves contemplating the demise of Man as privileged subject/object and what the material (read corporal) consequences might be.

After presenting Foucault's argument, I will piggy-back on his hopes, also embracing the possibilities of linguistic analysis to "give body" to the body, man's most literal and fundamental structure. To do so, inspired by Jardine's analysis of "becoming-woman" as a verbal structure, I will turn to the works of four thinkers to see what each does and does not have to say about the male body—the subject upon which the verb is working—in this framework. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy are some of France's most well-known post-war theorists devoted in their reading and writing practices to scrutinizing and disassembling structures of all kinds. All four, inspired by Antonin Artaud's visceral injunctions, touch (however obliquely) upon the question of embodied masculinity. Deleuze and Guattari embrace Artaud's "body without organs" as the basis of their philosophy of radical exteriority. Privileging language of surface and external interaction over depth and interiority, they seek to undo the *organ-ized* body from the outside, *le dehors*. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, Derrida and Nancy both move discursively toward the importance of internal mechanisms—immunity, in particular—defining, transforming and compromising structure. However, both Derrida and Nancy fall short in fleshing out their terms; they surprisingly leave immunity, as a concept, largely naturalized and unexamined. I will pick up on their respective expositions of immunity (or auto-immunity, in Derrida's case) and push them to their limits.

I will conclude by following the syntactic and semantic gymnastics involved in tracing immunity as structure, as metaphor and as biological—even ontological—condition, concluding



with a medical and philosophical history of the concept written by Anne Marie Moulin. Moulin intriguingly posits the immune system as a biological *cogito*. Offering a counter-narrative to the Freud's unconscious, she writes that immunology, "le dernier langage de la médecine," "furnishes the indispensable myth of the birth of the Ego."<sup>7</sup> I will consider how this "last language," as a biological unconscious, depicts the modern condition as it comes to *inflect discorps* about the embodied, masculine self.

### **Foucault's Man and the Modern *Epistémè***

According to Foucault, before the modern era, "Man" did not exist as a separate category of epistemological inquiry but, rather, as part of a larger continuum of beings and knowledge. Indeed, "Man," before the nineteenth century, was not an end in himself. As Foucault writes: "...[L]a pensée classique et toutes celles qui l'ont précédée aient pu parler de l'esprit et du corps, de l'être humain, de sa place si limitée dans l'univers, de toutes les bornes qui mesurent sa connaissance ou sa liberté, mais qu'aucune d'entre elles, jamais, n'ait connu l'homme tel qu'il est donné au savoir moderne."<sup>8</sup> The "classical age" (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), Foucault maintains, was a period epistemologically oriented around the principle of "representation." During this period, words "meant what they said," functioning as transparent, reliable vehicles to describe the world, ideas, and beliefs they signified. Man ordered the world into clean categories based on visible—and, therefore, easily discernible—differences. A continuous, unquestioned chain, following "reason" and accepted laws, extended from God to the king to his subjects.

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<sup>7</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 400.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 329.

According to Foucault, a great shift occurred toward the end of the eighteenth century, rupturing all of these principles. While Foucault is reluctant to attribute the shift to specific, historical events (choosing, instead, to shape his narrative around the role of particular individuals), the pivotal importance of the French Revolution and its aftermath cannot be overlooked. The Revolution broke the line of descent between God and ordinary man with its dramatic severing of the royal head.<sup>9</sup> While it took nearly a century for Nietzsche (in)famously to pronounce God's death, "Man" was born out of the rubble of the classical age. *La déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, the document that "fathered" democracy in France out of the principles of "natural rights," formally decrees His birth: "Les hommes *naissent* et demeurent libres et égaux en droits." Unlike the American Constitution, in which men are "*created equal*," "endowed by their *Creator*" with certain rights, the French document takes all mention of a "Creator" out of the equation; the French citizen is materially and conceptually a living, humanly derived body, born not created. As Ed Cohen astutely observes in his analysis of the enmeshment of the political and the biological in this founding document: "The French Declaration of the Rights of Man...derives rights from birth as a natural event that individualizes human life as such. In other words, birth confers freedom and equal rights on all *individuals* because as embodied beings all humans *equally* must be born... [T]he *Déclaration* naturally attaches the freedom and rights of French citizens to their *conditions of living*."<sup>10</sup> In this condition of birthed equality, Man is forced to come to grips with the gap of meaning and sense left by the deprivation of transcendence and the decapitated patrilineal line. With no clear connection to the white-bearded grandfather in the sky through the prongs of the sacred crown,

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<sup>9</sup> The havoc wrought by the king's beheading on the notion of family is insightfully analyzed by Lynn Hunt. See *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 150.

man lost his claim to promised (though deferred) infinite power and life. He found himself, instead, confronted with and resigned to his earthly confines, exclusively constituted by the efforts, accomplishments and decisions made within the span of his lifetime. Man suddenly had an acute sense of the precariousness of his individuality, his existential state from here on forth “promised,” as it were, “to destruction.”<sup>11</sup>

With this focus on limits, as one side of the story goes, Man took action and assumed the powers of self-creation, self-definition, and self-study. In short, Man came into his own. What counted for the “Modern” Man was what he did between beginning (birth) and end (death): how he cultivated, grew, solidified, glorified, destroyed, expressed or changed himself—the self—in association with the material world and fellow beings around him. But also, and Foucault (among many others) emphasizes the importance of this point not only in *Les mots et les choses* but in his subsequent works, Man was “dominated” by the material, temporal, spatial, linguistic situation, the limits placed on him by his earthly existence. The notion of the subject arises out of this duality of both wielding a certain power as a being endowed with “rights,” acting toward specific, chosen ends (in the sense of goals) all while being acted upon, *subjected* to conditions and constraints. The subject exists for the sake of existing, for the sake of prolonging his existence; his life is his own to promote while he courts capricious fate and makes do with given circumstances (natural and cultural). The goal of life, in this scenario, is to push off death as long as possible. In this environment of control and subjection, ends (*les fins*)—as a cessation or a limit—become a focus unto themselves: “...[N]otre culture a franchi le seuil à partir duquel nous reconnaissons notre modernité, le jour où la finitude a été pensée dans une référence interminable à elle-même...[L]’homme moderne—cet homme assignable en son existence

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 291.

corporelle, laborieuse et parlante—n'est possible qu'à titre de figure de la finitude. La culture moderne peut penser l'homme parce qu'elle pense le fini à partir de lui-même" (328-29).

Modernity, suggests Foucault, began when man, grappling with his limits, extracted himself from the outside and sealed himself off as both a privileged observer and observed object. This withdrawal resulted in an experience of an unbridgeable *décalage* or gap in relationship to the inanimate world: to time, to resources, to language—to life, itself. Foucault emphasizes again and again how modern Man, because of this gap, came to occupy a singular position as both the object and subject of knowledge—"a strange empirical-transcendental doublet" (329). Standing at the epistemological center, Man watches, experiences, seemingly rises above as the world revolves around him; he has become God in God's absence. At the same time, he lingers on the periphery of scope, squinting and gathering data about himself through his magnifying glass, telescope, binoculars or, now, webcam. The primary goal of knowledge, in this case, is to explore, understand, quantify this new object/subject "Man" and his out-of-sync, non-coincidental interactions.

The ambivalence of this dual position—untenable in Foucault's mind—is acutely experienced at the intersection between the sense of self and the body, the self's perishable "container" into which he retreats. An intense interest in the internal body, conceived as an inhabited space, grew stronger as man retreated further into his "shell" and "armor." Within the modern period, explains Foucault, space—bodily space included—is no longer conceived along the ruly, mathematical axes of universal measurements and regular, delineated separations. Modern space is made up of discontinuous interactions, inter-linkings, and overlaps that have, as their principle goal, to maintain proper functioning. In accordance to these spatial configurations and requirements, it is not the placement of the internal parts that counts, nor the external

appearance, but rather the way the parts work together: “d’une organisation à l’autre le lien, en effet, ne peut plus être l’identité d’un ou plusieurs éléments, mais l’identité du rapport entre les éléments (où la visibilité n’a plus de rôle) et de la fonction qu’ils assurent...” (230). In terms of the body, the visible, external appearance no longer carries the weight it once did; a good body is a solid body, one that works quietly and efficiently. A hierarchy of parts is established; the most vital parts are hidden from view, deeply buried, only attainable through drastic means of opening: “...d’un côté, il y a les organes secondaires, qui sont visibles à la surface du corps et se donnent sans intervention à l’immédiate perception, et les organes primaires, qui sont essentiels, centraux, cachés, et qu’on ne peut atteindre que par la dissection, c’est-à-dire en effaçant matériellement l’enveloppe colorée des organes secondaires” (281). Disease also lodges itself in the hidden recesses of the body. It is no wonder that, during this time, an obsession with “concealed” illnesses (“nervous” conditions, “microbes”) took hold of the medical community. The desire to root out the invisible fueled the development of laboratory culture as it attempted to pin down the hidden, secret laws governing this remote sphere, a drive we will discuss in much greater detail in the next chapter.

Interest in understanding the “proper” functioning of the body naturally led to inquiries into changes in the internal space: how the body, with all of its myriad, complicated, opaque relationships between parts and systems, “becomes” over time: “...[S]’il arrive à ces organisations de voisiner...ce n’est pas qu’elles occupent des emplacements proches dans un espace de classification, c’est parce qu’elles ont été formée l’un en même temps que l’autre, et l’une aussitôt après l’autre dans *le devenir* des successions” (230, my emphasis). Changes in one organization trigger changes in another—and the changes are endless and unpredictable. The modern period moves along the assumption of infinite change. While the world—and man—

during the classical period was assumed fixed, set in place, discernible, describable, the modern world and the modern man are always in flux; interactions lead to other interactions, everything is always *becoming* something else: “[L]e savoir n’est plus constitué sur le mode du tableau, mais sur celui de la série, de l’enchaînement, et *du devenir...*”(274). Becoming institutes itself as the privileged metaphor. Over the course of the nineteenth century, new “becomings” crept up in every aspect of modern life: possibilities of social mobility arose; transportation improved, accelerated means of movement developed; investment was made in burgeoning sciences (embryology, ontogeny, phylogeny); capitalism, the movement of goods and capital, became the primary economic model; experimentation flourished in the arts, challenging generic boundaries and modes of artistic production. The promise of becoming also implies the creation of history, a plotting of transformations set in time and narrativized, an excavation of the traces left by each successive change. Becoming becomes a right unto itself: “[l’homme] a droit aussi à un devenir...”(381). However, a paradox lies at the heart of man’s fundamental drive to become. Since modern man’s depths remain unknowable, in an attempt to reduce his sense of *décalage* and difference with the “outside,” the modern man seeks to neutralize the “Other” through a process of radical appropriation and assimilation. The self doesn’t want to become anything other than what he is; rather, he wants the Other to become him: “...la pensée moderne s’avance dans cette direction où l’Autre de l’homme doit *devenir* le Même que lui” (339).

Foucault shows how the dual positioning of man as both subject and object, and his concomitant desire to assimilate others into the self, gave rise to the “human sciences.” Foucault identifies psychology, sociology, anthropology, and, less definitively, literary analysis as “derivative” sciences located at the interstices of the “real sciences,” *c’est-à-dire* the modes of inquiry that do not take man, in his psychological depth or his social behavior or his cultural

production, as their principal fields of investigation. However, on the peripheries of these “sciences of man” arose three disciplines that disrupt and undermine the illusion of self-same, self-aggrandizing wholeness; these epistemological domains threaten the coherence of man’s constructed sense of self. Psychoanalysis, ethnology and linguistics, as opposed to the “derivative” sciences, throw into relief man’s limits of self-knowledge by introducing the Other into his two “spheres”: on the one hand crowding man in the center of his transcendent, subjective circle; on the other elbowing him on the objective periphery as he gazes on and contemplates himself in his uniqueness. As Foucault explains, psychoanalysis illuminates the extent to which the self’s interaction with the world is shaped by unconscious desires, drives and interruptions to which the conscious self has limited access and over which he has little control. Ethnology, on the other hand, diminishes man’s sense of cultural singularity and superiority; the self standing in the center becomes decidedly less interesting in comparison with equally fascinating though radically different others circling the outside. Linguistics inflects both of these spheres, depriving man of any sense of mastery over his words, either those used for self-expression or those used to describe what he sees outside of himself. As I will demonstrate, immunology could be added to this list as a fourth “rogue” discipline. Immunology, a science that developed at the end of the nineteenth century in the realm of biology, simultaneously challenges man’s unity as it appears to constitute it. Like psychoanalysis, immunology “dissolves man” from within (391). It purports to consolidate knowledge about the protective mechanisms that keep man unified, and yet, really, it, too, produces an “other” speak, compromising the self’s claim to unity.

Toward the end of *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault alludes to the importance of linguistic analysis to better understand the “human sciences.” He wonders whether linguistics, in its role

of giving “structure”—one might say “body”—to things (to the point where the linguistic analysis “is constitutive of its very object” [393]) can be compared to mathematics in its invariability, i.e. indifference to the objects it is “describing”: “[L]a question qui se pose est de savoir si on peut utiliser sans jeu de mots la notion de structure ou du moins si c’est de la même structure qu’on parle en mathématiques et dans les sciences humaines: question qui est centrale si on veut connaître les possibilités et les droits, les conditions et les limites d’une formalisation justifiée...” (ibid.). If this were the case, if linguistic analysis erects “mathematical-like” structures, then it could be used “to describe” the “justified forms,” the “axes” constituting the “volume proper to the human sciences,” (ibid.) i.e. man, in his material density.

I take Foucault’s proposition literally. For me, quite simply—and without “word play”—the question of the body is a question of structure, and the only way to constitute the body as a body of knowledge is to use language to erect it. The body, itself, does not speak; man speaks for it and the words and metaphors he uses come to shape its functioning.

### **The Unseen Structure Between Force and Form: Modernity and the Masculine Body**

In *L’Écriture et la différence*, written a year after *Les mots et les choses*, Jacques Derrida highlights the inherent contradiction between structuralism’s stated goals and its method. While structuralism aspires to let the mysteries of a given structure unfold and reveal themselves unimpeded, to understand fully a given structure, to extract and spell out its *meaning* and, thus, its purpose, it must essentially be cut from any potentially altering influence (either interior or exterior) and shielded from interference. It must be removed and sealed off, purified and fixed to



ensure “the coherence and the completeness of each totality at its proper level.”<sup>12</sup> The cost of this fixity, Derrida reminds his reader, is a petrification of form. When structure is discovered (and, by being “discovered,” set), when all of the relationships between parts have been established, the possibilities of change and evolution within the form wither. The structure, Derrida warns, “encloses becoming” (“enfermer le devenir”). Moreover, in the search to *understand* a structure—to classify, construct, and anticipate an evolving organization of parts or future incarnations—structuralist epistemology confines and limits what Derrida, for lack of a better word, calls “force”: “*Comprendre* la structure d’un devenir, la forme d’une force, c’est perdre le sens en le gagnant” (44, my emphasis). Force, the vital energy within a given form, dries up as soon as one goes to dam it in.

Derrida evokes “force” to stand in as the opposite of structure. He is quick to acknowledge that what he means by “force” is fundamentally at odds with language’s ability to “pin it down.” At the same time, force paradoxically serves as language’s defining “essence,” that without which language would not be: “La force est l’autre du langage sans lequel celui-ci ne serait pas ce qu’il est.”<sup>13</sup> “Force” is synonymous with a kind of spontaneous, “organic” (without being “organizational”—I will say more about organs in a moment) becoming, the kind of becoming in the present that renders both past and future, origin and end, irrelevant. Derrida waxes poetic about these elusive terms and their “pure and proper” attributes: “le sens du devenir

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1967), 43 (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> “Force” acquires a near-mystical status in Derrida’s writing. In a later contribution, entitled “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” Derrida alludes to his earlier recourse to the word, expressing his “uneasiness” about it. However, he only briefly attempts to elucidate his usage of the word, quickly moving his analysis toward a reflection on the relationship between force as part of the discourse of law and violence. “Force,” especially as it relates to “becoming,” remains largely intact as a concept, one might even assert a primary “building block” in Derridean lexicology, something that resists further deconstruction. See “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3-67.

et de la force, dans leur pure et propre qualité, c'est le repos du commencement et de la fin, la paix d'un spectacle, horizon ou visage."<sup>14</sup> This confounding sentence, reminiscent of Foucault's concluding sentence in *Les mots et les choses* ("...alors, on peut bien parier que l'homme s'effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable"<sup>15</sup>) establishes an equivalence between "becoming" and "force." Their meaning does not inhere in a quality of activity as one might expect, but rather in activity's release: a pacifying of beginning and end. This relaxation seemingly erases all need for particularizing articles; "the" disappears. All that remains in its wake is pared-down, exteriorized and vague promise, "horizon" or "face."

Alice Jardine follows the signifying chain in Derrida's (among others') work from force to becoming to horizon to face and frames it as exemplary of a larger phenomenon in post-structuralist French cultural theory. Jardine shines a light on a symptom shared by many of the writers—Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Philippe Sollers, to name only a few—who were responding to a fundamental and wide-reaching crisis in structure and/in meaning that went far beyond the question of esthetic and cultural criticism. This symptom was the fixation on the "feminine" or on "woman" as the primary characteristic of imagined force or becoming.

In *Gynesis*, her "feminal" critique, Jardine argues that, in post-war Europe, all structures—institutional (government, schools, family, law, communication, etc.), representational, epistemological, even ontological—that had once served as the underpinnings of Occidental, patriarchal society had been upended by uncontainable external and internal force(s). These thinkers were responding to the sense that the occidental male was progressively finding himself deposed as the dominant producer of discourse, displaced by alternative

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<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 398.

narratives that arose in response to a myriad of historical circumstances: to name only a few, humanism's perceived "failure" in the wake of World War II's atrocities; the fall of empire and end of colonization; the space and mind-altering effects of increasing globalization; the widening space of expression gained by women and other, previously silent populations, as a result of changing social norms. The writers Jardine identifies were largely responsible for pulling apart and dismantling the crumbling structures, for exposing the constructed nature of the principles supporting society. As Jardine clarifies:

These writers have laid bare the vicious circles of intellectual imperialism and of liberal and humanist ideology. They have elaborated at length how that ideology is based on reified and naturalized categories, or concepts like 'experience' and the 'natural'; or, in another mode, the Ethical, the Right, the Good, or the True. The clearest way, perhaps, to contain in one word the gesture they have performed on the texts and contexts of humanist ideology is to focus on the word *denaturalization*; they have denaturalized the world that humanism naturalized...<sup>16</sup>

Narratives—the stories that had circulated, passed down over the centuries—were the cement that held together the foundations of the structures; through careful maintenance and consistent re(ap)pointment, the rocks and pillars had remained seemingly upright and strong. However, once these narratives faced scrutiny, once their cracks and faults—the lies, the false assumptions, the privileged hierarchies, the *a priori*s—were exposed, the structures standing upon them also lost their footing. Even the cement holding together the most unshakeable pillar—that of the patrilineal line—upon which all of the other structures depended had not withstood the light of day, gradually breaking down allowing water to seep through the cracks, leaving legitimacy awash. As we mentioned earlier, the Revolution and the descent of the king leveled the first blow to the patrilineal pillar. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the rule of the father came under greater and greater pressure. The effects of this social

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<sup>16</sup> Jardine, *Gynesis*, 24.

erosion were not felt equally. Those who were particularly effected were those who depended on the structures to maintain their legitimacy, namely the *pater*—the fathers present and future, the men: “It is widely recognized,” writes Jardine, “that legitimacy is part of that judicial domain which, historically, has determined the right to govern, the succession of kings, the link between father and son, the necessary paternal fiction, the ability to decide who is the father—in patriarchal culture. The crises experienced by the major Western narratives have not, therefore, been gender-neutral. They are crises in the narratives invented by men” (ibid.).

Jardine unpacks the gender implications of this flooding and erosion of signification as well as the response such narrative devastation triggered. She focuses on what she identifies as the “non-knowledge,” that which the structure failed to take into account and which contributed to the breakdown. For Jardine, the solution imagined and proposed to fix the gaps of signification was to somehow integrate the “non-knowledge” into the narrative mortar. “In France,” she writes, “such rethinking has involved, above all, a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives’ own ‘nonknowledge,’ what has eluded them, what has engulfed them” (ibid.). Jardine suggests this “nonknowledge” gets framed in the works of each of these writers as a rogue space gendered feminine. “This other-than-themselves is almost always a ‘space’ of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine*, as *woman*” (25).

Jardine coins the word *Gynesis* to describe the process at work by which the narrative is rebuilt and rendered whole (at least discursively) through the *verbalization*—in the literal sense of made into verb, i.e. into action, into process—of woman and the feminine, more broadly. “[G]ynesis—the putting into discourse of ‘woman’ as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity...” (ibid.). Going back to my chosen metaphor, the

“feminization” of the mortar, an attempt to reinject “force” or vitality into the structure results in a new configuration whose “becoming” moves the structure (or at least the discourse about the structure) farther and farther outside of itself, away from the internal remnants of its male “constitution.” As Jardine explains: “The object produced by this process is neither a person nor a thing, but a horizon, that toward which the process is tending: a *gynema*. This *gynema* is a reading effect, *a woman-in-effect that is never stable and has no identity*” (ibid., my emphasis). Jardine, in the rest of her analysis, brilliantly traces how the “horizon” (or the “becoming,” to recall Derrida’s equivalence between the two terms) is produced, how it appears, like a faint mirage, to hover over and out of the texts of several of France’s preeminent post-war theorists and writers.

Instead of peering over the horizon, the potential oasis projected just beyond the words, I will keep my focus on the dingy remains of the initial structure, the dark underbelly, as it were, away from which the gaze has been consistently diverted. The feminine space—what Jardine identifies as “nonknowledge”—is in fact only a foil for the space that remains persistently naturalized and “unthought” in these writings. The space “over which the narrative has lost control” is not the feminine, unknowable and external “other” but rather the fixed, crumbly internal structure of the male body. Jumping back from Jardine’s analysis of verbal conjugation (the “becoming feminine” as verb) and projected predicate, I will stay fixed on the “nominal subject,” so to speak; I will pick apart the passive or effaced noun upon which the verb of the woman is acting. In short, I will decline the male embodied subject, in all of its senses.

Jardine's "verbalization" of the feminine is undergirded or lined by an antinomical and hidden discursive—or rather, what I will call a “dis-corpsive”<sup>17</sup>—shadow presence that consistently resists deconstruction, even by those theorists most committed to the deconstructive process. This unconscious, deeply embodied narrative structure—this *dis(s)-corps*—effectively and repeatedly enacts and reinforces a privileged corporeal “sealing” off of the masculine body while claiming to aspire to a “feminine” expansiveness. The masculine *dis-corps* adheres—gloms on—to the woman's body/space as a locus of acknowledged ‘nonknowledge’ and therefore an identifiable site over which to assert control and mastery. Meanwhile, the male subject's corporality inheres, unnoticed, so deeply sublimated it becomes virtually invisible in the face of “feminine becoming” (femining?). Its *dis-corps* is a largely unidentified, inflammation inducing, ink-ling hidden in plain sight. It is indicative of a less pronounced, less palpable because more profoundly felt anxiety radiating from a perceived loss of control over the male subject's **own** body—his body imagined, *proper and propre*, as the basic, “natural,” fundamental structure from which all discourse emanates.

### **Organ Rejection in Deleuze & Guattari, Derrida and Nancy**

Le corps est le corps,  
il est seul  
et n'a pas besoin d'organes,  
Le corps n'est jamais un organisme,  
les organismes sont les ennemis du corps,  
les choses que l'on fait  
se passent toutes seules  
sans le concours d'aucun organe,

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<sup>17</sup> I am borrowing the term *discorps* from Evelyne Grossman. She uses the term in a slightly different though still relevant way, as the “tension entre le naturel et l'artifice du corps” (Grossman, *La Défiguration*, 31.). For me, *dis(s)-corps* refers to the shadow discourse that underli(n)es a projected « beyond text » of becoming. It communicates the notion of discord at the heart of this discourse as well as the ultimate rejecting (dissing) of the body that must occur for discourse about becoming to emerge.

tout organe est un parasite,  
il recouvre une fonction parasitaire  
destinée à faire vivre un être  
qui ne devrait pas être là.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1960s and 70s, the heyday of post-structuralism, the most explicit engagements with the male body's internal structure were prompted by the *organ-ic* musings of Antonin Artaud. Foucault, in *Les mots et les choses*, identifies Artaud as one of the writers whose language, "renvoyé au cri, au corps torturé, à la matérialité de la pensée, à la chair," reaches man's outer limits, the region "où rôde la mort, où la pensée s'éteint, où la promesse de l'origine indéfiniment recule."<sup>19</sup> Several of France's preeminent post-structuralist thinkers, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida and, later, Jean-Luc Nancy, use Artaud's enigmatic writings of bodily extremity as a springboard for their own critical inquiries. Organs figure prominently in their "imaginary anatomy," what Elizabeth Grosz (drawing on Lacan) defines as the "internalized image or map of the meaning that the body has for the subject, for others in its social world, and for the symbolic order conceived in its generality (that is, for a culture as a whole)."<sup>20</sup> Each of these theorists frames organs as internal markers of difference emphasizing the lack of self-sameness at the most fundamental level (how can the self be heart, liver, pancreas, kidney, intestines, bladder, lungs, brain, not to mention sex, all at once?). More disturbingly, though, organs function as a force of self-dispossession, internal elements that not only divide, but can work against the self. In an attempt to draw together the fragments of organhood, each theorist then takes a step back to reflect on the *organism* as a

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<sup>18</sup> Antonin Artaud, "Les États préparatoires: Le théâtre de la cruauté," in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* suivi par *Le théâtre de la cruauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 167.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 395.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 39-40.

whole, its relationship to questions of origins (and to the mother, problematic for all four) and the totalizing mechanisms of determination—inside and outside—at work.

### *Deleuze and Guattari: Egg over Ego*

Deleuze and Guattari are the thinkers of this group most well-known for their out-and-out organ rejection. They famously seize upon Artaud's liberatory ideal of the "body without organs" to fashion a critique of and counter-model to both Marxist ideology (with its materialist superstructure) and psychoanalysis (with its universal Oedipus), two narratives, as we stated above, that had, since the nineteenth century, anchored and split the modern, capitalist (male) subject. Deleuze and Guattari fantasize the "body without organs" (BwO or CsO—"corps sans organes"—in French) as a body of pure energy, of infinite potential, and of flow. "Intensities" is the word they repeat throughout their long exposition. The BwO pulses and connects, unimpeded by the fixed mass and function of individualized parts; it is an unbroken, uncompromised, a self-same because a self-undifferentiated body. The BwO is a body paradoxically repossessed as it is unpossessed; the lack of appropriation of the BwO by any single subject restores wholeness to it: "...[L]e corps sans organes n'est jamais le tien, le mien...C'est toujours *un* corps...Il ne s'agit pas du tout d'un corps morcelé, éclaté, ou d'organes sans corps."<sup>21</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari, with their BwO, construct their philosophy around a dual premise of projected, externalized becoming paired with an imagined, internal deconstruction, a melting

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<sup>21</sup> Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980), 203 (emphasis in original).



of forms which paradoxically enfolds the human (male) within the safe shell of a self-generating egg, as we will discuss below. Their focus stubbornly remains on the infinite recombinatory potential of outward desire translated into an unlimited number of arrangements or *agencements*. Comprised only of relationships of speed and intensities, “of movement and of rest,” this becoming occurs primarily on what they call “*le plan d’immanence*,” an external plane always working beyond and against stifling self and form-hood: “Le plan d’immanence n’a rien à voir avec une intériorité, il est comme le Dehors d’où vient tout désir” (116). In essence, Deleuze and Guattari wish away the “real” constraints of embodied existence in lieu of a virtuality where the “actual object is dissolved” (180).

As mentioned above, Deleuze and Guattari’s imaginary, the BwO assumes the form of an egg. Discursively, Deleuze and Guattari situate the BwO as a locus of intersection between narrative disciplines and systems of thought: “Il y a une convergence fondamentale de la science et du mythe, de l’embryologie et de la mythologie, de l’œuf biologique et de l’œuf psychique ou cosmique...” (202). The traditional associations with an egg are those of a fragile, bound, metonymically feminine object out of which life cracks open and develops. Contrary to these associations, the BwO egg’s key characteristic is unimpeded movement within itself and experimentation between undifferentiated depths (“strates”). Its momentum is neither back nor forward-moving (neither “regressive” or “progressive”); rather, the becoming occurs on a parallel, coexistent plane. And yet, while their theory posits an ideal of combinatory potential for the BwO, the image of the egg remains paradoxically self-contained and self-defining. Its “becoming” unfolds in conserved wholeness. The egg exists not as an originary starting point of

a being but rather as a parallel, contemporaneous construct in infinite flux: “L’œuf est le CsO. Le CsO n’est pas ‘avant’ l’organisme, il y est adjacent, et ne cesse pas de se faire” (202).<sup>22</sup>

As such, organs are not the only things Deleuze and Guattari reject; their response to the crisis in legitimation is a violent refusal of the mother as source of corporal individuation. By logical (and biological) extension, the BwO, “cette réalité intensive...où les choses, les organes, se distinguent uniquement par des gradients, des migrations, des zones de voisinage,” in its indefinite movement and defiance to fixity, should remain unencumbered by the constraints and heavy baggage of genital and gender differentiation. However, the gender politics of the BwO are anything but neutral. This egg is a form wrought with contradiction, particularly in regards to its generative potential and properties. While Deleuze and Guattari will later qualify the *modus operandi* of the egg as a process of perpetual becoming, and, more explicitly, of an aspirational “becoming woman” (I will soon say more about this), in their initial exposition of the BwO, the relationship to the feminine—and particularly to the maternal—is ambivalent. They go to pains to clarify that the BwO’s “egginess” is in no way, as psychoanalysis would have it, a regressive desire for a return to the mother. To the degree that the mother is recognized or incorporated into the egg’s narrative, she is quickly—and quite violently—stripped of her life-giving parts:

S[i l’œuf] est lié à l’enfance, ce n’est pas au sens où l’adulte régresserait à l’enfant, et l’enfant à la Mère, mais au sens où l’enfant, tel le jumeau dogon qui emporte avec lui un morceau de placenta, *arrache* à la forme organique de la Mère une matière intense et déstratifiée qui constitue au contraire sa rupture

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<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, in developing their vision, were inspired by the work of Marcel Griaule, the French anthropologist who focused in his research on the elaborate system of myth and ritual of the Dogon tribe in Mali. As a model for the BwO, Deleuze and Guattari seized on the Dogon “cosmic egg,” which, according to Griaule, radiated spiraling life and energy into the universe.

perpétuelle avec le passé, son expérience, son expérimentation actuelles. Le CsO est bloc, devenir, le contraire du souvenir d'enfance."<sup>23</sup>

The “intense material” is “ripped” from the “organic form of the Mother” (the capital letter accentuating the mother’s allegorical universality). This material lacks segmentation—it is “destratified”—and allows for the egg to separate, distanced temporally from the past and spatially from the experience of maternal enclosure.

While the rest of the mother is severed and rejected through this *arrachement*, the “intense and destratified matter” is soon reclaimed as masculine. Seemingly out of nowhere and with a succinct assertion that stands for and by itself, Deleuze and Guattari (de)posit “*Logos spermaticos*.” *Logos spermaticos*, the Stoic law of “seminal logic,” places generation squarely in the male activity of reason that bubbles and shapes form within feminine “inanimate matter.”<sup>24</sup> Textually, the interruption of “*logos spermaticos*” cleaves the text, sectioning off the opaque explanation of the BwO from a rehearsal of what, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “psychoanalysis has wrong,” namely its fixation on giving the body an *image*; psychoanalysis is

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<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, 202. Griaule frames the myth of the fallen “twin,” Yurugu, as the Dogon tribe’s equivalent to the Adam and Eve story. According to Griaule, Yurugu, impatient to be born, snatched the part of his mother’s placenta attaching him to her and fell from the heavens, separating himself and severing the divine configuration. According to legend, Earth formed out of the part of torn placenta. Yurugu then copulated incestuously with earth hoping to rival the great deity’s power of creation. This act of defiance and arrogance resulted in the procreation of flawed offspring (single beings) and worldly misfortune. In Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the story, the paternal deity has disappeared, replaced by a mother threatening to entrap the egg in time and space. They embrace the fallen figure as a model of liberation, reclaiming its creative potential.

<sup>24</sup> The question of conception arises in Deleuze’s “Lettre à un critique sévère,” the first text in *Pourparlers*, in which Deleuze describes his writerly approach. When “taking on a philosopher,” so to speak, he imagines “buggering” them, the equivalent to him of an “immaculate conception.” He takes a philosopher “from behind” and impregnates (for lack of a more male oriented word) him, leaving him with a monstrous child. He absolves himself of any responsibility for this child born out of a delicate manipulation—reordering—of the philosopher’s own words: “...[M]a manière de m’en tirer...c’était...de concevoir l’histoire de la philosophie comme une sorte d’enculage ou, ce qui revient au même, d’immaculée conception. Je m’imaginai arriver dans le dos d’un auteur et lui faire un enfant qui serait le sien et qui serait pourtant monstrueux. Que ce soit bien le sien, c’est très important, parce qu’il fallait que l’auteur disent effectivement tout ce que je lui faisais dire. Mais que l’enfant soit monstrueux, c’était nécessaire aussi, parce qu’il fallait passer par toutes sortes de décentrement, glissements, cassements, émissions secrètes qui m’ont fait bien plaisir.” Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers 1972-1990* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1990), 15.

always too quick to imprison the imaginary anatomy within a fixed form. The pair reminds the reader that psychoanalysis just does not “get” the egg; it fails to appreciate its radical indefiniteness as well as its unceasing drive to “make itself”: “Elle [La psychanalyse] ne comprenait rien à l’œuf, ni aux articles indéfinis, ni à la contemporanéité d’un milieu qui ne cesse pas de se faire.”<sup>25</sup>

Against psychoanalysis’ “backwards” approach of focusing on “des photos de famille, des souvenirs d’enfance et des objets partiels,” Deleuze and Guattari emphasize their vision—a highly prepositional, difficult to locate, hard to see body if ever there was one. The situational difficulty is highlighted when Deleuze and Guattari use a topographical metaphor to explicate the egg’s slipperiness: a BwO is a depariculated “world map of intensity” unfolding through “intensive organic reason[ing]s” and mechanical operation.<sup>26</sup> This properly engineered narrative of self-generation displaces Lacan’s messy mirror reflecting the (M)other as the source of imagined self-hood; it cancels out the ego, the “organ” responsible for projecting the self as it conserves its sense of integrity.<sup>27</sup> Here, there is no ego to fix, no self to endow with a false sense

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<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, 203.

<sup>26</sup> This is the prepositional explanation that Deleuze and Guattari give of the BwO: “Il y a distribution des raisons intensives d’organes, avec leurs articles positives indéfinis, au sein d’un collectif ou d’une multiplicité, dans un agencement et suivant des connexions machiniques opérant sur un CsO” (ibid.).

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Grosz unpacks the differences of the “ego organ” in Freud and Lacan. For Freud, the ego exists on the periphery between biological embodiedness and psychic social projection. “The very organ whose function is to distinguish biological or id impulses from sociocultural pressure, the ego, is always already the intermingling of both insofar as it is the consequence of the cultural, that is, signficatory effects of the body, the meaning and love of the body as the subject lives it.” For Lacan, on the other hand, the ego loses its corporality. It withdraws from the physical world into the psychic imaginary: “For Lacan, the ego is not an outline or projection of the real anatomical and physiological body but is an imaginary outline or projection of the body, the body insofar as it is imagined and represented for the subject by the image of others (including its own reflection in a mirror” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 39).

of wholeness. In the place of ego, there is an egg of unfettered becoming: an infinitely mobile, polymorphous, universal—masculine—Humpty Dumpty before the fall.<sup>28</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari eventually abstract their arguments, moving away from individual organs—and their egg—to a more philosophical reflection on structure and its forces of solidification or disintegration. *Le devenir*—becoming—insists as a concept of promise and anxiety. Deleuze and Guattari, on the one hand, whole-heartedly tout infinite “becoming” as the cornerstone of their philosophy—the “becoming-animal,” “becoming-nomad,” and, most importantly, “becoming-woman.” These jubilant “becomings” promote desire as a productive, positive force.<sup>29</sup> Their becoming is gradual, based on a Spinozian vision of an undivided matter shared by all things (animate and inanimate). It is the opposite of any sense of personal “growth” or “evolution,” either psychological or physical; becoming, for Deleuze and Guattari, empties interiority and deemphasizes both the importance of origin and *terminus*; the only “goal” to be achieved is the eradication of goal: to be “between,” “in the middle,” “*entre*.”<sup>30</sup> Deleuzian “becoming” entails the persistent softening and moving beyond of fixed structural

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze first mentions the BwO in an essay from *La Logique du Sens* in which he analyzes Artaud’s critique of Lewis Carroll’s poem “The Jabberwocky.” Artaud criticizes Carroll for his superficiality, his lack of depth in language. When asked to furnish a translation to the poem, Artaud offers this damning retort: “Je n’aime pas les poèmes ou les langages de surface et qui respirent d’heureux loisirs et des réussites de l’intellect, celui-ci s’appuyât-il sur l’anus mais sans y mettre de l’âme ou du cœur. L’anus est toujours terreux, et je n’admets pas qu’on perde un excrément sans se déchirer d’y perdre aussi son âme, et il n’y a pas d’âme dans Jabberwocky...” Antonin Artaud quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *La logique du sens* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 103.

<sup>29</sup> Several feminist thinkers have embraced this aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s discourse as a promising alternative to the psychoanalytic discourse that frames desire—particularly female desire—as “lack” or deficiency. For feminist valorizations of Deleuze, see Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Gender and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) and Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Gilles Deleuze et Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris : Champs Essais, 1996), 38. The term Deleuze uses to describe the movement of becoming is “involuer”: “to turn in on oneself.” “*Involuer*” does not move backward (to regress) or forward (to evolve). Rather, it means to shed layers, to reduce oneself to the bare minimum, to streamline: “c’est devenir de plus en plus sobre, de plus en plus simple, devenir de plus en plus désert, et par là même peuplé” (37). As we shall discuss, Deleuze’s ideal embodiment of involution, of *devenir-femme*, is the anorexic, the BwO *par excellence*.

boundaries, culminating in a release of form. Malleability is the ideal and allows a morphing into radical otherness—epitomized by “becoming woman.” This “becoming woman” has nothing to do with traditional associations of feminine plenitude, fertility, *rondeurs* or procreation. Deleuze and Guattari’s “*femme*” is a stripped-down anorexic, an “involted” body, turned in on itself and emptied of corporal organization:

Le vide anorexique n’a rien à voir avec un manque, c’est au contraire une manière d’échapper à la détermination organique du manque et de la faim, à l’heure mécanique du repas. Il y a tout un plan de composition de l’anorexique, pour se faire un corps anorganique (ce qui ne veut pas dire asexué : au contraire devenir-femme de tout anorexique). L’anorexie est une politique, une micro-politique : échapper aux normes de la consommation, pour ne pas être soi-même objet de consommation. C’est une protestation féminine, d’une femme qui veut avoir un fonctionnement de corps, et pas seulement des fonctions organiques et sociales qui la livrent à la dépendance. (132)

Deleuze and Guattari, as they are defining the BwO, revise their statement. Organs, in and of themselves, are not the “enemy”; it is rather the *organism*, in its entirety, that must be undone. A confining and rigid structure is the culprit of dispossession—organs are simply the consequences of this initial force of restriction. “Nous nous apercevons peu à peu que le CsO n’est nullement le contraire des organes. Ses ennemis ne sont pas les organes. L’ennemi c’est l’organisme...l’organisation organique des organes.”<sup>31</sup> The *mode d’emploi* for transforming an organism into a BwO is not straightforward. While the goal of the BwO is to “undo” the organism, enough structure of the organism must be kept “pour qu’il se reforme à chaque aube,” and enough subjectivity maintained “pour pouvoir répondre à la réalité dominante” (197). Deleuze and Guattari walk a tightrope as they attempt to undo structure without annihilating form (and thus life) entirely, so that the “autodestructions...ne se confondent pas avec la pulsion de mort” (198). They propose a program of imitation—“Mimez les strates” (199)—meant to

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze et Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, 196.

result in a “diagramme” (etymologically a “marking through or across”) of “les programmes encore signifiants et subjectifs.” The “emptying” or “destratifying” must be executed carefully and progressively. If the organism is “emptied” too quickly, the body can collapse in on itself: “Le pire n’est pas de rester stratifié—organisé, signifié, assujetti—mais de précipiter les strates dans un effondrement suicidaire ou dément, qui les fait retomber sur nous, plus lourdes à jamais” (ibid.). Their solution is one of progressive “connection, conjugation and continuation,” a gradual and determined undermining, *unhinging* of the most essential social, physical and psychical points of assemblage or arrangement (agencement): “...remonter des strates à l’agencement plus profond où nous somme pris ; faire basculer l’agencement tout doucement, le faire passer du côté du plan de consistance. C’est seulement là que le CsO se révèle pour ce qu’il est, connexion de désirs, conjunction de flux; continuum d’intensités” (ibid.). The “consistency” of the being becomes increasingly flexible, connecting and disconnecting seemingly without peril. Deleuze and Guattari’s model of being and body is transitory, unstable, fleeting—an ebb and flow that never fixes itself for too long, that never “sticks to the ribs.”

Their portrayal of the body—both masculine and feminine—is also singularly unsatisfying. They essentially pay no mind to any “real” body,<sup>32</sup> they persistently deemphasize physical limitations. They lay out a vision for how bodies might combine, morph, and break down without much consideration for interior constraints that work against or even prevent these border crossings and dissolutions. Even hopeful feminist proponents admit the Deleuzian philosophical manifesto lacks a “systematic account of bodies.”<sup>33</sup> Their organ-less body self

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<sup>32</sup> One exception to Deleuze's disregard for "real" bodies is the recurrent emphasis he places on the "fragile constitution" of writers and thinkers in *Dialogues*. As he writes in one instance: "Il se peut que l'écrivain ait une santé fragile, une constitution faible" (62).

<sup>33</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 167.

generates, self combines, takes flight, hoping it will maintain structure, but doing so without any guarantees.

***Jacques Derrida: Hollow Organs, Autoimmunity and the Perils of Misrecognition***

In *L'écriture et la différence*, Derrida devotes two essays to Artaud.<sup>34</sup> In both of them, he shows how Artaud's project to reinvent theater goes hand-in-hand with a desire to reclaim the body's integrity from the *organ-ic* forces of dispossession. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida hones in on the self-generating potential suggested in Artaud's vision of the body. However, instead of taking the "body without organs" as a given and creating an alternative theoretical system around and outside of it, Derrida digs in to what is at stake for the body *with* organs, what their "presence" incurs and means.

Antonin Artaud, explains Derrida, hated derivation. Through his project of the Theater of Cruelty, Artaud was attempting to lay out an esthetic vision that fought metaphysics; he was writing against God as the creator ("he" who fixes forms) and God as the word, the text from which all else is derived. He sought to perturb and overturn any pre-existing organizational construct, divine or otherwise, that was not originally self-generated. Tracing the various meanings of "organ" in Artaud's text,<sup>35</sup> Derrida eventually winds his way to the biological

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<sup>34</sup> The two essays are "La parole soufflée" and "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation." Derrida will later devote two more published reflections to Artaud. See "Forcener le subjectile," in *Antonin Artaud: Dessins et portraits*, by Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 55-108; and *Artaud le Moma: Interjections d'appel* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> In one exuberant statement, Artaud imagines the ability of his theater to strip God of his powers of life configuration: "Il faut croire à un sens de la vie renouvelée par le théâtre, et où l'homme impavide se rend le maître de ce qui n'est pas encore, et le fait naître. Et tout ce qui n'est pas né peut encore naître pourvu que nous ne nous contentions pas de demeurer de simples *organes d'enregistrement*." Antonin Artaud quoted in Derrida, *L'Écriture et la Différence*, 278-279.



associations, highlighting how organs—because of their preformed nature—estrangle the body from itself, divvying it up through a process of “articulation”:

Artaud redoute le corps articulé comme il redoute le langage articulé, le membre comme le mot, d'un seul et même trait, pour une seule and même raison. *Car l'articulation est la structure de mon corps et la structure est toujours structure d'expropriation.* La division du corps en organes, la différence intérieure de la chair ouvre le manque par lequel le corps s'absente à lui-même...L'organe accueille donc la différence de l'étranger dans mon corps, il est toujours l'organe de ma déperdition et ceci est d'une vérité si originaire que ni le cœur, organe central de la vie, ni le sexe, organe premier de la vie, ne sauraient y échapper...(279)

Unlike the bones and blood (the only components, according to Artaud, out of which "the body without organs" would be made), which systemically form a united body to reinforce *le propre*, organs “expropriate,” depriving the self of its *propreté* and *propriété*. The *organ-ic* body is always a fragmented body, *un corps morcelé*. The literal etymology of “organ” means “that with which one works.” Organs, with their autonomous functioning, disquiet precisely because they work within the self, beyond and often at odds with conscious or even unconscious control. Organs obey their own rules, and they make their own demands.

Derrida ends his reflection above somewhat predictably on, if not the most sturdy or reliable of organs, at least the most identifiably male. Speaking about “the sex” as the “first organ of life” allows Derrida to venture into much more well-rehearsed *dis-corps*: “L’homme vrai n’a pas de sexe car il doit être son sexe. Dès que le sexe devient organe, il me devient étranger, il m’abandonne d’acquérir ainsi l’autonomie arrogante d’un objet enflée et plein de soi. Cette enflure du sexe devenu objet séparé est une sorte de castration” (279-80). Derrida dwells on a very particular moment of rupture in Artaud’s text when “hegemonic discourse,” in Kaja Silverman’s terms, breaks down, when the penis ceases to be the phallus. Oddly, here, this

failure of coincidence occurs not in a moment of impotence, but rather when the “sex” swells and assumes an “arrogant autonomy...full of itself.” For the male subject—the referenced “me”—the organ's autonomy is unsettling precisely because of its force of separation. By “declaring” its “objecthood,” the organ puts into question the subject’s own status.

However, the most disturbing aspect of organs is not their autonomous functioning. As Derrida points out, organs disquiet because of their hollowness at the core. The perpetuation of the “organ-ed” self depends on continuous passage of the exterior through these open pathways that prevent the self from ever self-sustaining or self-aggrandizing through its own powers; the organ-ed self remains forever open, gaping and, thus, vulnerable. “L’organe, lieu de déperdition parce que son centre a toujours la forme de l’orifice. L’organe fonctionne toujours comme embouchure” (280). To reclaim its structure, to ensure its re-institution, the body must close in on itself; the holes must be plugged, the “organic” structure reduced and, ideally, eliminated. “La reconstitution et la ré-institution de ma chair suivront donc la fermeture du corps sur soi et la réduction de la structure organique...” (ibid.). At this point, Derrida’s analysis appears to join up with Deleuze and Guattari’s egoless egg: Artaud’s ideal body would be a body sealed over, unbroken, entirely independent and sufficient unto itself: “autarcique...le corps doit être refait d’une seule pièce” (ibid.). However, as we shall see, Derrida, contrary to Deleuze and Guattari, does not close off the body so as to bounce off of it. Rather, he performs a curious infiltration, reconstituting another form of metaphysics (or perhaps an anti-metaphysics), a *discorps* floating not outside of the body but deep in its core as a ticking time-bomb waiting to cause the self to implode. “Autoimmunity” is this internal mechanism vowing all expressions of life to involuted death. Derrida’s usage of the term becomes increasingly ubiquitous and imprecise, and,

ironically, what Derrida misses in his dependence on (auto)immunity is precisely its role as mediator and (de)regulator between the organs and the self.

Very little attention has been paid to Derrida's engagement with the body. A recently published book by Jones Irwin, *Derrida and the Writing of the Body*, highlights Artaud's influence (and the underappreciated influence of the "avant-garde," more generally) on what Irwin identifies as Derrida's practice of "grammatological opening" forged in *L'écriture et la différence*.<sup>36</sup> Throughout his *oeuvre*, Derrida remains attached to understanding the relationship between the written trace and breath—breath as a force of *espacement* and of survival. As Martin Hägglund remarks: "Derrida's writing tries to imprint and prolong the rhythm of his breathing, in defiance of the death sentence that is being written at the same time."<sup>37</sup> The breath should be encapsulated in the writing, itself, as a force kept as whole as possible: *la parole soufflée* is thus imagined as a writing that breaks grammar and, along with it, the constraints of phallogocentrism. Discussing Artaud's recourse to extra-European forms of theatre for inspiration, Derrida contemplates what form this writing might take: "Cette fois, non seulement l'écriture ne sera plus transcription de la parole, non seulement elle sera l'écriture du corps lui-même, mais elle se produira, dans les mouvements du théâtre, selon les règles du hiéroglyphe, d'un système de signes où ne commande plus l'institution de la voix."<sup>38</sup> This new kind of writing is needed, for, as Derrida makes clear in *Grammatologie* written at roughly the same time as *L'écriture et la différence*, written traces existing in a form of non-animation, as scribbles on a page, by their cutting action (breaking language into logical chains of words, syllables,

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<sup>36</sup> James Irwin, *Derrida and the Writing of the Body* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 152.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, 280.

letters) always jeopardize breath's—and, thus, life's—survival: “Ce que trahit l'écriture elle-même, dans son moment non phonétique, c'est la vie. Elle menace du même coup le souffle, l'esprit, l'histoire comme rapport à soi de l'esprit. Elle en est la fin, la finitude, la paralysie...elle est le principe de mort et de différence dans le devenir de l'être.”<sup>39</sup>

Irwin's analysis, however, neglects the question of bodily materiality; never does he address Derrida's critique of organs and their limitations/demands. When he does address the body in more substantive ways, he does so in relation to the female body (always the fall-back) as it is discussed in *Éperons*, Derrida's text on Nietzsche and women. The title of Irwin's chapter, “What if Truth Were Woman?,” is reminiscent of Jardine's thesis on the transcendent horizon of femininity. Towards the male body (and towards Derrida's own body), Irwin's study remains sanitized, above-board—above-belt; he scrupulously avoids the nitty-gritty of corporality, the “nuts and bolts,” so to speak. He eschews scrutiny, for example, of what is arguably Derrida's most explicit work on the body, *Circonfession*, in which Derrida, as the title suggests, dwells at length on the state of his penis—in all of its states!<sup>40</sup> Irwin's lack of any reference to this work is surprising, especially given his emphasis (quoting Peggy Kamuf) on “cutting, grafting, piecing together” as both themes and practices in Derrida's writing.<sup>41</sup>

Thomas Docherty, on the contrary, highlights the primordial importance of the signifying incision to which Derrida, as baby, was subjected. The shedding of foreskin, Docherty maintains, “gives rise” to Derrida's writing project and, indeed, sense of self. It sustains it,

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), 40-41.

<sup>40</sup> The title, *Circonfession* (translated as *Circumfession*, in English) marries two highly contested religious practices, Jewish circumcision and Catholic confession. Additionally, the French title—with the insertion of “con” in the middle—brings the mother and her corporality to the center.

<sup>41</sup> Irwin, *Derrida and the Writing of the Body*, 7.

animates it, gives it its *force* (to return to this word of “becoming”): “For Derrida, the confession stems not from the heart but rather from the mutilated penis. It is as if the foreskin, and most especially its cut, is what will foretell; or as if the core of the self—and indeed, the very motivating force or animating force of Derrida and his work—is in the mutilating cut, this attack on the very forefront of Derrida’s infant body.”<sup>42</sup> Docherty’s claim could be viewed as an inversion of Deleuze’s originary fable of *arrachement* and formulation (ovulation?). As with Deleuze and Guattari’s Dogon myth, Derrida’s “writing of the body” springs from “torn” primal matter. In this case, though, the matter has been stripped not from an imposing Mother but from the writer’s own body, leaving young Derrida in a state of raw exposure that effects a paradoxical, dual trussing; the cut binds him and his body irrevocably to defining cultural and religious structures (his Judaism), and by extension reattaches the young boy, despite his will, to his mother.

Religion and cuts aside, for the moment, and to turn to another critic, while Calvin Thomas, in his provocative *Male Matters*, does not explicitly connect the shorn penis with what he views as Derrida’s repression of the body, he does further illuminate the relationship between the written trace and the maternal.<sup>43</sup> In a clever play on words, Thomas traces Derrida’s anxiety about “mere” writing—the ordinary practice of putting pen to paper—to both the mother (*mère*) and to shit (*merde*), to the origin and the “end” of being, framing his reading using Kristeva’s characterization of “shit” as one of the many substances the self “abjects” (the abject being a part

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Docherty, “On Prejudice and Foretelling,” in *The Origins of Deconstruction*, eds. Martin McQuillan and Ika Willis (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010): 87.

<sup>43</sup> On the topic of tearing, Thomas pinpoints the way “stripping”—as elision or repression of textual elements—functions elsewhere in Derrida’s critical/scriptural practices. Showing a certain anal-retentiveness, Derrida turns a blind eye, for example, to Bataille’s “solar anus,” an amaurosis which exemplifies for Thomas this practice of textual stripping through omission: “What Derrida’s overarching determination primarily strips from Bataille is his potentially subversive emphasis on anality (I argue later that this stripping, this disembodiment, is symptomatic of Derrida’s entire approach to the repression of writing)” (*Male Matters*, 69).

of the self—something the self *produces*—that it then rejects and expulses to reestablish and affirm the integrity of its boundaries). Thomas writes:

Is not the recourse to the notion of the ‘mere’ one of the marks of this somatophobic repression, particularly considering the proximity of the word *mere* both to *la mere* and to *merde*? To note this proximity is not simply to make a translanguistic pun at maternity’s expense: as I have attempted to show, the anxieties about *la mere* as the site for the production of the body and about *merde* as the disturbing sight of one of the body’s productions inhabit the very heart of the fear of “mere” writing. (139)

Without question, toward *la mère*, Derrida exhibits heightened ambivalence.

Rhetorically, the “absence of origin” echoes as a refrain in all of Derrida’s work (reminding us of the organ’s hollow center, its most galling aspect), a pointed contestation of any material solidity one might be tempted to intuit, for example, from a Courbet-like representation of “L’origine du monde.” Fullness, plenitude, pregnant presence is ever elusive. While Derrida uses vocabulary relating to birthing—“la conception, la formation, la gestation, le travail...l’enfantement”—to discuss the possible interpretations of any interpretative structure, all mention of the mother is elided. Alice Jardine seizes on this passage in which this characterization appears, the very last paragraph in *L’écriture et la différence*, as emblematic of Derrida’s own version of “becoming woman.” Birthing, here, is not a maternal process at all; “la naissance...à l’oeuvre” lacks name, species and especially a point of issuance, just as the resulting “child” lacks both shape and language: it is “une forme informe, muette, infante et terrifiante de la monstruosité.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence*, 428.

In *La dissemination*, a text glued together by the “viscous trace of semen,”<sup>45</sup> Derrida obliquely appears to give some *voie/voix* to the monstrous child of unknown species, this nacent trace heading off on its “*aventure séminale*”:

L’écriture et la parole sont donc maintenant deux sortes de trace, deux valeurs de la trace, l’une, l’écriture, est trace perdue, semence non viable, tout ce qui dans le sperme se dépense sans réserve, force égarée hors du champ de la vie, incapable d’engendrer, de se relever et de se régénérer soi-même. Au contraire, la parole vive fait fructifier le capital, elle ne dévie pas la puissance séminale vers une jouissance sans paternité. Dans son séminaire, elle se conforme à la loi.<sup>46</sup>

The receptacle for this “seminal potency” is not an awaiting womb; again, none of this has anything to do with women at all, as Derrida readily acknowledges and even emphasizes: “[i]l est question de père et de fils, de bâtarde qui n’est même pas aidé par l’assistance publique, de fils légitime et glorieux, d’héritage, de sperme, et de stérilité. La mère est passée sous silence mais on ne nous en fera pas objection” (178). He finishes his reflection in a reconfirmation of the inconstant nature of the feminine form (an instability to which Jardine points), couching her in a hidden pictures puzzle, turned upside-down, inside-out, amidst the leaves and gardens, the “natural” dwellings of the feminine since Eve: “Et si on la [la mère] cherche bien, comme dans ces images-devinettes, on en verra peut-être la forme instable, dessinée à l’envers, dans le feuillage, au fond d’un jardin...” (ibid.).

In the long quote above, Derrida rewrites the parable of the sower where it is the transmission—*dissemination*—of the “grain” (and not the soil upon which it lands) that determines “the seed’s” viability. The spoken word, transmitted from lips to ear, from “father” to “son,” properly channeled through—and thus triumphant over—the living organs, retains its

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<sup>45</sup> Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity and Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 209.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 190-191.

potency and reinstates an elusive sense of patrilineal authority, however fleeting. Indeed, with *dissemination*, Derrida gives a name to this particular process of *enfantement*, asserting his own claim to *logos spermaticos*. "...[L]a dissémination se lit, si l'on s'y penche, comme une sorte de matrice..."<sup>47</sup> What Jardine sees as an alternative logic to castration<sup>48</sup> also institutes itself as, if not a logic, then at least a fantasy of masculine-derived generation (a reflex humorously annotated by Thomas as an instance of "womb envy").<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to the "spoken" seed, however, the written trace is sterile, endangered, "mortal"; inclined toward indulgences in pleasure without authorship ("jouissances sans paternité"); its eagerness to get on the page translates into an excess of "spunk." It peters out, gets cast to the wind, succumbs to erasure and, disperses any plenitude invested in it: "La trace est l'effacement de soi, de sa propre présence, elle est constituée par la menace ou l'angoisse de sa disparition irrémédiable, de la disparition de sa disparition...une semence, c'est-à-dire un germe mortel."<sup>50</sup> We see its affiliation with the abject—here, wasted sperm—without which "writing itself would have never been subjected to a repression."<sup>51</sup> In a passage from "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," Derrida, commenting on his reluctance to employ Freud's concepts without using quotations, explicitly links the materiality of writing ("la trace écrite") to excrement; Freud's "*Unheimlich*" and "*Verdrängung*" (to give two examples) hover pristinely above, keeping metaphysical abstraction firmly in place and thus preserved from the sully

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<sup>47</sup> Derrida, *La dissemination*, 65. Derrida directly references the principle of *logos spermaticos* in a discussion about Novalis' unfinished Encyclopedia, a self-generating, "total book" composed in an exhaustive and taxonomic writing. "L'Encyclopédia s'enfante. La conception du concept est une auto-insémination" (64).

<sup>48</sup> Jardine, *Gynesis*, 189.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Male Matters*, 150.

<sup>50</sup> Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 339.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, *Male Matters*, 139.



forces of metaphor and metonymy: “[les concepts freudiens] appartiennent tous, sans aucune exception, à l’histoire de la métaphysique, c’est-à-dire au système de répression logocentrique qui s’est organisé pour exclure ou abaisser, mettre dehors et en bas, comme métaphore didactique et technique, comme matière servile et excrément, le corps de la trace écrite.”<sup>52</sup>

Derrida’s suspicion vis-à-vis metaphor is well documented. In “La mythologie blanche,” he shows how metaphor—always a trope of derivation (like all tropes)—by virtue of its role as stand-in for something else, loses its intrinsic value with the increased frequency of its exchanges.<sup>53</sup> Metaphor’s double process of loss of meaning and accumulation of groundless truth-value is nowhere more apparent than in the philosophical appropriation of scientific terms that morph into metaphors once they are “transported”—“translated”—from their “proper” domain: “Il faudrait alors reconnaître l’importation dans le discours dit philosophique de métaphores allogènes, ou plutôt de significations qui deviennent métaphoriques à être transportées hors de leur habitat propre. On classerait ainsi les lieux de provenance : il y aurait des métaphores biologiques, organiques, mécaniques, techniques, économiques, historiques, mathématiques... “ (262). Derrida identifies the biological sciences as a particularly propitious domain for just this kind of semantic trafficking, a dangerous activity because it always runs the

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<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence*, 294.

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche deploys a slew of metaphors in a performance aimed at unmasking the very process by which the imaginative activity directed towards creating metaphors becomes naturalized, hardened into truth. He writes: “Qu’est-ce donc que la vérité ? Une multitude mouvante de métaphores, de métonymies, d’anthropomorphismes, bref, une somme de relations humaines qui ont été poétiquement et rhétoriquement haussées, transposées, ornées, et qui, après un long usage, semblent à un peuple fermes, canoniales et contraignantes : les vérités sont des illusions dont on a oublié qu’elles le sont, des métaphores qui ont été usées et qui ont perdu leur force sensible..., des pièces de monnaie qui ont perdu leur empreinte et qui entrent dès lors en considération, non plus comme pièces de monnaie mais comme métal.” Quoted in Jacques Derrida, “La mythologie blanche,” *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1972), 258. Derrida draws on Nietzsche’s characterization of truths as effaced, worn-out coins, honing in on the polyvalence of “*usure*” as emblematic of the relationship between metaphor and philosophical discourse: “le mot n’est pas prononcé, mais on peut déchiffrer la double portée de l’*usure* : l’effacement par frottement, l’épuisement, l’effritement, certes, mais aussi le produit supplémentaire d’un capital, l’échange qui, loin de perdre la mise, en ferait fructifier la richesse primitive, en accroîtrait le retour sous forme de revenus, de surcroît d’intérêt, de plus-value linguistique, ces deux histoire du sens restant indissociables” (250).

risk of muddying epistemological clarity: “Cette ambivalence épistémologique de la métaphore qui provoque, retarde, suit toujours le mouvement du concept, a peut-être son champ d’élection dans les sciences de la vie auxquelles on doit adapter une incessante critique du jugement téléologique...Où pourrait-on être plus tenté de prendre la métaphore pour le concept?” (331). Scientific concepts of the “life sciences” (Derrida names cells, blood circulation, and we might be tempted to add organs) easily lend themselves to philosophical discourses due to the inherently “living”—and thus adaptable—quality of the terminology. In many ways, the goal of Derrida’s reading (and writing) methods aims to keep the wedge between the concept and its tropical stand-in. Derrida emphasizes the notion of *espacement*, “premier mot de toute déconstruction, qui vaut aussi bien pour l’espace que pour le temps,”<sup>54</sup> what Martin Hägglund refers to as “shorthand for the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space.”<sup>55</sup> The critic must remain vigilant of easy slippage to keep honed his instruments of “denaturalization”: “Et quelle tâche plus urgente pour l’épistémologie et l’histoire critique des sciences que de distinguer entre le mot, le véhicule métaphorique, la chose et le concept ?”<sup>56</sup>

Derrida’s unabashed recourse to “autoimmunity” in his later works, in light of these reservations regarding biological metaphors, thus surprises the reader, as does the relative dearth of critical commentary on Derrida’s choice of tropes. Michael Naas, without scrutinizing Derrida’s own usage, goes so far as to suggest that autoimmunity constitutes the last iteration of “deconstruction,” even supplanting it as a more forceful expression of Derrida’s reading and

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 207.

<sup>55</sup> Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Derrida, “La mythologie blanche,” 331.

writing project.<sup>57</sup> Naas follows Derrida's "autoimmune" thread of reasoning as it silently unravels all spheres touching human experience, from the most material, corporeal existence, to its political and religious institutions, to God himself.

Though Derrida began using the term *autoimmunity* already back in the mid-1990s, particularly in the essay 'Faith and Knowledge,' it became more prominent and got developed in a more accelerated fashion after 9/11. 'Autoimmunity,' the 'illogical logic,' as Derrida put it, *that turns something against its own defenses*, would appear to be yet another name, in some sense the last, for what for close to forty years Derrida called 'deconstruction.' But whereas 'deconstruction' often lent itself to being (mis)understood as a 'method' or 'textual strategy' aimed at disrupting the self-identity of a text or concept... 'autoimmunity' appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere, at the heart of every sovereign identity... [It] goes to affect not only the bodies we call discourses or texts but psychic systems and political institution, nation-states and national contexts, and perhaps even, though this is the most contentious, God himself, God in his sovereign self, or God in his phantasmatic, theologico-political body.<sup>58</sup>

Derrida's autoimmunity, in Naas' eyes, unlocks the key to all critical inquiry aimed at taking down the text and, with it, the uninterrogated, essentialist notions underpinning it. Quoting Derrida's *Rogues*, Naas clarifies autoimmunity's disruptive, *active* potential, emphasizing its "death drive"-like aspect aimed at undoing life: "With 'autoimmunity,' deconstruction has to be thought *as that which happens*, like a certain death-drive, to 'life' itself. As a 'weak force,' a force that turns on and disables force or power, autoimmunity at once destroys or compromises

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<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Martin Hägglund embraces Derrida's logic of autoimmunity without concern of the metaphor's precision, explicitly stating that he does not intend to measure the "deconstructive logic" of autoimmunity in terms of its fidelity to the biological, scientific concept. For Hägglund, it is enough that the biological connotations of autoimmunity remind the reader that, with "autoimmunity," Derrida "pursues a logic of life (or, rather, life-death)," autoimmunity serving as the term that marks the tracing of time, that instills the grain of death within every living being. But the blind espousal of "autoimmunity" by critics such as Naas and Hägglund actually weakens its usefulness as a deconstructive metaphor, collapsing *pêle-mêle* the differe/ant and differing concepts of immunity into autoimmunity into a facile binary, making "autoimmunity" synonymous with death, in general. Hägglund, discussing Derrida's refutation of the possibility—even the desirability—of immortality and salvation, highlights the equivalence between mortality and the autoimmune: "The state of immortality cannot answer to the desire to save the mortal, since it would put an end to the time of mortal life. The desire for salvation is rather a desire for survival that is *essentially autoimmune*, since the death that it defends against is internal to what is defended" (*Radical Atheism*, 130, my emphasis). This quote exemplifies the facility of such equivalences and the sloppy reification of ....to the point of raising the specter of "essentiality."

<sup>58</sup> Michael Nass, *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 124.

the integrity and identity of sovereign forms and opens them up to their future...” (124-25). But what *is* autoimmunity in this context, this “implacable,” “illogical” logic turning all things human against themselves in a sort of anti-becoming? How is Derrida troping this trope?

As Naas repeatedly emphasizes, Derrida offers his sharpest articulation of autoimmunity in *Foi et savoir*, performing an extended reading of the term in a long footnote:

L’immun’ (*immunis*) est affranchi des charges, du service, des impôts, des obligations (*munus*, racine du commun de la communauté). Cette franchise ou cette exemption ont ensuite été transportées dans les domaines du droit constitutionnel ou international (immunité parlementaire ou diplomatique) : mais elle appartient aussi à l’histoire de l’Eglise chrétienne et au droit canon ; l’immunité des temples, c’était aussi l’inviolabilité de l’asile que certains pouvaient y trouver...<sup>59</sup>

As one expects from Derrida, he begins his unfurling of the immune etymologically, identifying the Latin root *munus* shared by both immunity and community. He frames immunity as a liberated (*affranchi*) social or political state, an exemption from service, taxes, participation in communal life. He then follows immunity into the juridical and legal realm, touching on the ecclesiastic canon before treading into immunity’s most sprawling stomping ground (we will return to the etymology of immunity in more detail in the following section):

C’est surtout dans le domaine de la biologie que le lexique de l’immunité a déployé son autorité. La réaction immunitaire protège l’*indemn-ité* du corps propre en produisant des anticorps contre des antigènes étranger. Quant au processus d’auto-immunisation, qui nous intéresse tout particulièrement ici, *il consiste pour un organisme vivant, on le sait, à se protéger en somme contre son autoprotection en détruisant ses propres défenses immunitaires*. Comme le phénomène de ces anticorps s’étend à une zone étendue de la pathologie et qu’on recourt de plus en plus à des vertus positives des immuno-dépresseurs destinées à limiter les mécanismes de rejet et à faciliter la tolérance de certaines greffes d’organes, *nous nous autoriserons de cet élargissement et parlerons d’une sorte de*

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Foi et Savoir* suivi de *Le Siècle et le Pardon* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 67n23.

logique générale de l'*auto-immunisation*. Elle nous paraît indispensable pour penser aujourd'hui les rapports entre foi et savoir, religion et science, comme la duplicité des sources en général. (67-68)

Derrida's rhetorical flourishes—his asserting authority over this “spread-out pathological zone”; his off-handed “*on le sait*” and “*nous nous autoriserons de*”; not to mention the way he piggy-backs on what he identifies as the pervasive tendency to valorize immune suppressants (“*on recourt de plus en plus à des vertus positives*”) (perhaps imagining his own discourse as a certain *immuno-dépresseur*)—perform the very operation of naturalization that Derridian deconstruction has historically been most committed to thwarting. He uses the expansiveness and imprecision of the term to appropriate it for its own ends and to blur the epistemological clarity. Ultimately, auto-immunity assumes the same level of metaphysical separateness that Derrida reproached in Freud's concepts, floating above the excrement, entrails, and *écriture* it jeopardizes.

Derrida puts the emphasis on what he calls the “process” of auto-immunization, defined as the way in which the self, to protect the most pure, sacred, “unscathed” part of its being, launches an “immune attack” on its own mechanisms of defense: “[Le mouvement du soi] secrète son propre antidote mais aussi son propre pouvoir d'auto-protection de l'indemne, du sain(t) et sauf, du sacré doit se protéger contre sa propre protection, sa propre police, son propre pouvoir de rejet, son propre tout court, c'est-à-dire contre sa propre immunité. C'est cette terrifiante mais fatale logique de l'*auto-immunité de l'indemne* qui associera toujours la Science et la Religion” (67). Derrida qualifies this process of self-attack as an “absolute terror,” “un mal radical” (71), because it comes from “inside,” “de cette zone où le pire ‘dehors’ habite chez ‘moi’”; autoimmune reactivity puts *le moi* in a situation of vulnerability “sans limites.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas, *Le 'concept' du 11 septembre: Dialogues à New York (octobre-décembre 2001) avec Giovanna Borradori* (Paris : Editions Galilée, 2004), 145n1.

In his presentation of autoimmunity, Derrida tacks between the most abstract societal concepts and the micro-level—the individual, personal, “le soi,” “le moi.” Early on, as in *Foi et savoir*, he first invokes “autoimmunity” as a mechanism for understanding religious fundamentalism and terrorism. He analyzes the social generation of the suicide bomber, the elected offspring born out of the redoubtable marriage between the hyper-rational, “tele-techno-capitalist-scientific” machine (the modern beast of the Enlightenment) and the rise of religious *intégrisme*, driven by ignorance, irrationality, and obscurantism (and, for Derrida writing in the early 2000s, neo-conservative punditry touting the responsibility of “free” and “equal” individuals as it launched its war against the “Axis of Evil” is just as “fundamentalist” as Koranic teachings). These “residues” or “surface effects”—the crafty ignorance and determination that motivate the suicide bomber to carry-out his actions—arise as a reaction to the loss of bearings triggered by the late-capitalistic “society of spectacle” (Debord’s nightmare on steroids) in which we are all living. These symptoms of autoimmune reactivity, the blind embrace of faith as justification for using the most sophisticated means possible for committing violence and wreaking havoc, “masquent une structure profonde ou bien (mais à la fois) une peur de soi, une réaction contre cela même avec quoi l’on a partie liée: la dislocation, l’expropriation, la délocalisation, le déracinement, la désidiomatisation et la dépossession (dans toutes ses dimensions, en particulier sexuelle-*phallique*) que la machine télétechnoscientific ne manque de produire.”<sup>61</sup> We are reminded, in this quote, of Derrida’s wariness toward the phallus, particularly in the way it separates and dispossesses the self *en gonflant*, becoming too big for its proverbial britches.

In *Voyous*, a work published after 9/11, Derrida examines the ramifications for liberal democracy of Bush’s now infamous identification of “Rogue States,” evoking the autoimmune

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<sup>61</sup> Derrida, *Foi et savoir*, 70.

as a key logic at work in this black-and-white division of the wor(l)d. Drawing on Benveniste, he links autoimmunity—to the extent that it attacks the *autos* or the *ipse*—explicitly to the masculine: “...[C]omme *autos* en grec d’ailleurs, que *ipse* peut traduire...*ipse* désigne le soi-même comme maître au masculin: le père, le mari, le fils ou le frère, le propriétaire, le possédant, le seigneur, voire le souverain.”<sup>62</sup> Yet again, there is no woman, no mother in this associative chain; later in the text, he even mentions the necessity, as suggested by Freud, of maternal “abandon”: “Peut-être la ‘mère’ doit-elle être aussi abandonnée, si on ne peut pas l’éviter ‘phallique’ (mais est-ce sûr?). Il faudrait alors penser la fraternité dans l’abandon, de l’abandon” (91). He turns to the repercussions of the “autoimmunitaire” on the individual psyche, unpacking the double annihilation the autoimmune entails, depriving the “affected” self (whether it be a brother of the Muslim brotherhood or one of the fraternal *egos* of Western liberal democracy unequally equal “à d’autres *ego* égaux” [82]<sup>63</sup>) of not only his life but the “integrity” of his suicide: autoimmunity not only destroys the self, it also compromises any ability the self has to lay claim to its actions:

Car ce que j’appelle l’auto-immunitaire ne consiste pas seulement à se nuire ou à se ruiner, voire à détruire ses propres protections, et à le faire soi-même, à se suicider ou à menacer de le faire, mais plus gravement et par là même à menacer le moi ou le soi, l’*ego* ou l’*autos*... Non pas seulement à se suicider mais à compromettre la sui-référentialité, le soi du suicide même. L’auto-immunité est plus ou moins suicidaire, mais c’est encore plus grave: l’auto-immunité menace toujours de priver le suicide lui-même de son sens et de son intégrité supposée. (71)

Derrida proposes what some might consider an outdated solution. In his view, psychoanalysis offers, if not a remedy, than at least a useful diagnostic tool to understanding

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<sup>62</sup> Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 31.

<sup>63</sup> Derrida underlines the notion of brotherhood at the heart of true democracy and sees the autoimmune potential in it when “la démocratie à venir” is determined by “la fraternité des frères [qui] *fait la loi*, où s’impose une *dictature politique* de la fraternocratie” (76).

these self-annihilating impulses at the heart of both the unconscious *and* consciousness: “Ce que les psychanalystes appellent plus ou moins tranquillement l’inconscient reste...un des ressorts privilégiés...pour cette implacable loi de la conservation auto-destructrice du ‘sujet’...Sans auto-immunité,...il n’y aurait ni psychanalyse ni ce que la psychanalyse surnomme ‘inconscient.’...Ni, donc, ce que nous appelons aussi tranquillement la conscience” (83).

Tranquility reigns free in this quote as Derrida contents himself with making these statements “un peu sentencieusement, pour faire vite.”

And yet, what is shocking in Derrida’s formulation of auto-immunity is how it absolutely fails to exploit one salient aspect of the definitional apparatus. Though he touches on it with his evocation of the internal “enemy” and the unconscious, connecting the auto-immune to a part of self alienated from the conscious ego, Derrida does not elaborate at length on the role auto-regulation or lack of auto-regulation plays in the autoimmune response, nor does he seem to take into account the role “becoming” plays. In Derrida’s autoimmune *dis-corps*, the self grows stagnant, fixed, ready to self-explode precisely because of its inflexibility. Ironically, by vowing all life to this self-destructive impulse, Derrida falls victim to the same critique he made of structuralism: he stifles or at least boxes in *force*. He jumps quickly to the fatal, and seemingly (in his view) inevitable result of this “self-annihilating” mechanism, without charting what is in fact a chronic, drawn-out condition of intermittent system glitches coupled with an incessant internal process of change forcing the system, time and again, to readjust its settings. While scientists (who adamantly refused for decades to acknowledge the existence of an autoimmune response) still do not fully understand the mechanisms by which autoimmunity is provoked, this lapse in immune regulation is widely attributed to a failure in recognition: either the failure of the self to recognize itself as self (in which case, a part of self—usually an organ or tissue—is



considered other and attacked); or an instance where the self, meant to remain selfly invisible, finally gets a glimpse of its reflection and recoils in horror. In both cases, auto-immunity hinges on the notion of recognition—misrecognition or full recognition. Derrida’s seeming blindness to this aspect—his quickness to apply his somewhat reductive definition immoderately and with impunity as he jumps to the most dire and abstract consequences—perhaps betrays a *point faible* in his logic regarding, precisely, the stakes of self-recognition.

Indeed, to return to Derrida’s most “bodily” text, “Circonfession” directly poses the question of the possibility of survival once recognition (and thus identity) is imperiled. In its most literal form, this question emerges through the figure of the demented, bed-ridden mother. She lingers in the background as a persistently fading presence and, as such, a disconcerting disruptor of identity. Through Derrida’s reflections on her, we are reminded that his young boy self had no say over the indelible marks of identity conferred on his body in his mother’s name; blood was spilt, the “ring” of flesh torn away, never to be returned. At the same time, this event to his body, unchosen—unwritten—by him, was doubly couched in secrecy out of historic necessity:

‘...tenir toujours le plus grand compte, dans l’anamnèse, de ce fait que dans ma famille et chez les Juifs d’Algérie, on disait presque jamais la ‘circoncision’ mais le ‘baptême’...avec les conséquences de l’adoucissement, de l’affadissement, par acculturation apeurée, dont j’ai toujours souffert plus ou moins consciemment, d’événements inavouables, ressentis comme tels, pas ‘catholiques,’ violents, barbares, durs, ‘arabes,’ circoncisions circoncise, accusation de meurtre rituel intériorisée, secrètement assumée’ (20-12-76)...<sup>64</sup>

The reader learns that this part of the confession is extracted from a journal from the 1970s in which Derrida had begun conceiving an ultimately failed project on circumcision. Derrida was never quite able to find the words to see it through, and this, perhaps, because, in his

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<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Circonfession,” in *Jacques Derrida*, by Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 72.

view, they were never his own words to confess, but rather those of his mother: "...à savoir que la confession retenue n'aura pas été de ma faute mais de la sienne...le péché originel contre moi, mais pour se reproduire et m'acharner, me mettre à la question, moi, une vie entière, pour faire avouer, elle, en moi"(73). The text performs this state of speechlessness in a poignant moment of both abandon and release.<sup>65</sup> Stricken by Alzheimer's and unable to recognize her son, Derrida's mother nonetheless uses her last intelligible words to ventriloquize him, to express *his* wounded condition in the face of maternal loss: "...alors que je lui demandais si elle avait mal ("oui") puis où, c'était le 5 février 1989, elle eut dans une rhétorique qui n'avait jamais pu être la sienne l'audace de ce trait...qui trouant la nuit répond à ma demande: 'J'ai mal à ma mère,' comme si elle parlait *pour* moi, à la fois dans ma direction et à ma place..." (24). The mother adopts a tongue not her own (leaving behind her mother tongue) to speak in place of her son, a son she no longer knows nor names. In doing so, she, as the bearer of his life, also becomes the harbinger of the cruelest<sup>66</sup> of deaths: permanent retreat into the nameless and forgotten.

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<sup>65</sup>There are fifty-nine "confessions," one for each year of Derrida's age at the time he was writing.

<sup>66</sup> The word cruel is purposefully chosen in light of this text. Cruel, from the Latin *crudus*, means "he who likes blood." *Cru*, the adjective meaning "uncooked" or "bloody," is derived from the same root. *Circonfession* opens on an extended reflection on the polysemy of the "*vocable cru*," a word that conjures faith (*cru* as the past participle of *croire*, "to believe"); belonging (*cru* as a noun designating the vintage of a wine derived from a particular soil); rawness (*cru* as an adjective derived from the Latin *crudus* meaning "bleeding"); and finally crudeness or bluntness (as in *un mot cru*, harsh or even vulgar speech): "Le vocable cru, lui disputer ainsi le cru, comme si d'abord j'aimais à le relancer, et le mot de 'relance', le coup de poker n'appartient qu'à ma mère, comme si je tenais à lui pour lui chercher querelle quant à ce que parler cru veut dire..." (7). The nature of this "call" is a source of contention; following a dense flow of associations and tortuous syntax, the reader learns that Derrida appears to be arguing with his mother—or at least the internalized mother (to whom he both does and does not cling)—about the meaning of *cru*. The dispute infiltrates the depths of the body, exploiting the hollowness of organs and their passageways. Through the ear canal, *le vocable cru* eventually winds its way to the vein and is seized there: "...le mot cru laisse affluer en lui par le canal de l'oreille, une veine encore...telle phrase est venue, de plus loin que je ne saurai jamais dire, mais une seule phrase, à peine une phrase, le mot pluriel d'un désir vers lequel tous les autres depuis toujours semblaient, la confluence même, se presser, un ordre suspendu à trois mots, *trouver la veine*, ce qu'un infirmier pouvait murmurer, une seringue à la main..." (10). The "mot cru," having percolated, emerges at the other end and is drawn out via an instrument, either a needle syringe or pen.

Additionally, the dismissive mother is doubled by the second, both “God-like” and maternal presence materially hovering above his words as they threaten erasure. Formally, “Circonfession” is a hybrid text written in dialogue (or, in Martin Hägglund’s characterization, “in duel”), first with Saint Augustine (the intra-text quotations of *Confession* are preserved by Derrida in Latin, Saint Augustine’s tongue, almost as a secret language between the two of them), and more pointedly with Geoffrey Bennington, Derrida’s interlocuteur, referenced as “G.” (an initialized “God”). Bennington’s words appear at the top of the page in a specified attempt (as drawn up in the “contract” laid out on the first page) at creating a systematized “Derridabase” encompassing all of Derrida’s thought without recourse to the theorist’s own words. The very premise of the text involves creating a *matrice* (a computer program—a *théologiciel*) that will appropriate Derrida’s “grammaire génératrice” and anticipate any future writings, thus obviating the need for Derrida’s signature, either future or past. In this way, Derrida is “writing for his survival,” hoping to “surprise” the *logiciel*, to produce something that escapes its logic to justify the need for his continued presence. He writes about this precarious position with G., whom he admires and loves, and yet against whom he is working. As his associations move forward, the distance between G. (Geoffrey) and G. (Georgette) increasingly closes. Once again, Derrida is overcome with the fear of his mother—through G.—stepping in to speak for him : “[C]’est comme si je voulais l’obliger à me reconnaître et à sortir de cette amnésie de moi qui ressemble à ma mère alors que je me dis à lire cette matrice voilà que la survivante signe à ma place et si elle est juste, or elle l’est, sans une faute, non seulement je ne signerai plus mais je n’aurai jamais signé, n’est-ce pas au fond ce que j’ai toujours voulu dire...”(34-35).

And yet, the act of naming carries with it inherent dangers. For Derrida, the interpellation automatically inscribes mortality into the named object: “Celui qui reçoit un nom

se sent mortel ou mourant, justement parce que le nom voudrait le sauver, l'appeler ou assurer sa survivance. Être appelé, s'entendre nommer, recevoir un nom pour la première fois, c'est peut-être se savoir mortel et même se sentir mourir. Déjà mort d'être promis à la mort: mourant."<sup>67</sup>

Does no longer having a name release the name bearer of his mortality? Or does the erasure jeopardize the self so much so that it forces it toward autoimmune self-destruction?

In the same year Derrida is forced to confront (*faire face à*) his mother's forgetting (1989), he contracts a viral infection that paralyzes his face. Not only does his mother no longer recognize him, but he becomes unrecognizable to himself: "...le spectre cruel de cet œil gauche qui ne cligne plus, je le vois dissymétriser mes figures, il me regarde depuis ma mère en chien de faïence, comme pour anesthésier la vue de l'horreur, car sans faiblesse il me faut décrire l'escarre de ma vie, plus irrémédiable encore que celles d'Ester (qu'on peut aussi écrire sans *h* comme escarre)...je meurs faussaire au fond du sang de l'escarre à quatre temps de dieu..."<sup>68</sup>

Derrida, perhaps in an act of revenge, begins undermining his mother's name (Georgette Sultana Esther), removing letters, as he watches himself, disfigured, in horror. He equates his life to his mother's bedsores in which he is drowning as a counterfeit version of himself.

As we mentioned, Derrida hesitates in identifying to which realm the autoimmune belongs. Initially using it to describe macro-social impulses, he eventually traces the autoimmune to the heart of life writing. Equating the immune to the desire to preserve self, Derrida underscores the darker impulse ever threatening the process of self-preservation:

L'autobiographie, l'écriture de soi du vivant, la trace du vivant pour soi, l'être pour soi, l'auto-affection ou l'auto-infection comme mémoire ou archive du vivant serait un mouvement immunitaire (donc un mouvement de salut, de sauvetage, de salvation du sauf, du saint, de l'immun, de l'indemne, de la nudité virginale ou intacte) mais un

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<sup>67</sup> Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2006), 39.

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, "Circonfession," 97-100.

mouvement immunitaire toujours menacé de devenir auto-immunitaire, comme tout *autos*, toute ipséité, tout mouvement automatique, automobile, autonome, auto-référentiel. Rien ne risque d'être aussi empoisonnant qu'une autobiographie, empoisonnant pour soi, d'abord, auto-infectieux pour le présumé signataire ainsi auto-affecté.<sup>69</sup>

Autobiographical writing institutes itself as the auto-immune of philosophical discourse, contaminating, killing off, but also imparting life to it.

### ***Jean-Luc Nancy: L'immunité, l'ex-criture and a change of heart***

Jacques Derrida, in *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, quotes Merleau-Ponty's harmonious analogy between the body and the heart: "Le Corps propre est dans le monde comme le cœur dans l'organisme: il maintient continuellement en vie le spectacle visible, il l'anime et le nourrit intérieurement, il forme avec lui un système."<sup>70</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy makes claim to no such complicity in *L'Intrus*, a short, first-person account bearing witness to life after a heart transplant.<sup>71</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, like Deleuze and Guattari, like Derrida, found inspiration in Artaud's excoriation of organs, even using Artaud's disparagement of the most symbolically-laden of organs as his epigraph: "Il n'y a de fait rien de plus ignoblement inutile et de superflu que l'organe appelé cœur qui est le plus sale moyen que les êtres aient pour inventer de pomper la vie en moi" (9).<sup>72</sup> In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari who fantasize a Body without Organs

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<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, 72-73.

<sup>70</sup> Jacques Derrida quoting Merleau-Ponty in *Le Toucher*, 233.

<sup>71</sup> In Nancy's writing, most frequently described as fragmentary and *décousu*, the "je" makes absolutely no claim to unicity: "J'ai (qui, 'je'?, c'est précisément la question...: quel est ce sujet de l'énonciation, toujours étranger au sujet de son énoncé...)" (Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 13).

<sup>72</sup> Nancy further underscores his scorn for the heart in the comparison he makes between the heart and the breast: "Le cœur n'est rien que muscle élastique battant sa mesure précise. Le cœur n'a aucune émotion. La preuve: on peut le changer, on peut en greffer un autre, tout dénervé et prêt à fonctionner. Mais le sein, on ne peut pas le greffer. On peut réparer, suturer sa blessure, on peut le remodeler, mais c'est toujours lui, modulé jusque dans sa

sealed off, made flexible and deterritorialized into a limitless *dehors*, Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy both focus on the mechanisms shaping, changing or delimiting the self from within. However, while Derrida begins with the dispossession of the self by organs and frames this dispossession as an *internal* force pushing the self, in an act of preservation of its most “pure” core, to fold in, irrevocably separate and self-destruct through the process of “autoimmunization,” Nancy testifies to the forces of “intrusion,” the internal and external strange(r)ness that the self is made to accommodate to survive. Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers identify the rhetoric of intrusion in Nancy’s text as one of his most lasting philosophical contributions. Quoting René Lericq who spoke of a life “lived in the silence of organs,” Geroulanos and Meyers redefine the “state” of health within Nancy’s thought and show how the “intruder” always forms part and parcel of any notion of the self:

Nancy...see[s] healthy life as a life that manages its own intrusions without either the intrusions or this ‘management’ causing suffering. The emphasis on intrusion, however, does not contrast the ‘silence of the organs’ to a condition of disease or suffering, and here lies one of Nancy’s major contributions. The rhetoric of intrusion, with its concurrent claims that a certain intrusion both breaks apart this ‘management’—thereby causing suffering—and concurrently discloses a hidden force-field instead suggests that a life without intrusion has always been a myth—a myth that healthy subjects embody and enjoy, yet which is no longer imaginable for those who have come to face disease, organ transplant and medical intervention, indeed from their perspective was always merely a foil.<sup>73</sup>

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cicatrice. 'Cœur' est un mot écœurant. 'Sein' est un mot défailant. On ne peut pas, on ne peut que mal le dire." Jean-Luc Nancy, *La naissance des seins* (Valence: École Régionale des Beaux-Arts, 1996), 46.

<sup>73</sup> Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers, “A Graft, Physiological and Philosophical: Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Intrus*,” *Parallax* 15, no.2 (2009), 87.

In *L'Intrus*, Nancy narrativizes the self's loss or "perdition" due to the inherent "strangeness" of a failing heart. His text unfolds in uneven "beats," disparate fragments,<sup>74</sup> some longer, some shorter, spaced out arhythmically over forty-five pages. Through the text, Nancy considers his heart and its design. He explicitly problematizes the "program" of his heart, after he is told by a doctor that it was only built to last fifty years: "Mais quel est ce programme dont je ne peux faire ni destin ni providence?" (22). This "originary truth" of dispossession is never made more clearly than when an organ "breaks" the silence and "announces" itself precisely by ceasing to function properly. The relationship of a faltering organ to the self is an instant of double "strange(r)ness," thrusting the self into a state of internal confrontation: "Mon coeur devenait mon étranger : justement étranger parce qu'il était dedans...Jusqu'ici, il était étranger à force de n'être même pas sensible, même pas présent. Désormais, il défaille, et cette étrangeté me rapporte à moi-même" (17).

Nancy speaks of the helplessness he feels, both in terms of the condition of inherent weakness in which he finds "himself" (a self broken apart, faltering as it follows its own "program" over which he has no say) and in terms of the push for survival, yet another "program" entirely dictated by the contingency of historical circumstances also exceeding his will: "Mais quel autre programme croisait alors mon programme physiologique?...On croise une contingence personnelle avec une contingence dans l'histoire des techniques. Plus tôt, je serais

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<sup>74</sup> For an illuminating discussion of Nancy's fragmentary writing, see Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) and B.C. Hutchins, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). Hutchins argues that Nancy's fragmentary writing is a contestation of any possibility of reifying unifying systems of *logos*. While Derrida uses deep close reading to unravel a text (and to identify the self-destructive core at the center of any text), Nancy employs the fragment in an act of contestation. Hutchins speaks of textual ruins: "...the implicit task of the fragmentation of discourse is to distort textuality in service of the truth of fragmentation itself, thereby reducing the risk that the disorder of textuality will be buried beneath superficial orders. If he were ever to explain in non-fragmented form why he writes in fragmented form, then that would imply that there is a unifying *logos* facilitating intelligibility" (Hutchins, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, 10-11).

mort, plus tard, je serais autrement survivant. Mais toujours ‘je’ se trouve étroitement serré dans un créneau de possibilités techniques.”<sup>75</sup> Nancy underscores the absolute arbitrariness of the prolongation of his life, the fact that it is by no means divine will (B.C. Hutchens makes clear that God is irrevocably “dead” for Nancy, “locked into an ‘ontological paralysis’ in which it cannot be born into life and, since death is an absolute event, cannot be resurrected”)<sup>76</sup> or a “pure necessity.”<sup>77</sup> A whole host of decisions must be made to counteract the program of the failing heart. First comes the decision of whether “il vaut la peine” to choose survival (“qui dira ce qui ‘vaut la peine’, et quelle peine” [20]); family members, doctors and finally the “*moi-même*” weigh in on the matter without the “*moi-même*” having any sort of priority of voice. Then a plan of implementation is drawn up: physiological needs are established, a “*traitement de suivi*” is determined.

And then, it is simply a matter of waiting for the right heart: "Il faut savoir, le moment venu, changer de coeur."<sup>78</sup>

As part of the round-table discussion concerning Derrida’s presentation of Nietzsche and autobiography, Christie McDonald poses a question about the pronoun “I.” She first quotes Husserl (using a citation Derrida had himself identified): “When we read the word ‘I’ without knowing who wrote it, it is perhaps not meaningless, but it is at least estranged from its normal meaning.” She then goes on to ask whether the “‘I’ [has] a gender.”<sup>79</sup> This question takes on a

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<sup>75</sup> Nancy, *L’Intrus*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, 89.

<sup>77</sup> Nancy, *L’Intrus*, 23.

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, *Le toucher*, 319.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference and Translations*, ed. Christie McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 48-49.



particular inflection in Nancy's *L'Intrus*. Nancy, for the most part, elides the question of sexual difference. However, in one parenthetical comment, he does contemplate the possibility that his "new" heart could have once belonged to a "black woman."<sup>80</sup> He makes this statement emphasizing how heart transplantation is not limited by gender or by ethnic consideration; the only category determining the suitability of a heart is blood type compatibility. As it turns out, for Nancy, any heart can be assimilated into the "I" so long as it is O positive, and thus "operative."<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, it is not gender or race that inflects the I, but rather the radical otherness of immune alterity: "...ni la femme, ni le noir, ni le jeune home ou le Basque, mais l'autre immunitaire, l'autre insubstituable qu'on a pourtant substitué. Cela se nomme le 'rejet': mon système immunitaire rejette celui de l'autre."<sup>82</sup> Nancy equates immunity with the "signature physiologique" (31). It is the closest thing one has grounding a solid identity: "...[I]dentité vaut pour immunité, l'une s'identifie à l'autre. Abaisser l'une, c'est abaisser l'autre" (33).

Geroulanos and Meyers use the metaphor of a hidden force field to describe Nancy's situation. Though not used explicitly in reference to immunity, their metaphor is well-chosen. To be able to tolerate an intruder, one's force field must be weakened; identity must be compromised, reduced, a weakening that can only be effectuated through a bio-medical intervention.

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<sup>80</sup> Derrida recounts Nancy's reception of this heart and the inability to know whether it belongs to a man or a woman. He extends the gendered implications by emphasizing that under "normal" circumstances, only a pregnant woman would know the strangeness of having a heart, not her own beating, inside: "Le cœur de l'un au cœur du cœur d'un autre. D'un homme ou d'une femme, Nancy n'en sait rien, dit-il au sujet du cœur qui sur-vit en lui désormais. D'un homme ou d'une femme? C'est ici le lieu de le rappeler: dans des conditions 'normales' et avant toute greffe virtuelle, seule une femme peut sentir en elle battre le cœur d'un autre ou d'une autre. On appelle cela une 'grossesse'" (Derrida, *Le toucher*, 134-135).

<sup>81</sup> In view of the ambivalence of all of these operations, we can appreciate the apt title chosen by Peter Connor in his translation of *La communauté désœuvrée* as *The Inoperative Community*. *L'Intrus*, however, opens up the realm of possibility: though the operations are fraught, they are not completely stymied. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 30.

Cyclosporine is the drug, developed in the 1980s, that suppresses the immune system, lessening the fortifications of the self to prevent “le rejet,” which is the greatest risk after the operation; *tout le jeu* is to maintain tolerance. But the price of this tolerance—the price of a muted immunity—is the proliferation of mutinous invaders: “les vieux virus tapis depuis toujours dans l’ombre” (ibid.), cancerous cells (“la figure mâchée, crochue et ravageuse de l’intrus” [37]) and the subsequent treatment necessary to combat these “rebels” (chemotherapy, radiation, morphine, and finally, a stem cell transplant involving the extraction of white blood cells through an exteriorized circulation of all of the body’s blood). The self emerges embattled, “l’identité vide” (39).

Once the heart is in, Nancy experiences only expropriation. He personifies the “intruder,” describing the tug-of-war it inflicts. He is pushed both from within and without; self is increasingly alienated from self. Nancy materially enacts this process in his writing by violently “x-ing” the “me”—a direct object in French, and the equivalent of “le moi” in English: “L’intrus m’expose excessivement. Il m’extrude, il m’exporte, il m’exproprie” (42). The intruder transforms the self who is both always over and underprepared to accommodate the endless alterations: “L’intrus n’est pas un autre que moi-même et l’homme lui-même. Pas un autre que le même qui n’en finit pas de s’altérer, à la fois aiguisé et épuisé, dénudé et suréquipé, intrus dans le monde aussi bien qu’en soi-même, inquiétante poussée de l’étrange, *conatus* d’une infinité excroissante” (45). The syntax of negation and exception—“ne...pas un autre que”—works discordantly to highlight the paradox of infinite alterity enclosed within infinite sameness. *Conatus*, from the Latin verb *conor* (“to endeavor,” “to strive”) is a philosophical term implying an inclination, an undertaking, a striving; it stresses the notion that there is a natural impulse of

the body to want to exist and enhance itself, an impulse lying beyond the subject's control. The intruder keeps the self just barely hanging on as it incessantly exceeds it.

The strange circumstances of contingency permitting Nancy's survival push him outside of the zone of "natural time": "...natural in the sense of a physiology that would be untampered with: as a medical subject he lives a life whose time is literally out of joint."<sup>83</sup> To a certain extent, Nancy has been robbed of a sense both of origin and of finitude: "One might say that by choosing life via the transplant; he has lost both his life and his death as he previously imagined he knew them. He is no longer 'capable' of either of these dimensions of his experience...Life and death separate out, or recouple in an unsettled relation of which he has little grasp, and of which he cannot claim to be capable."<sup>84</sup> Nancy, as he himself states, has moved outside of time: he is "'hors d'âge,'" outside of the "normal" human continuum of a chronology moving forward from youth to old age. He no longer knows where to situate himself; while his heart is "younger" than he, the treatment he has to undergo to keep the heart inside has, through the wear and tear it causes, aged him prematurely: "Mon coeur a vingt ans de moins que moi, et le reste de mon corps en a une douzaine (au moins) de plus que moi. Ainsi rajeuni et vieilli à la fois, je n'ai plus d'âge propre et je n'ai plus proprement d'âge."<sup>85</sup>

Geroulanos and Meyer convincingly argue how this portrait of a "survivor" in spite of himself—a "passive" subject to whom things happen—is in many ways the opposite of Sartre's existential hero "condemned" to freedom. For Nancy, there is no consciousness outside of the

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<sup>83</sup> Geroulanos and Meyer, "A Graft, Physiological and Philosophical," 92.

<sup>84</sup> Christopher Fynsk, "L'Irréconciliable," *The New Centennial Review* 2, no.3 (Fall 2002): 34.

<sup>85</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 41.

body. Resolutely anti-Cartesian, Nancy's ontology, as Christine Howells eloquently states, is an ontology of the body:

...[T]here is no being preceding or underlying the phenomenon [of the body]...Psyche, he maintains, in a radical refusal of all dualism, is the body, is, indeed, maintains, in a radical refusal of all dualism, is, indeed, the subject. And he rejects the notion of 'my body' in favour of that of *corpus ego*, which, paradoxically, is without 'egoité', without egoism, because the body is never *me*, it is rather delivered up to others, known through others, just as I know others as bodies. The singularity and specificity of the body is its subjectivity.<sup>86</sup>

Nancy makes clear that any claim to a unified ego is a mirage; the body is always secretly split off, following its own "program" that, when push comes to shove, short-circuits any other "program" of the conscious, willful "subject." The self *is* the body, and, for Nancy, as Christine Howells states, "the body *is* death" (ibid.). "All its life, the body is a dead body; the body of a dead man, of this dead man who I am during my life."<sup>87</sup> Within the body, to a certain extent, we are all "mort-vivant."<sup>88</sup> Life can never be separated from death, nor should it be: "Isoler la mort de la vie, ne pas laisser l'une intimement tressée dans l'autre, chacune faisant intrusion au coeur de l'autre, viola ce qu'il ne faut jamais faire" (23). In Nancy's *oeuvre*, the "death of the subject" takes on a particular resonance; Nancy's "subject" is no longer the subject of vitality, strength, self-promotion, but rather a "weak" subject forced to "hold"—in the sense of "to bear, sustain or support"—even the most invasive of "guests": "Je suis la maladie et la médecine, je suis la cellule cancéreuse et l'organe greffé, je suis les agents immuno-dépresseurs et leurs palliatifs, je suis les bouts de fil de fer qui tiennent mon sternum et je suis ce site d'injection cousu en permanence sous ma clavicule..." (42-43). Holding together all of these elements in contradiction, these pairs of opposites, these disparate examples of the *pharmakon*, leaves the

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<sup>86</sup> Howell, "Mortal Subjects," 163.

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métalié, 2000), 17.

<sup>88</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 43.

“je” infinitely “holed”; for its survival, it must forever stay that way, stitched precariously together, only whole in its excruciating lack of wholeness. We will recall how Derrida highlighted the emptiness at the center of organs—the fact that they never close in, thus allowing passage—as their most disturbing aspect. *Chez Nancy*, the entire body, to live on, depends on remaining in a constant state of openness, allowing passage, as it attempts to retain some sense of integration: “Je suis ouvert fermé...Entre moi et moi, il y eut toujours de l’espace-temps: mais à present il y a l’ouverture d’une incision, et l’irréconciliable d’une immunité contrariée” (35-36).

Just as there is no Sartrean freedom to which the individual is “condemned,” there is also no Sartrean hero. Not even the heart donor ascends to a laudable status. Indeed, as several critics underline, Nancy does not give great attention (or any significant textual space) to the so-called privileged relationship between donor and receiver, the “intimate” rapport most widely explored in transplant literature (or in films treating the subject). In fact, Nancy emphasizes how quickly the sentiment of phantom complicity with the donor dissipates for the receiver: “...[T]oute la symbolique douteuse du don de l’autre, d’une complicité ou d’une intimité secrète, fantomatique, entre l’autre et moi, s’effrite très vite; il semble d’ailleurs que son usage, encore répandu lorsque je fus greffé, disparaisse peu à peu des consciences des greffés...” (29). The transplanted organ—as well as its source—is never anything but an intruder. But, in a nod to Derrida’s reading of *hospes* as both guest and potential enemy, because of its status as intruder, it must be welcomed and embraced as part and parcel of the “je.”<sup>89</sup>

All of this intrusion and extrusion leads to a reformulation of language as an externalized conduit of communicability. First, there is the passage of the spoken word through the mouth that founds the Nancian ego, an instance marking the body as the primordial issuer of selfhood,

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<sup>89</sup> Howell, “Mortal Subjects,” 165.

the forger of space: “La bouche est l'ouverture de Ego, Ego est l'ouverture de la bouche. Ce qui s'y passe, c'est qu'il s'y espace...”<sup>90</sup> This utterance illustrates what critics point to as Nancy's materialism, in the sense that his language—speaking and writing—stays firmly attached to the “real” of the body as it gets carried to its limits of expression: “...[Q]u'est-ce que cela peut-être, de remplacer un coeur? La chose excède mes possibilités de représentation.”<sup>91</sup> Nancy follows this remark by envisioning the material steps (“L'ouverture de tout le thorax, le maintien en état du greffon...” [ibid.]) that would need to be taken to displace a heart from one body to another—to his body--“l'intrusion en moi de cet espace...”(26). Ian James ties Nancy's materialism or “realism” to a sort of birth, a point of depart for becoming: “Nancy's realism may allow us to think of the way writing ‘refers,’ not to clear and distinct signifiers or fixed moments of meaning (language as representation does this all the time), but rather to existence in its most refractory and obscure moment of becoming or creation.”<sup>92</sup>

Nancy's *dis-corps* is not the excrement of Derrida's *écriture*, but rather the tenuous bridge between life and death, the forced spacing linking *moi* and *moi* and eventually *toi*, an intruder in its own right in the way it creates “une possibilité de réseau où la vie/mort est partagée, où la vie se connecte avec la mort, où l'incommunicable communique.”<sup>93</sup> Nancy calls this writing *ex-criture*, an un(ad)dressed writing that undresses experience.<sup>94</sup> “Ecrire et lire, c'est être exposé, s'exposer à ce non-avoir (à ce non-savoir), et ainsi à l'excription'. L'excrit est excrit dès le premier mot, non pas comme un 'indicible', ou comme un 'ininscriptible', mais au contraire

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego Sum*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 162.

<sup>91</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 25.

<sup>92</sup> James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 150.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy, *L'Intrus*, 30.

<sup>94</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Une pensée finie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 63.

comme cette ouverture en soi de l'écriture à elle-même, à sa propre inscription en tant que l'infinie décharge du sens--dans tous les sens qu'on peut donner à l'expression" (62).

*L'Intrus* is a perfect example of *ex-criture*, “exposed” by a voice that constantly questions itself—its unity, location and legitimacy always in doubt. The “I” is abandoned, split, dispersed, and resisted. Derrida takes up the metaphor of rejection and frames it in terms of abjection, tying Nancy’s understanding of *l'ex-criture* to an auto-biographical impulse, a “birth of the subject” as a form of elimination: “...[C]ar ces thèses catastrophiques...sont aussi des pensées de la naissance. Elles donnent à penser la mise au monde comme rejet, mais aussi la possibilité du rejet en général, celui du corps à sa naissance aussi bien que *celui* d'une partie essentielle du corps, par exemple un cœur greffé, par lui-meme. De lui-meme éjectable, jetable, rejetable. Le désordre immunitaire est aussi dans l'ordre. Tout ce que Nancy dira par la suite de l'excrit' trouve ici son ressort essentiel, me semble-t-il. Et comme il s'agit du rejet de soi, ce ressort demeure, certes, essentiellement auto-biographique.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, one might be tempted to speak about *L'Intrus* as autobiographical: but, as Philip Adamek eloquently states, *L'Intrus* is only autobiographical to the extent that it “practic[es] the impossibility of autobiography.”<sup>96</sup> Nancy moves outside of the autoimmunitary dilemma plaguing Derrida (the philosophical being constantly at risk of being undermined by the autobiographical) precisely because *ex-criture* grows out of the lack of coincidence—temporal or spatial—of the I and the body. “Excription then describes the relation of exteriority, or separation which is maintained between impenetrable matter and bodily sense, and between bodily sense and linguistic signification. Nancy puts this in the following terms: ‘It is no doubt *because* of the body that *one writes*, but

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<sup>95</sup> Derrida, *Le Toucher*, 72.

<sup>96</sup> Philip M. Adamek, “The Intimacy of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L'Intrus*,” *The New Centennial Review* 2, no.3 (Fall 2002): 190.

the body is absolutely not *where* one writes, and the body is not *what* one writes—but always what writing *exscribes*.<sup>97</sup> There is no intimacy and thus no *retournement* possible; paradoxically, *ex-criture*, by exposing, disturbing the intimate, and rejecting the body, protects it. The writing becomes the force field, a different kind of immunity precisely through its force of expropriation, exposition—or *expeausition*, a Nancian term that surrounds, encloses the body as it reveals it.

And, as it turns out, this *dis-corps* is also a force of *expeausition* for the other. Normally, Nancy is not an author that readily revisits his writing. In prefaces to collections of his works—articles or conference papers assembled together—he always assures the reader that little has been *retouché*, usually appending only a brief preface that attempts to give coherence to a collage of disparate texts. In general, he prefers leaving a text as it is, adding nothing to it. He speaks to this preference in the most recent edition of *L’Intrus* from 2010: “Les rééditions de livres ne me suggèrent pas, le plus souvent, d’ajouts ni de transformations. Je préfère en général qu’un livre reste clos dans sa forme initiale. SI quelque chose d’autre demande à être dit, que cela ouvre un nouveau texte, on un prolongement ou une addition au premier.”<sup>98</sup> Nancy goes on to say that his approach to *L’Intrus* has figured as an important exception. Indeed, *L’Intrus* has been reedited twice, once in 2005 and most recently in 2010. With each new edition, Nancy has felt compelled to add on a short post-scriptum forming an integral part of the original text. He meditates on why *L’Intrus* has been an exception for him. Unlike other texts that may not be quite so tied to his personal survival, reeditions of *L’Intrus* mark a special relationship to time.

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<sup>97</sup> Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 149.

<sup>98</sup> Nancy, *L’Intrus*, 48.



Each reedition, so far, has gone hand in hand with the continued beating of the intruder inside of Nancy's chest cavity, an "uninterrupted movement" that Nancy experiences as a surplus of life.

Avec ce livre [*L'Intrus*], il en va différemment. Les rééditions paraissent venir à point nommé pour scander le mouvement ininterrompu dans lequel se poursuit le battement de ce cœur. Il y a cinq ans, j'ai ainsi noté la pensée de 'survie' qui me venait d'avoir dépassé dix années de greffer. Aujourd'hui je ne suis pas très loin de vingt ans—ce sera en 2011, si j'y parviens. Cette survie m'apparaît toujours plus comme une vie supplémentaire, voire excédentaire. Toujours plus de vie accordée à ce vivant que l'intrusion—mécanique et chimique—a soustrait à la mort qui devait être sienne. (48-49)

If the awareness of excessive life is the courant inciting him to write, the reeditions also punctuate a notable loss of life for Nancy. Each post-scriptum marks the passing of one of Nancy's closest philosophical friends: Jacques Derrida, with whom Nancy had entertained a long and rich textual and personal exchange, passed away in 2005; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy's long-time collaborator, in 2010. *L'Intrus*, initially a document meant to record the ramifications of being a walking-dead, ends up becoming a testament to loved ones who have died while "le mort-vivant" continues on. These addendums—doubly *excrits* in their existence as supplement (to resort to one of Derrida's buzz words)—serve as points of intersection between immunity, the singular signature of the self, and community, as "the multiplicity of singular existences who are 'in common' only on the basis of a shared mortality which cannot be subsumed into any communal project or collective identity."<sup>99</sup> Singular existence only sees, touches, knows, experiences—is exposed—to death through the death of others. "Community reveals, or rather *is*, our exposure to the unmasterable limit of death, and thus our being together outside of all identity or work of subjectivity" (ibid.). For Nancy, our relationship to others constitutes the

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<sup>99</sup> James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 185.

limits of the self, limits that can only be known by the passage of one mouth to the other, one communicated word that resonates in, touches the body.

“Qu’est-ce que toucher? Que veut dire ‘toucher’ ?” Derrida poses these questions at the end of *Le toucher* (“Le toucher” functioning grammatically as both a noun and a verb preceded by the direct object “le” meaning “him” or “it”). He interrupts his reflection with a parenthetical note and confesses to something he never communicated to Nancy, himself:

Un jour, je ne le lui ai jamais dit à lui-même...j’ai rêvé que je l’embrassais sur la bouche. C’était peu après la transplantation de son nouveau cœur, quand je venais de le revoir et de l’embrasser en effet, sur les joues, pour la toute première fois. Comme après une résurrection. Et non seulement la sienne...[L]a vérité, c’est que j’aurais voulu être capable de raconter ce que fut, et reste, pour mon cœur, l’atteignant lui-même, l’épreuve de cet autre cœur que Jean-Luc Nancy fut pourtant seul à ‘connaître’ au fond de son cœur, le sien, le tien, le seul, le même, celui d’un autre ou d’une autre.<sup>100</sup>

To kiss Nancy on the mouth—this site of the “ego” as intrusion into the world—would mean to know the other, to be able to seize and recount its “ordeal,” to reach the place of confusion where le sien, le tien, le même, et l’autre run together while still remaining separate, distinct, enunciated—“l’être singulier pluriel.” “The ‘we’ is happening,” writes Hutchens,<sup>101</sup> it is *becoming* at the point where one lip touches another, and where words and breath come forth, interrupt, intrude and they penetrate “au fond,” “[u]ne caresse dont on ne sait plus si elle fait le bien ou le mal, comme un coup de telephone au coeur.”<sup>102</sup> To which Nancy might reply: ‘Il y a

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<sup>100</sup> Derrida, *Le toucher*, 339.

<sup>101</sup> Hutchins, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, 117.

<sup>102</sup> Derrida, *Le toucher*, 348. This allusion to the telephone call refers to another intimate “secret” Derrida confides earlier on in the text to the reader. “...Est-il décent d’obéir ici à la tentation pour évoquer un souvenir presque secret? (J’aime à me le rappeler, heureusement, comme une grâce partagée). A la veille de l’opération dont nous parlions plus haut, alors que Nancy allait changer de cœur, je me suis entendu lui dire au téléphone, depuis la Californie: ‘Ne t’inquiète pas, je me réveillerai avec toi.’ Et d’une certaine façon, bien que ce fut, je le savais, plus facile à dire qu’à faire, je crus reconnaître là, à la lettre, une figure de la vérité. Oserai-je dire, bien plus grande que moi, une figure littéralement tangible de la vérité du cœur? La vérité aussi d’une gratitude

bien de la chose au cœur du mot, mais cela ne définit pas une sorte de 'surparler': plutôt un non-parler des mots eux-mêmes, toujours immobile en eux jusque dans la parole...Au cœur des choses-mots, comme au cœur de toutes choses, il n'y a pas langage."<sup>103</sup> The limits of words are the limits of the self.

### **The Language of Immunity and the Birth of the Biological Ego**

So how do we make sense of this language of immunity employed by both Derrida and Nancy? From where does it emerge? Like the notion of legitimacy, the loss of which Jardine takes as the starting point for her analysis in *Gynesis*, immunity originates in the legal realm. In a certain way, it functions as the opposite of legitimacy: someone who is immune does not have to worry about legitimating his or her actions or words. We already touched on the brief overview of immunity's lexical history as it was developed by Derrida in *Foi et savoir*, but a rehearsal and expansion of his explanation is necessary. To begin, let us shift discursive domains. Leafing through a standard textbook on immunology, we acquire this explanation for what immunity commonly means:

The human organism, from the time of conception, must *maintain its integrity* in the face of a changing and often threatening environment. Our bodies have many physiological mechanisms that permit us to adjust to basic variables such as temperature, supply of food and water, and physical injury. *In addition, we must defend ourselves against invasion and colonization by foreign organisms.* This defensive ability is called *immunity*.

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incommensurable--envers qui accepte, envers qui reçoit, envers l'ami qui ne rejette pas, dont le corps consent à garder le cœur d'un autre, d'une autre, et par cette incroyable survivance nous donne mieux à penser le fond du cœur, au tréfonds, plus loin que le tréfonds de ce que tant de mémoire, partout où l'on parle du 'cœur', de la Bible à Pascal ou à Heidegger, nous donne en héritage: la mémoire, justement, là où elle s'unit à la pensée, à la grâce de la gratitude, à l'amour ou à l'amitié" (135).

<sup>103</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, "Le cœur des choses," *Une pensée finie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 198-199.

Immunity comes from the Latin word *immunitas* and means “protection from.” In legal terms, immunity means that an immune person is not subject to certain laws (e.g., diplomatic immunity) or is exempt from certain duties (e.g., not required to serve in the armed forces). In medical terms immunity means protection from certain diseases, particularly infectious diseases.<sup>104</sup>

Such definitions brilliantly illustrate the metaphorization of biological immunity, currently accepted and used to designate a generalized resistance “to invasion and colonization” by the body’s “defense system.” Sell, the author of the textbook, posits the body as a self-regulated machine whose goal it is to “maintain...integrity,” to wage war against all organisms (or other foreign bodies) that dare penetrate, permeate the body’s closed walls. Within this vision, the body figures as an autonomous, bounded entity. Threatened by its interaction with the outside world, this entity needs protection.

To support the understanding of “immunity” he proposes, Sell traces the word back to its Latin origins. “Immunity comes from the Latin word *immunitas* and means ‘protection from.’” He slips seamlessly from the legal back to the medical realm, relying on this etymological evocation to bridge the two discourses. The ease with which his language flows from one discursive site to the next underscores the assumption he makes that most readers share in his vision. And indeed, from Sell’s putative description one is led to believe that the bioscientific appropriation of the word, which dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when scientists became acutely interested in the physiological processes involved in protecting the body (in large part thanks to Pasteur’s vaccination campaign), flows “naturally” from its legalistic root: “protection from” laws or duties translates (translating meaning “to carry over”) into “protection from” diseases. And yet, a closer look at the etymology of “immunity” casts this naturalizing

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<sup>104</sup> Stewart Sell, *Immunology, Immunopathology, and Immunity* (New York: Elsevier, 1989), 3 (emphasis added). Quoted in Ed Cohen, “Metaphorical Immunity: A Case of Biomedical Fiction,” *Literature and Medicine* 23, no.2 (Fall 2003), 149-50.

assumption in a different light, revealing the imaginary work contained within the metaphor itself and the tensions the description above has all but elided.

While Sell is right that “immunity” does originate in the legal realm from the Latin *immunitas*, as Derrida notes, *immunitas* does not etymologically mean “protection from” but rather the state of being “exempt from public service or charge” (the accusative case of *immunis* from *in*—“not” + *munis* “ready for service”). Already, the move from protection to exemption causes the reader to pause, as the two terms seem to find themselves on opposite sides of the inside/outside, interior/exterior binary. “To *protect* from” implies that the object—or body, as it were—lies “within,” needing to be kept from damage or injury looming “without” whereas “to *exempt* from” places the object/body in question on the outside, setting it apart, isolating it, freeing it from obligation. And the distinction is further complicated by the fact that the isolation/freeing established by immunity is conferred to a body that is at the same time considered to be a part of the larger *community*, falling under the community’s jurisdiction all while being released from full participation in and accountability to it. The immune body is both outside and inside, a fact that highlights the limits or boundaries inherent in the concept.

Anne-Marie Moulin, in a remarkably well-researched book, traces the trajectory of immunity, what she calls the “last language of medicine.” While it ignited fierce debate at the end of the 1880s and into the twentieth century between the French and German schools of thought,<sup>105</sup> according to Moulin, the forty years following WWI, immunity occupied only a very small place as an obscure science in the consciousness—and language—of doctors and

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<sup>105</sup> As we will discuss in the next chapter, the scientists led by Elie Metchnikoff at *L’Institut Pasteur* endorsed a cellular understanding of immunity by which phagocytes or “eating cells” were responsible for assuring immunity, gobbling up “intruders” and dying or ill-functioning self-cells; the Germans, on the other hand, espoused a purely chemical understanding by which “antigens” are neutralized by chemical chains emitted by the body through antibodies.

biologists, only to emerge from its “purgatory” at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>106</sup> During this decade, through the development of transplant technology as well a newly vested interest in autoimmunity, the “vocabulary” of immunity evolved and began to assume its current place of dominance in the Western world’s anatomical imagination as THE totalizing system (i.e. not isolatable to one specific organ or cell) responsible for determining self from non-self. Peter Medawar, a British biologist renowned for his work on transplant rejection and “acquired” immunity (the “learned” immunity an organism develops as it lives and encounters the world as opposed to “innate” immunity with which an organism is born), strongly emphasized immune difference and incompatibility as the most basic, essential dividing line between two individuals: “Il n’est pas de propriété biologique qui sépare si finement deux individus que l’incompatibilité.”<sup>107</sup> In the 1980s, the advent of AIDS expanded awareness of the immune system beyond the medical sphere, bringing it to the forefront of people’s everyday concerns and consciousness. The imperative to bolster immunity has since turned into a cultural obsession, as attested by the popularity of such immune-insuring or boosting parapharmaceutical products as Purell and Emergen-C.<sup>108</sup> Immunity, before a term designating a singular event of survival (and often a visible one: pock marks were the most telling battle scars to testify to one’s “exempted” position) gradually became a descriptive state—an invisible, interiorized property—to which the individual could lay claim. As Moulin writes:

Le nouveau langage a atteint sa cohérence quand le passage s’est fait de l’immunité-événement à l’immunité-propriété, caractéristique permanente des espèces et des individus. L’immunologie a construit une nouvelle fonction dans l’épaisseur de l’organisme, le système immunitaire. Ce système s’est développé

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<sup>106</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 390.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Medawar quoted in Moulin (*ibid.*, 176).

<sup>108</sup> The obsession with immunity is only matched by the obsession with making sure men “keep it up” with the help of such magic drugs as Viagra or Cialis, necessary when “natural instinct” fails to kick in.

sous la forme d'un réseau complexe de cellules et de molécules, avec des 'organes', des 'voies' centripètes et centrifuges et une 'circulation', enfin sous une forme métaphysique, celle de la constitution du soi, différent des autres soi qui forment le non-soi. (13)

The immune system offered doctors a way to speak about and scientifically systematize such fleeting and philosophically thorny notions as individuality, subjectivity and idiosyncrasy. The *champ lexical* of immunity evolved over the course of the century; war metaphors of territorial defense gave way to a conception of the immune system as sister to the nervous system, and, eventually, as a complex auto-regulated system constantly having to balance auto-preservation from auto-destruction. Endowed with its own cognitive functions of perception and memory, not to mention an ability to “learn,” the immune system came to assume the epistemological task of “knowing” the borders of the biological self, or at least being able to “identify” that which did not belong. But more than just “knowing” the self, as Albert Tauber has very convincingly argues, with every decision either to “eliminate” or to “integrate,” the immune system also ontologically constitutes the organism, redefining its borders. In this sense, immunity is the biological mechanism of becoming, *par excellence*, the internal mechanism by which the human structure—and with it, as we are beginning to see, the human psyche—changes. “Le langage immunologique est entré en résonance avec le système de représentations où les hommes projettent leurs rapports avec leurs semblables au travers des indices biologiques.”<sup>109</sup>

Rapports with their “fellow men” are not the only relationships mediated through this “new immunological language;” man’s biological relationship to himself also (and increasingly) gets framed using these terms. Early in the history of immunology, Paul Ehrlich, a German biologist, decried auto-toxicity—an intolerance toward the self (what he labeled *horror*

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<sup>109</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 180.

*autotoxicus*)—as a “natural” impossibility: “L’organisme possède certains moyens par lesquels la réaction immunitaire, si facilement produite par toutes sortes de cellules, est empêchée d’agir contre les éléments de l’organisme et de donner lieu à des autotoxines... On est donc justifié à évoquer l’*horror autotoxicus* de l’organisme... et ces moyens sont de la plus haute importance pour l’existence de l’individu.”<sup>110</sup> Ehrlich’s argument was so convincing that scientists ceased even entertaining the possibility that the self could work against itself. Moulin offers an illuminating explanation for the easy abandonment of the concept of a biological intolerance of self, even in the face of strong evidence that contradicted Ehrlich’s unequivocal decree. Moulin identifies the rise of psychoanalysis, coupled with a reductionist and positivist turn the biological sciences took, as the reason self-defeating impulses or drives were deflected into the nebulous realm of the psyche: “Une hypothèse supplémentaire peut-être à retenir pour la décadence de l’auto-immunité est la montée entre les deux guerres de la psychanalyse... Dans la théorie psychanalytique, le moi jouait un grand rôle et assurait des fonctions de suppression des affects, expliquant nombre de déplacements et de refoulements... Le travail du négatif, l’autodestruction, devenait l’apanage de la psyché. La fonction régulatrice du ‘moi’ était ainsi perdue pour la biologie et renvoyée à des instances qui, contrairement aux premières orientations de Freud, étaient de moins en moins matérielles” (239). Neo-Cartesianism reigned supreme during the inter-war period as the German school, promoting its understanding of immunity based on chemical interactions, won over the scientific community.<sup>111</sup> Bodies were again considered machines programmed to chemically neutralize “strangers.” This understanding of the body

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<sup>110</sup> Paul Ehrlich quoted by Anne Marie Moulin (*ibid.*, 231).

<sup>111</sup> During the inter-war years, L’Institut Pasteur, having enjoyed such an illustrious beginning, sank into a period marked by a lack of innovation and productivity. This was mostly due to the financial difficulties it encountered when both state and private funding dried up, as well as to poor management under Emile Roux who succeeded Pasteur after his death in 1904 (*ibid.*, 126).



undoubtedly aided scientists in justifying the planning and execution of “the final solution” by which the German national body, through chemical means—fabricated “anti-bodies”—sought to rid itself of all of the Jewish (along with other “degenerate” bodies), antigenic “intruders” within its borders.

In the aftermath of the war, and through scientific work on tolerance (involving experiments on how to manipulate the body to tolerate—i.e. not produce antibodies against—“foreign” agents) auto-immunity again presented itself as a possible explanation to account for any number of afflictions with no readily identifiable cause, particularly those affecting several organs at a time. The reintroduction of the possibility of self-intolerance flipped the scientific paradigm and for the first time cast a shadow of doubt on the unequivocally positive way in which immunity had been framed. It also brought into question the stark line established between self and other; the two categories were no longer so clear. Moulin draws two conclusions from the “revolution” triggered by auto-immunity:

--d’une part, l’auto-immunité apparaît comme une exception à la fondamentale exclusion du soi du domaine de l’immunisation, une disparition de la différence constitutive entre soi et non-soi qui est normalement un arrêt de mort;

--d’autre part, l’autoimmunité peut être perçue comme un élément dynamique dans les relations fluctuantes que le soi contracte avec le non-soi. Le répertoire des antigènes n’est pas rigide; il s’étend et se restreint suivant un mouvement de systole et de diastole. Les limites de ce répertoire résultent d’un équilibre sans cesse remanié dont l’auto-immunité représente un pôle extrême. Il est impossible de définir *a priori* une limite entre soi et non-soi, soi et autrui (à l’intérieur d’une même espèce), de façon définitive et cette limite résulte d’une négociation permanente de l’organisme, défini comme système immunitaire. (257)

Moulin uses the metaphor of the heart’s contractions to illustrate the impermanence of immune boundaries, the constant renegotiation of the correct “balance” fluctuating somewhere between one extreme of self-intolerance to the other extreme of a deficiency in immune

reactivity (too much “tolerance”—as with AIDS). She emphasizes the implications of a broadening use of the word “recognition” to describe the primary activity of the immune system and the consequences this shift in vocabulary entails: “Quand les réactions immunitaires sont de plus en plus décrites comme des réactions de ‘reconnaissance’ de l’antigène, et que le bras séculier est mis à distance de l’inquisition, l’idée d’auto-immunité perd en même temps une partie de ses connotations agressives. Elle se rapproche des phénomènes d’aperception, voire d’introspection... Les phénomènes d’auto-immunité échappent en partie à la pathologie pour devenir avant tout une source primaire d’information de l’organisme sur lui-même” (ibid). Moulin draws on psychological ideas of introspection to reconfigure auto-immunity as a more common and less dire occurrence (certainly less dire than the way Derrida portrays it as an internal bomb waiting to explode), complicit in the process of self-constitution. Later, Moulin goes further to intertwine psychological registers with immune discourse:

...[L]a construction du soi et du non-soi est une étape essentielle du développement de la personnalité, elle est la moderne version des *Méditations* cartésiennes, la genèse du moi et du monde. Mais, signe des temps nouveaux, cette genèse ne se traduit plus en termes de pensée et d’étendue, ni en termes de modes et de substances, elle s’exprime en termes de systèmes, de cellules et de molécules. *L’immunologie fournit l’indispensable mythe de la naissance de l’Ego*. Ces accents métaphysiques et psychologiques expliquent que la création scientifique apparaisse en immunologie plus transparente, reliant l’expérience de l’être au monde et le laboratoire d’une manière inimitable, manifestant des complicités et des dépendances ailleurs impossibles à retrouver. Le souffle de l’immunologie anime une création indissolublement scientifique et artistique. (400)

Though she doesn’t explicitly say it, I am tempted to draw a link between the immune system and the unconscious, framing the immune system—and discourse emanating from it—as

a biological unconscious of sorts.<sup>112</sup> If the immune system gives birth to the Ego, it does so without the Ego having much say over its emergence or its development. Much like the unconscious, the immune system also “protects” the self from encounters with other selves, operating through its own version of “repression.” It sculpts the organism from the inside, modifying, shaping, distorting the physiological building blocks of self-recognition and self-definition.<sup>113</sup> As the “culmination” of “les caractéristiques de l’âme et de l’organisme,”<sup>114</sup> it has come to represent the channel through which biological self in the world gets negotiated. As such, the immune system is seen more and more as a medium to be manipulated and controlled even as a full comprehension of the mechanisms by which it works continues to elude man.

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<sup>112</sup> The title of another of Moulin’s articles emphasizes the relationship between immunity and the unconscious: Anne-Marie Moulin, “L’inconscient pasteurien. L’immunologie de Metchnikoff à Oudin (1917-1940),” in *L’Institut Pasteur: Contributions à son histoire*, ed. Michel Morange (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1991), 144-164.

<sup>113</sup> To this extent, Derrida is right to turn to psychoanalysis as a model for getting in touch with the autoimmune impulse, figuring the unconscious as “une des réserves et des ressources vitalemment mortelles, mortellement vitales pour cette implacable loi de la conservation auto-destructrice du ‘sujet’ ou de l’ipséité égologique” (Derrida, *Voyous*, 83). This “reserve” constitutes the subject as both the unseen, unknown force animating his structure as well as the translation of this force into consciousness. Derrida employs the word “tranquilly” in his description of the psychoanalyst’s demeanor when referencing the unconscious (“[c]e que les psychoanalystes appellent plus ou moins tranquillement l’inconscient” [ibid.]), an attitude paralleled by our non-chalant, quotidian referring to consciousness (“ce que nous appelons aussi tranquillement la conscience” [ibid]). Perhaps here we get a glimpse of this uneasy peace “d’un spectacle, horizon ou visage,” always in danger of being disrupted by the forces of becoming churning underneath (Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence*, 44).

<sup>114</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 400.

## Chapter 2: Contested Terrains: The Birth of Biological Immunity

"C'est parmi les parasites et non chez l'homme qu'il faut chercher le dernier mot de la création."<sup>1</sup>

Questions surrounding mechanisms for maintaining bodily and psychic integrity arose at the time when science was attempting to come up with a suitable response to the most fundamental (if not basic) question: what is life?<sup>2</sup> Conceptions of life were undergoing a Kuhnian paradigm shift as “The Creator” stepped further and further back into the shadows. The term biology—the study of life—was coined at the beginning of the nineteenth century by two scientists, one German, one French (Gottfried Treviranus and Jean Baptiste de Lamarck, though independently of each other), when it became clear that Enlightenment classification systems failed to provide a satisfying explanation for how life is “born” and how it develops.<sup>3</sup> Across Europe, scientific attention slowly turned away from accounting for and keeping track of taxonomic observations to attempting to grasp the *functional* processes at the heart of “life.” Cell theory was elaborated by the Germans in the 1830s, establishing cells as the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Metchnikoff, *Études sur la nature humaine: Essai de philosophie optimiste* (Paris: A. Maloine, 1908), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *Making Sense of Life: Explaining Biological Development with Models, Metaphors, and Machines* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>3</sup> As it turns out, the French/German divide would determine the evolution of biological sciences—including immunology—for over a century. As John Andrew Mendelsohn demonstrates in his remarkable dissertation, France and Germany consistently approached questions of life (particularly regarding the interaction between microorganisms and other living beings located higher up the food chain) from radically opposed perspectives. The French school, led by Louis Pasteur, grew out of an “agricultural” tradition by which microorganisms were seen to coexist (even often proving useful—as in fermentation) with other forms of life. Even when the school turned its attention on more “harmful” interactions, it maintained a belief in the often positive and ecologically necessary role of microbial life. In contrast, the German school framed biological life in purely atomistic, medical terms. With Robert Koch at its head, it approached microorganisms as pathogens to be eradicated. The basic principles of these conceptual frames remained constant, shaping what would later become the disagreement between the French (with a dash of Russian) cellularists and the German humorists regarding the mechanisms of immunity, to which I allude above. The German willingness to reduce life to chemicals and atoms may also account for the way they justified carrying out their “salutary” programs during the Holocaust. John Andrew Mendelsohn, “Cultures of Bacteriology: Formation and transformation of a science in France and Germany, 1870-1914,” (PhD, Princeton, 1996), 17-18.

elements organizing all living creatures (plants and animals). It was later proven (in 1855 by Virchow) that all cells are derived from other cells.

These discoveries led to debates about the nature of cells: should they be treated as “building blocks” making a mechanized body “work” or, rather, do they constitute the smallest, most vital expression of a more ineffable “spark”? Otherwise termed, is the body a machine functioning according to knowable, predictable physical laws or is it guided by unknowable life impulses, something that cannot simply be explained through recourse to the physical world? Finally, since cells “give life” to other cells, how should cellular development—indeed, cellular “becoming”—be approached and comprehended?

Several scientific disciplines—ontogeny, phylogeny, embryology, and, eventually, immunology—developed and had as their express purpose the goal of studying these various “becomings.” Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, first published in England in 1859 and translated into French in 1862, launched an entirely new mode of inquiry. Up to this point, developmental studies were largely descriptive, consisting of detailed observations of organisms at various stages. The forces driving the changes in appearance, and the mechanisms responsible for the developmental trajectory remained unexamined. It was only with Darwin’s intriguing suggestion of evolution and natural selection that scientists suddenly began wondering what accounted for physical change, what decided morphology, what established lines of continuity or differentiation from one stage to another and from one organism to another. They began to pose questions (questions that are still up for debate today!): how does an organism become what it is at a given place in a given time? What determines its path, its shape, its borders? When does life begin? When does it end? Is there a way to intervene to alter the processes of becoming?

What is the relationship between a particular organism's trajectory (the ontogeny) and the evolution of a species to which the organism belongs (phylogeny)?<sup>4</sup>

Methodological practices and scientific assumptions used to tackle these questions varied from country to country. While the German school focused on reducing life to its physical, observable, measurable properties (most notably its chemical makeup), the French adopted a more holistic approach inspired by agricultural metaphors; the notion of "le terrain" is exemplary of this ecological mindset. Indeed, "le terrain" is a particularly French concept. Though its precise first usage in the medical context is difficult to pin down, it began widely being used in this sense during the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> By the 1930s, it had instituted itself as a "doctrinal" subject whose definition ranged (within the same article) from being synonymous with the "animated material" of "the host body"; with "heredity"; or a "pre-

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<sup>4</sup> Across the disciplinary aisle, the "sciences of man," or "social sciences," also products of the nineteenth century, were asking the same sorts of questions. Speculations on man's becoming were refracted through all of these disciplinary prisms: Where is society going (what is the best society? How do we create it?)? Are we evolving? Becoming more civilized? Progressing? Regressing? Stagnating? Becoming, in these disciplines, quickly involved the importance of *overcoming*: Where is Man headed? Toward another beheading? Scholars have extensively discussed how the French Revolution (with its multitude of decapitations) catapulted French society into the modern age, eliminating priorly cemented social distinctions and giving birth to the narrative of the individual legally endowed, through *La déclaration des droits de l'homme*, with promises of life, liberty and equality. How do we make man richer, stronger? How can he transcend the situation into which he is born? The biological and social sciences worked in tandem to try to delimit this new object of study—Man as individual—as we discussed in chapter one.

<sup>5</sup> John Andrew Mendelsohn, "Medicine and the Making of Bodily Inequality in Twentieth-Century Europe," in *Heredity and Infection: The History of Disease Transmission*, eds. Jean-Paul Gaudillière and Ilana Löwy (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 34. The first instance that I was able to pinpoint of *le terrain* used in the medical context was in a short report on smallpox delivered by the Parisian doctor, Jules Meugy: "Une fois le germe entré dans l'économie, la maladie doit forcément éclore et se développer, rien ne peut la faire avorter; une fois en marche, rien ne peut la faire rétrocéder. Le corps humain est *comme un terrain* dans lesquels les maladies trouvent des conditions plus ou moins avantageuses à leur développement." *Mémoire sur une épidémie de variole, adressé à l'Académie de médecine dans la séance du 4 juillet 1865* (Paris: A. Parent, 1865), 41 (my emphasis). It does not yet appear in this sense in the *Littre* from 1877. It is defined in *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* as "[L']Etat d'un organisme, quant à sa résistance aux agents pathogènes ou à sa prédisposition à diverses affections." The first literary occurrence, as we will discuss in chapter 3, is in Zola's *Le Docteur Pascal*.

established harmony."<sup>6</sup> It is composed of living tissue endowed with powers of perception,<sup>7</sup> and with memory (317). "Le terrain" corresponds roughly to what Anglophones would understand by the word "constitution." Grossly defined, it is an inherited pre-disposition that renders a person more or less resistant, more or less susceptible to falling ill to a particular condition. It raises the question of "differential reactivity, of essential inequality."<sup>8</sup> Individual bodily *terrains* vary from person to person (some are more propitious to the growth of certain bacteria than others, for example; some are more resistant. In this sense, it approximates a "negative" version of *le terroir*, which, in viticulture, makes some earth more suitable for growing grapes than others with each *terroir* endowing the grapes with its own particular characteristics). Unlike constitution (which has a more neutral and abstract, if somewhat political connotation), "terrain" conjures rich associations with land, soil and fertility, and thus easily fits into the agriculturally-inspired lexicon grounding French biological and medical discourse at the time. In short, French scientific production, more so than other national schools, took a tremendous interest in the inside of the body—its individualized, biological "plots," an interest that eventually led to Metchnikoff's conception of cellular immunity and the birth of what has become the science of immunology.

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<sup>6</sup> Arnault Tzanck, "La notion de terrain: Son importance doctrinale," *La Presse Médicale*, no.16 (24 février 1934), 315.

<sup>7</sup> Evoking the interaction between a pathogen and *le terrain*, Tzanck suggests this perceptive quality: "La réaction n'est donc pas imposée par l'agent externe, mais 'déclenchée' par lui. Elle n'est point pathognomonique. Tout se passé comme si c'était *le tissu*...qui reconnaissait cette substance provoquant la réaction" (Ibid.).

<sup>8</sup> Mendolsohn, "Medicine and the Making of Bodily Inequality," 24.

### Claude Bernard: Plunging *le milieu intérieur*

It is important to understand how the internal body was conceived before arriving at Metchnikoff. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Claude Bernard, the father of experimental medicine, elaborated a ground-breaking (pardon the pun!) theory around the concept of *le milieu intérieur*, an extremely “civilized” version of the notion of *terrain*. Bernard’s *milieu intérieur*, a homeostatic, internal disposition of the individual body (no two *milieux intérieurs* are alike), brings the true locus of life into the body proper. By localizing it in such a way, folding it into the deepest recesses (made accessible through vivisection), Bernard framed life as being available and thus knowable to the researcher who sought to explore (*tâter le terrain*), excavate (or, perhaps more fittingly, strain) *le milieu intérieur* as his fieldwork.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bernard, the body strives to achieve a state of original, organic integrity regulated by *le milieu intérieur*. The body’s principal mode of functioning is no longer in its interaction in the world, but rather in mediation *protected from* the world; the internal body exists as a machine seeped in a space governed by still undiscovered though absolutely determinative laws. In this way, Bernard firmly rejects the hygienic agenda, which linked the health of the individual to the health of society at large; he grants immunity to the body, emancipating it from its communal tethers.

It is the discovery of or at least the search for these internal laws that Claude Bernard defends in his project. He posits that biological entities—*corps vivants*—are subject, like the world of objects (“*corps bruts*”), to physical-chemical laws that are absolutely, necessarily

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 192.



determined and unchanging.<sup>10</sup> In order to understand the determining causes, one must observe the environment at work, opening up the “machine” and taking it apart, piece by piece: “...il faut en quelque sorte décomposer successivement l’organisme, comme on démonte une machine pour en reconnaître, et en étudier tous les rouages...” (92). *Rouages* is a word that repeatedly appears in Bernard’s writing (and it is a word Zola adopts, as we shall discuss in chapter 3), highlighting the notion of fragmentation inside a totalizing whole. Heterogeneity has moved from the outside in, with each part performing its own, individual work to make the organism function. While Bernard’s vision of the body is also based on humoral properties, his ideas differ from German reductionism by the emphasis he places on the idiosyncratic nature of the *milieu intérieur*: though the body is regulated by internal laws, those laws are not universally applicable to other bodies.

Bernard offers these further precisions about *le milieu intérieur*. It is an environment the organism generates itself, composed of the body’s liquids (91). It protects the organism by mediating and regulating all interactions the organism has with the outside world. As the organism increases in complexity—or, in Bernard’s terms, “becomes more perfect”—the internal increasingly separates from the external world: “Chez tous les êtres vivants le milieu intérieur, qui est un véritable *produit de l’organisme*, conserve des rapports nécessaires d’échanges et d’équilibres avec le milieu cosmique extérieur; mais, à mesure que l’organisme devient plus parfait, le milieu organique se spécialise et s’isole en quelque sorte de plus en plus du milieu ambiant”(91, my emphasis). Bernard makes clear that this environment would be impossible to recreate artificially; the delicate harmony fostered in the interaction between the autonomous

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<sup>10</sup> “Dans les corps vivants comme dans les corps bruts les lois sont immuables, et les phénomènes que ces lois régissent sont liés à leurs conditions d’existence par un déterminisme nécessaire et absolu.” Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l’étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: J.P. Baillière, 1865), 98.

elements, working in coordination but still in absolute liberty one from the other, all floating in a protective bath, can only exist in its natural, pre-given, harmonious state.<sup>11</sup>

Bernard remains loyal to his understanding of the *milieu intérieur* throughout his life and his writings. In *Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie commune aux animaux et aux végétaux*, a later work published the same year as his death in 1878, he further elaborates his vision of this internal machine, explaining how each element—*rouage*—is both autonomous and yet subordinated to the whole. Bernard, in a Rabelaisian move<sup>12</sup> (though perhaps without the humor), metaphorically goes one step further; he puts on the hat of an architect and constructs a city to describe the body's internal workings.<sup>13</sup> Bernard's utopia is both egalitarian (each element is autonomous and shares the same general faculties, possessing its specific place) and capitalistic in the sense that the individual parts are represented as a trade (some industrial, some more traditional) that produces services. Additionally, each component functions autonomously:

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<sup>11</sup> “Les conditions de ce milieu sont tellement délicates qu'elles nous échappent. Elles n'existent que dans la place naturelle que la réalisation du plan morphologique assigne à chaque élément. Les organismes élémentaires ne les rencontrent que dans leur place, à leur poste: si on les transporte ailleurs, si on les déplace, à plus forte raison si on les extrait de l'organisme, on modifie par cela même leur milieu, et, comme conséquence, on change leur vie ou bien même on la rend impossible.” Claude Bernard, *Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie communs aux animaux et aux végétaux* (Paris: J.P. Baillière, 1878), 360.

<sup>12</sup> I am thinking here of the episode in *Pantagruel* when the narrator walks on Pantagruel's tongue into his mouth. There he meets a man planting cabbage. Here is a segment of the dialogue between the two men: “-Voire mais (dis je) mon amy, comment a nom ceste ville où tu portes vendre tes choux ? –Elle a (dist il) nom Aspharage [arrière-gorge], et sont christians, gens de bien et vous feront grande chere.’ Bref, je deliberey d’y aller.” François Rabelais, *Pantagruel : Roy des Dipsodes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 178. I wonder what the name of Claude Bernard's city would be.

<sup>13</sup> “Représentons-nous l'être vivant complexe, l'animal ou la plante, comme une cité ayant son cachet spécial qui la distingue de toute autre, de même que la morphologie d'un animal le distingue de tout autre. Les habitants de cette cité y représentent les éléments anatomiques dans l'organisme; tous ces habitants vivent de même, se nourrissent, respirent de la même façon et possèdent les mêmes facultés générales, celles de l'homme. Mais chacun a son métier, ou son industrie, ou ses aptitudes, ou ses talents, par lesquels il participe à la vie sociale et par lesquels il en dépend. Le maçon, le boulanger, le boucher, l'industriel, le manufacturier, fournissent des produits différents et d'autant plus variés, plus nombreux et plus nuancés que la société dont il s'agit est arrivée à un plus haut degré de développement. Tel est l'animal complexe. L'organisme, comme la société, est construit de telle façon que les conditions de la vie élémentaire ou individuelle y soient respectées, ces conditions étant les mêmes pour tous; mais en même temps chaque membre dépend, dans une certaine mesure, par sa fonction et pour sa fonction, de la place qu'il occupe dans l'organisme, dans le groupe social” (Bernard, *Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie*, 356-357).

“Les éléments anatomiques se *comportent dans l'association comme ils se comporteraient isolément* dans le même milieu. C'est en cela que consiste le *principe de l'autonomie des éléments anatomiques*; il affirme l'identité *de la vie libre et associée* sous la condition que le milieu soit identique” (359, my emphasis). Bernard's city eerily borders on an Ayn Randian universe of absolute individualism, albeit an individualism in a very controlled environment.

The irony of this metaphor does not escape Ed Cohen who underlines how, in one breath, Bernard has cut the body off from its surroundings while in the very next he is imagining an internalized society where everything is functioning properly and in its place.<sup>14</sup> Cohen underscores the revolutionary aspect of Bernard's vision of the “experimental animal” and very justly highlights the political overtones that accompany Bernard's claim of independence for the “perfected organism” (read man). Cohen shows how Bernard is intimately tied to the aspirations of the Second Empire, promoting an economically and politically liberal subject freed from the confines of an uncertain and contaminating world: “...Bernard's bioscientific formulation verges on the political theory of possessive individualism, since in Bernard's formative depiction, the highest (i.e., human) animal's independence leans on the ‘more completely protective an internal environment it possesses.’ Biologically incorporating ‘protective possession,’ milieu intérieur conjoins the political and the natural even as it holds them radically separate. ‘Subtracted’ and ‘protected’ from the lifeworld, the living organism becomes, in Bernard's view, biologically ‘free’” (196).

In fact, Bernard's ideal society is a miniature Atlantis: the only thing holding the parts in place, keeping them functioning together and separate from the outside are the surrounding liquids: “C'est par l'intermédiaire des liquides interstitiels, formant ce que j'ai appelé le *milieu*

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<sup>14</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 199.

*intérieur*, que s'établit la solidarité des parties élémentaires... Si l'on pouvait réaliser à chaque instant un milieu identique à celui que l'action des parties voisines crée continuellement à un organisme élémentaire donné, celui-ci *vivrait en liberté exactement comme en société.*"<sup>15</sup>

Through the feigned mastery and self-assurance, we can't help but sense the desperation Claude Bernard feels as he plunges in for the keys to this "lost city" that would allow him to understand its laws. Its internal workings become particularly incomprehensible and unpredictable when a pathogen surreptitiously manages to slip through its watery gates; it is precisely in this instance when Bernard's metaphoric city begins to crumble—or dissolve. Bernard dreams of the day when he will be able to follow the trails of pathogens into the blood, into the body's most intimate essence: "Mais, plus tard... on pourra pénétrer dans le milieu intérieur, c'est-à-dire dans le sang, y découvrir les altérations parasitiques ou autres qui seront les causes de maladies et déterminer les actions médicamenteuses physico-chimiques ou spécifiques capables d'agir dans ce milieu intérieur pour modifier les mécanismes pathologiques qui y ont leur siège et qui de là retentissent sur l'organisme tout entier" (299).

But, of course, the individual does not exist in a closed off bubble—nor does his *milieu intérieur*. Questions (along with the investigative terrains) were shifting away from seeing alterations in the *milieu intérieur* as the source of illness to finding fault in the external pathogens themselves. At the time of Bernard's death, science was drastically changing course, veering away from simply *treating* illness, from relying on the body's disposition *comme tel* to ward off sickness, to posing questions of etiology, of origins, and, especially, of interactions: the epistemological mode switched from asking *how* to *from where* and *why*, questions Bernard had dismissed as soliciting only naïve or stupid responses: "C'est... seulement la question du

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard, *Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie*, 359-360 (my emphasis).

pourquoi qui est absurde, puisqu'elle entraîne nécessairement une réponse naïve ou ridicule. Il vaut donc mieux reconnaître que nous ne savons pas, et que c'est là que se place la limite de notre connaissance.”<sup>16</sup>

“*Le microbe n'est rien, le terrain est tout!*,”<sup>17</sup> Bernard reportedly exclaimed precisely at the moment when the scientific community was leaving behind *le milieu intérieur*, behind *le terrain*, as an exploratory field, in search of the “*terra incognita*” of the pathogen, with its explanatory promises.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1860s, Louis Pasteur had begun attending Bernard’s lectures at Le Collège de France on the experimental method while he was performing his own research that would eventually lead to the confirmation of germ theory, which gave primacy to the *germe*’s powers of insemination over *le terrain*’s auto-regulatory functions.

### **From Chrestien's Spoiled Humors to Pasteur's Visible Germs**

Germ theory paved the way to raising the question of immunity in a more sustained way as scientists attempted to understand how the body reacts to the air-borne “invaders” newly rendered “visible.” Semantically, immunity, as a biological phenomenon, gradually evolved and acquired importance over the course of the nineteenth century. At mid-century, the medical meaning of the word was not the dominant one, and, in most cases, to evoke this sense, the noun was preceded by the adjectival qualifier “morbid,” differentiating it from parliamentary or

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard, *Introduction*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Ilana Löwy, “The Terrain Is All”: Metchnikoff’s Heritage at the Pasteur Institute, from Besredka’s ‘Antivirus’ to Bardach’s ‘Orthobiotic Serum,’ in *Greater than the Parts: Holism in Biomedicine, 1920-1950*, eds. Christopher Lawrence and George Weisz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 257.

<sup>18</sup> W. Kopaczewski, “Le terrain, le microbe et l’état infectieux: Claude Bernard ou Pasteur?,” *Revue Scientifique* 74, no.14 (25 juillet 1936): 418.

ecclesiastical immunity. Globally, people understood immunity in terms of two phenomena: firstly, by the observation that once a person is infected with an illness and survives, he or she is unlikely to fall ill with the same sickness again; secondly, that, for whatever reason, some people do not succumb to a sickness—they demonstrate an inherent resistance.

André-Thérèse Chrestien, a Montpellier physician and dedicated vitalist (to the extent that he rejected scientific trends, like the ones espoused by Bernard, reducing the body to a machine functioning according to predictable laws), wrote one of the first theses in France on immunity in 1852. Under the title *De l'immunité et de la susceptibilité morbides au point de vue de la clinique médicale*, he argues for treating “morbid immunity” as a clinical concept, the antonym of “morbid susceptibility” or the condition by which one is rendered “susceptible” to death. Chrestien espouses the view that illness arises from an interaction between internal and external causes; his willingness to emphasize the importance of the outside as well as the inside differentiates his thinking from that of Bernard, who, as we discussed, brings all “agency” and causality into the body proper. According to Chrestien, for disease to manifest, the internal environment must be “receptive” to noxious elements in the surroundings; immunity indicates a lack of such receptivity, a “failure” of sorts to engage and submit. Ed Cohen extrapolates on the consequences of this “negative” disposition, the way it results in an abortive interaction: “...[I]mmunity bears no particular positive or substantial import; it does not represent an active engagement of the organism, let alone an active defense, merely denoting the *failure* to be affected by illnesses...In other words, immunity serves here as a descriptive recognition that

*environmental catalysts lack efficacy* if a ‘certain capacity or disposition’ of the human body to fall ill does not realize itself.”<sup>19</sup>

Immunity, in this sense, is a passive, even a missing trait: “la faculté...de ne pas contracter certaines maladies ou même de n’en contracter aucune...Cette exemption est due à une force de résistance plus ou moins inhérente à la vie.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, according to Chrestien, the manner by which immunity is “attained” can put into question its overall benefit to the body’s natural equilibrium. As it happens, Chrestien was the first to distinguish between innate and acquired immunity, terms that have survived in the medical lexicon. As the names suggest, one is born with innate immunity whereas one “gains” acquired immunity either “naturally” (when, for example, one contracts an illness and survives, thus “earning” the protection from future contamination) or “artificially” through human intervention, i.e. vaccination.

The introduction to France in 1799 of Edward Jenner’s method of vaccinating for smallpox (using the cowpox virus, which triggered a significantly less severe reaction while proffering the same prophylactic protection) was first hailed as a “beautiful” and “extraordinary” discovery, stimulating a nation-wide vaccination initiative.<sup>21</sup> By mid-century, however, the shine had worn off. The reactionary ministry of King Charles X abolished *le Comité de Vaccine*, the association responsible for raising vaccine awareness and administering the

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 214 (my emphasis).

<sup>20</sup> André-Thérèse Chrestien, “De l’immunité et de la susceptibilité morbides, au point de vue de la clinique médicale,” (Thèse d’agrégation, Montpellier, 1852), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Elionor Meynell, “French Reactions to Jenner’s Discovery of Smallpox Vaccination: The Primary Sources,” *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 8, no.2 (1995): 285. Over the course of the century, enthusiasm for vaccination waned. As a case in point, while Napoléon had made vaccination mandatory for army recruits in 1804, by 1870 the requirement had lapsed: 23,400 soldiers died from smallpox during the Franco-Prussian war (299).

treatments, in 1824.<sup>22</sup> Then, when cholera broke out in the early 1830s, the focus shifted away from smallpox to the “socially induced” epidemic, from the individual to the city body: Paris, itself, had become *malade*.<sup>23</sup> The contagionist paradigm, by which disease is passed from individual to individual, took a back seat to the infectionist’s belief in the role “environment” plays in harboring illness as it festers; public hygiene replaced vaccination as the best guarantee for assuring the French public’s salubrity.

Chrestien met vaccination with skepticism, worried about the ways in which it modified the body. Anne-Marie Moulin sums up his concern portraying the vaccine as a “trick” that only displaces the points of vulnerability: “La vaccination est une sorte de tricherie avec l’histoire naturelle de l’individu et l’immunité à l’égard de la variole pourrait se payer d’une susceptibilité accrue à l’égard d’autres affections du même type, rougeole ou varicelle, voire même d’une ‘dégénérescence’ de la race... vacciner c’est empêcher l’expulsion d’une humeur gâtée qui risque de se fixer sur d’autres organes.”<sup>24</sup> Chrestien falls back on humoral theory, ultimately anticipating Bernard and his framing of the internal disposition (*le terrain, le milieu intérieur*) as the ultimate mediator between health and sickness.

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<sup>22</sup> Ed Cohen traces the role of the *Comité de Vaccine* in “disseminat[ing] the *idea* of vaccination as a public value and the *matter* of vaccine, which transforms the idea into a reality” during the early part of the nineteenth century. See Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 134-35.

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Kudlick riffs on the title of Eugène Roch’s epi(demi)c play, *Paris malade* (1832), spelling out the implication of this urbanization of disease: “Paris malade... signaled bourgeois Parisians’ understanding that a complete and literal fusion of the diseased urban and human bodies had occurred... Paris suffered from a kind of internal imbalance rather than from externally imposed conditions of geography and climate; the city was plagued by forces of its own making. Implicit in this view was a moral judgment: not only was the capital becoming sick, but this sickness was part of the very fabric of urban existence and resulted from human activity rather than mysterious natural forces.” *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 24.



The development of microbiology between 1870 and 1900 dramatically shifted causal understandings of sickness and of immunity. Pasteur's experiments on fermentation proved the existence of *le germe*—a living, *invisible* agent—while his experiments depriving sterile, sealed-off cultures of air disproved the theory of spontaneous generation. For Pasteur, the “germ” was life and life's becoming (“La vie c'est le germe avec son devenir, et le germe c'est la vie.”<sup>25</sup>) Bruno LaTour describes Pasteur's program as a formidable translation of hygienic principles (i.e. the belief that each individual body is tied and responsible to those around him) organized around manipulation of the germ/microbe. Once it became possible to vaccinate using an attenuated version of the microorganism, the hygienists (previously only concerned with eradicating insalubrious conditions, which usually amounted to policing efforts) jumped on the vaccination bandwagon with the mantra: “Nul n'a le droit de contaminer autrui” (196).

Politically, the drive to uncover and combat noxious and invasive elements corresponded with the push for the French body (all of the singular components of the French social body) to recover and “regenerate” in the wake of France's loss to the Prussians. Pasteur, for his part, hoped to mobilize science in the service of curing what he called the Prussian “chancre.”<sup>26</sup> Just as Bernard's imagining of the *milieu intérieur* scientifically reproduced the individualistic and isolating ideals of the Second Empire, the *pasteurization* of France perfectly channeled the rearticulated values of solidarity promoted under the Third Republic by which each member of society is responsible to the other members; all are mobilized behind a common goal of national

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Pasteur, *Pasteur: Écrits scientifiques et médicaux*, ed. André Pichot (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1994), 82n5.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Pasteur quoted in Bruno Latour, *Pasteur: guerre et paix des microbes suivi de Irréductions* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 34.

revitalization.<sup>27</sup> To this end, the force of pasteurization was nothing short of the “recomposition of society”; it “identified” all of the “actors” in play so as to decide, as a society, the best course of action to reach shared goals: “À composer la société avec seulement des liens sociaux en omettant les invisibles, on aboutit à une corruption générale, à une déviation perverses des bonnes volontés humaines. Pour agir efficacement d’homme à homme, c’est-à-dire, aller à la Mecque, survivre au Congo, accoucher de beaux enfants, obtenir des régiments virils, il faut ‘faire place’ aux microbes.”<sup>28</sup> All of France’s expansionary efforts (pursuing its colonizing program while boosting its “home-grown” population) hinged on recognizing—so as to master—the microbe.

Bruno Latour calls Pasteur “le montreur de microbes” precisely for this “accomplishment” (59), Pasteur’s greatest according to Latour. Building on the work of Edward Jenner (generalizing what for Jenner was a singularized phenomenon), Pasteur focused his energy on “revealing” the microbe. By rendering it “visible,” he tamed it as much in “actuality” (by physically manipulating it, lessening its strength) as in the imaginary, where its existence exerted the most force. He did so by staging the laboratory as a *théâtre de la preuve* (in the same vein as Charcot’s *leçons de mardi* at la Salpêtrière). Carefully choosing his experimental demonstrations so as to control the visual experience, Pasteur successfully defined this new “actor” to the public along weighted binaries: “absence/presence; before/after; living/dead;

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<sup>27</sup> Anne-Louise Shapiro draws the explicit connection between the value of solidarity and the public health movement: “Le concept de ‘solidarité’ se glissa de plus en plus dans les déclarations officielles et devint la philosophie sociale caractéristique de la Troisième République...La solidarité exaltait l’interdépendance de tous les membres de la société et employait le vocabulaire de l’obligation contractuelle pour démontrer que chaque individu est responsable du bien-être de tous et doit donc sacrifier volontairement des éléments de sa liberté personnelle dans l’intérêt de la communauté. La santé publique devint l’exemple parfait de l’application pratique de la solidarité.” Anne-Louise Shapiro, “Private Rights, Public Interest and Professional Jurisdiction: the French Public Health Law of 1902,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 54 (1980): 15.

<sup>28</sup> Latour, *Pasteur*, 63.

pure/impure, etc. (141, my translation). The *in vitro* methods (as opposed to Bernard's *in vivo* explorations) Pasteur used reinforced the ideology of visibility and also established Pasteur as the indisputable "master of ceremonies" of his theater, or, to use a political metaphor, the great *civilisateur* in his efforts to "cultivate" his microbial/bacterial "cultures."

By centering his scientific enterprise on this cunning if uncivilized character, Pasteur skirted traditional roadblocks of pigeonholing, which prominent men of science before him had had to face. He also did this through the publication of the Institute's *Annales* in which the microbe starred as a versatile actor maneuvering from one scientific discipline to the next: "[Les annales] peuvent...sans se disperser faire porter tous leurs efforts sur les quelques points d'hygiène, de biologie, d'administration, de pathologie sur lesquels le laboratoire leur permet d'être les plus forts...ils peuvent passer d'une discipline à l'autre" (170). The discipline-neutral laboratory permitted all of the cross-pollination exercised by microbiological studies. By focusing on the multifarious microbe, Pasteurians succeeded in revolutionizing both medicine and hygienic policy without ever getting bogged down in the more unsavory, "real" aspects implicated in the work: "[I]ls vont renouveler la médecine sans jamais prendre la maladie comme objet d'étude et renouveler la politique et l'hygiène sans jamais prendre l'homme pauvre ou déchu comme unité d'analyse" (ibid.).

Trickery is still involved in the Pasteurian paradigm of vaccination; however, in this case, the mechanism of the duplicity has shifted: instead of the vaccine adversely affecting the body by unbalancing the humoral disposition (and thus displacing the point of corporal vulnerability), as was the concern for Chrestien, here the microbe, the external "morbid" agent attenuated by Pasteur's treatment (what Latour labels as "le microbe-cultivé-dont-on-fait-varier-la

virulence”[168]) “compromises” itself by signaling its presence to the *terrain* (qualified here by Latour as “immunitary”): “C’est le microbe lui-même, un peu affaibli, qui va servir d’agent double et qui va, en allant prévenir le terrain immunitaire, trahir ses compagnons” (139).

However, Pasteur does not make the conceptual leap to understanding immunity as an active process. He maintains the language of negativity, seeing immunity as a passive bodily response (or lack thereof) that develops when the invasive microbes have exhausted the “nutrients” the body has to offer (thereby assuring that any future microbes of the same kind will ultimately die of “famine” when encountering the body still exhibiting signs of nutritional “depletion”). He uses this imagery of consumption when explaining the way his “cultured” microbe/virus secures immunity in the “Pasteurized” body:

A ceux qui s’étonnent de la durée limitée de l’immunité après l’inoculation de certaines maladies contagieuses, je répondrai ceci, car on peut aller loin lorsqu’on imagine: supposons que le caesium et le rubidium soient des éléments nécessaires à la vie des microbes-virus de la maladie dont il est question: qu’il en existe une petite quantité dans les tissus de l’animal inoculé et que cette petite quantité ait été *consommé* par une première culture du microbe-virus dans l’organisme inoculé, cet organisme restera *réfractaire* à une nouvelle inoculation jusqu’à ce que les tissus aient récupéré...J’ai envisagé l’organisme comme un *milieu de culture* qui, par une première atteinte du mal, perdrait sous l’influence de la culture du parasite des principes que la vie n’y ramène pas ou n’y ramène qu’après une certaine temps.<sup>29</sup>

We can chart how far we have moved away from the “organism” simply by noting the vocabulary shift from Bernard’s *milieu intérieur* (conceived as a sacred, auto-regulated internal

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<sup>29</sup> Louis Pasteur, *Œuvres*, ed. Pasteur Valléry-Radot, 7 volumes (Paris: Masson, 1922-1939), VI: 315 (my emphasis).

space) to Pasteur's easily manipulated and externally determined *milieu de culture*. Furthermore, Pasteur exchanges the word "immune" for "réfractaire." This lexical choice reinscribes the body into the political realm as a subordinate, albeit a recalcitrant one, since the most common definition of "réfractaire" is of a body (a person) who refuses to "submit" to authority.<sup>30</sup> There is still the implication of external, determinative pressure being exerted, placing the accent on the body's non-activity.

Ultimately, immunity did not capture Pasteur's imagination. The microbe's powers of fascination were "attenuated" for him once they passed under the "passive" skin, becoming invisible once again—and, ironically, leaving no trace of their "work" (unlike immunity gained through smallpox inoculation, which left a "battle" scar via the pock mark). Pasteur happily handed serious consideration of the phenomenon off to Elie Metchnikoff, the eccentric Russian zoologist/biologist/embryologist whom he appointed to the Institute in 1888, setting him up with his own lab to elaborate his "doctrine de l'immunité."<sup>31</sup> Metchnikoff was an "ennemi d'un ennemi,"<sup>32</sup> having conceived of a competing, cellular-based paradigm for immunity to the humoral, chemical explanation championed by Robert Koch. The phagocyte figures at the heart of Metchnikoff's theory, a small, wonder cell charged with the heavy responsibilities of protecting the organism, ensuring its integrity, as it constantly redraws the lines of what does and does not count as integral.

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<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, as Ed Cohen notes, Pasteur describes the effects of his vaccination as being of a "nonrecidivistic" nature. Cohen traces the word *récidive* back to its Latin root "recidivus" meaning "likely to fall again." It is used most commonly in the legal realm to designate the repetition of a crime or transgression that has already been committed. In this case, "nonrecidivity" is framed in the negative, as something that does not happen, that does not allow the body to "fall again," to "recommit" to illness. Pasteur's appropriation of the word prefigures a similar borrowing performed by the word immunity, itself, which also comes from the legal sphere, directly superimposing social and physical deviancy. See Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 249.

<sup>31</sup> Emile Roux, "Jubilé Metchnikoff," *Annales de l'Institut Pasteur* 29 (1915): 357.

<sup>32</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 49.

## Metchnikoff's Phagocyte: The Hungry Harmonizer

[The] phagocyte [is] a certain white globule of the blood, or leucocyte, which exercises a very remarkable action in our organism. The 'phagocytes' may be described as the policemen of the human organism. They are living germs of great voracity, and endowed with astonishing mobility, and they prey upon the harmful microbes that find their way in such astonishing numbers into our systems. These special white globules of the blood, or phagocytes, would seem to be possessed of some extraordinary 'flair,' or sense of smell, which immediately attracts them in large numbers to those parts of the organism where the presence of harmful microbes is revealed...The microbes are enveloped and absorbed by the phagocytes through the action of a special digestive sugar which they secrete for this purpose...<sup>33</sup>

The phagocyte emerges as the "Supercell" from this portrait, painted two years after Elie Metchnikoff received the Nobel Prize in Medicine (an award reluctantly shared with his German rival Paul Ehrlich) for his work on phagocytosis. Endowed with a keen sense of smell, the phagocyte "sniffs out" any microbe that dare set foot on his terrain, immediately rushing to the trespassed area, engulfing and devouring the offender. The story of Metchnikoff's "discovery" of these cells (by piercing the translucent skin of a starfish larva with a rose thorn to see these "mobile" cells race to the scene of infiltration) has instituted itself as one of immunology's founding myths.<sup>34</sup> In effect, with his articulation of the phagocyte (which Charles Brandreth, in his *London Magazine* article quotes almost word for word), Metchnikoff overturns Pasteur's

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Brandreth, "The Man Who Prolongs Life," *The London Magazine* 23: no.137 (January 1910): 578-79.

<sup>34</sup> Ed Cohen begins (and ends) his excavation of immunity with Metchnikoff's full personal account of his "discovery": "One day when the whole family had gone to a circus to see some extraordinary performing apes, I remained alone with y microscope, observing the life in the mobile cells of a transparent star-fish larva, when a new though suddenly flashed across my brain. It struck me that similar cells might serve *in the defense of the organism against intruders*...I said to myself that if my supposition was true, a splinter introduced into the body of a star fish larva, devoid of blood vessels or a nervous system; should soon be surrounded by mobile cells as is to be observed in a man who runs a splinter into his finger. This was no sooner said than done. There was a small garden to our dwelling...I fetched from it a few rose thorns and introduced them at once under the skin of the beautiful star-fish larvae as transparent as water. I was too excited to sleep that night in the expectation of the results of my experiment, and very early the next morning I ascertained that it had fully succeeded" (*A Body Worth Defending*, 1-2).

assertion of bodily passivity in the face of an avid, nutrient-starved microbe. He gives the "host cells" "the chops," so to speak; in Metchnikoff's imaginary, it is certainly not the microbe doing the eating and depleting.

Metchnikoff built his whole theory of immunity around the phagocyte, emphasizing the active role it plays in determining the body's constitution. Unlike Bernard who fixed *le milieu intérieur* as a homeostatic space striving to maintain a state of original, organic integrity, Metchnikoff vivifies the body as a site of constant movement and change. He reinterprets Darwin's theory of competition and survival for the theater of internal corporality where the heroic phagocyte squares off against the offending "morbid agent" in a fight to the death: "D'après cette hypothèse, la maladie se présenterait comme une lutte entre l'agent morbide, le microbe venant du dehors, et les cellules mobiles, propres à l'organisme. La guérison résulterait de la victoire de ces cellules et l'immunité serait la manifestation de leur activité, suffisante pour empêcher l'invasion par les microbes."<sup>35</sup> While this narrative highlights the phagocyte's role in protecting the organism, Alfred Tauber and Leon Chernyak emphasize the even more essential *definitional* function it performs: "The cardinal point to be elucidated is how Metchnikoff established an entirely new vision of the organism, one that arose from a potentially disharmonious evolved self made up of elements that had to be harmonized. For Metchnikoff, the phagocytes served as the principal harmonizing element; from the formulation, the basis of Self emerged and immunological defense and surveillance were born. More broadly, the idea of selfhood was revolutionized."<sup>36</sup> According to Tauber and Chernyak, Metchnikoff's theory transformed not only the science of the day but also the metaphysical understanding of identity,

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<sup>35</sup> Elie Metchnikoff, "Sur l'état actuel de la question de l'immunité dans les maladies infectieuses. Conférence Nobel fait à Stockholm le 14 mai 1909," *Les prix Nobel en 1908* (Stockholm : Impr. Royal), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Leon Chernyak and Alfred I. Tauber, *Metchnikoff and the Origins of immunology: From Metaphor to Theory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), xv.

placing emphasis for the first time on the capacity—indeed imperative—of the organism to identify, adapt and defend its “borders.” As such, the phagocyte *determined* self from other, only secondarily eliminating the latter, and it did so with the *intention* of restoring harmony to a fundamentally disharmonious being.<sup>37</sup>

Immunity, by virtue of the lines of inquiry it solicits (what are the boundaries of the organism? How do these boundaries change over time? Why? How? How does the organism maintain its integrity in a largely hostile universe as it heads for certain dissolution?, etc.), often compels scientists devoted to its study to moonlight as philosophers; Metchnikoff is perhaps the first example of this particular form of hybrid thinker. In addition to penning several scientific monographs on immunity, he also produced two "philosophical" works dedicated to analyzing the "disharmony in man." He embraces an orthobiotic definition of harmony that culminates not in an idealized state of perfect equilibrium, but rather in an ever-evolving "essence" secured to carry man closer and closer to physiological and moral happiness.<sup>38</sup> Metchnikoff combs documents far and wide from a variety of perspectives and disciplines (biological, historical, religious, political, and even esthetic) for descriptions of man's disharmonious existence, reasons for and solutions to it. His methodology knows no temporal or spatial limits; he extends his gaze beyond Occidental culture, referring (if with dubious accuracy) to writings about the Buddha,<sup>39</sup> or to Iranian reproductive myths (120), to give only two examples, and comfortably spans all of

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<sup>37</sup> Metchnikoff drew fire from his German colleagues (most notably Paul Ehrlich, with whom he shared the Nobel Prize), who embraced a humoral/chemical understanding of immunity, for endowing the phagocyte with "agency" and "teleological purpose." The German humoralists championed the "antibody" as the chemical agent responsible for neutralizing invasive cells. In contrast to the protean phagocyte, the antibody, has no "purpose" or "movement" of its own; the organism prophylactically "ejects" it into its internal fluids as a *reactive* (as opposed to a proactive) agent. See Crist and Tauber, "The phagocyte, the antibody, and agency in immunity," 130-135.

<sup>38</sup> Leon Chernyak and Alfred I. Tauber, "The Idea of Immunity: Metchnikoff's Metaphysics and Science," *Journal of the History of Biology* 23, no.2 (Summer 1990): 199-200.

<sup>39</sup> Metchnikoff, *Études sur la nature humaine*, 12.



human history. As a devoted Darwinist, he analyzes man's simian precursors, flies through Ancient Greece to Mesopotamia, to the Middle Ages, making pit stops in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, finally hopping to present day (as he speculates about the future). He shows no hierarchy in the sources he quotes, drawing equally on texts as disparate as pessimistic German philosophy to Indian medical treatises to Tolstoy's novels.

*Études sur la nature humaine: Essai de philosophie optimiste* (written in 1903) followed a few years later by *Essais optimistes* (1907) both grapple with the fundamental questions: why is human nature so profoundly out of sync both with itself (body and soul, the Cartesian duality, being so often pitted one against the other across cultures) and with its surroundings? Why can't man be like the digger wasp, which exists in perfect harmony with its environment and does so with "admirable mores"?<sup>40</sup> Man, comparable to the Icarian night moth drawn to the light only to have its wings burnt (46-47), exhibits, in his morphology and drives, any number of inexplicable traits and behaviors that either fail to serve in ensuring survival and propagating the species (from the repertoire of disharmonies he gives having to do with sexuality and reproduction, Metchnikoff highlights the classic futility of masturbation [123-23]) or, in some cases, even work against it (the hymen and the lack of a penile bone [104-5]; or, more seriously, the powerlessness of the "family instinct" to prevent a woman from seeking an "artificial" abortion [136-37]). Not to mention the deleterious effects mysterious forces like the unconscious, primed

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33. The traits Metchnikoff finds "admirable" in the digger wasp are the fact that it never sees its progeny, laying and sealing its eggs in the earth with all of the sustenance the larva will need to develop properly. It uses great discrimination in choosing its prey, limiting itself to one or two species. Instead of killing the insects it traps, it paralyzes them, knowing precisely where to sting so as only to immobilize, to ensure freshness for their offspring. As such, the larva grow and develop without expending any energy, being able to mobilize its forces for a healthy development.

to thwart man when he least expects it, can have on the evolution of his being. Moreover, Metchnikoff asks, in concert with Rousseau: why do only old people appreciate life?<sup>41</sup>

As a predictable positivist, Metchnikoff argues that science offers the most promise in ameliorating some of these conditions and posits the phagocyte as a (if not the) key player, though ambivalently. Through his writing, and as his interests evolved, Metchnikoff's portrait of this cell increased in complexity.<sup>42</sup> He splits the phagocytes into two groups: the microphages (the cells that lead the attack against microbes) and the macrophages (the "housecleaners," those that sop up blood from hemorrhaging and other "lesions mécaniques" [313]). While, in general, their role is "très bienfaisant" (313), if the macrophages, in particular, become *surexictés*, they begin ingesting the body's "éléments nobles" (315) (nerve cells, for example), a destruction which leads to—and accelerates—aging.<sup>43</sup> To ensure a long life (and a "non-pathological" old age), according to Metchnikoff, man's phagocytes have to be managed. In an illuminating article, Kirill Rossiianov likens the phagocyte to the "primitive element" in man, both his most vital and his least civilized element. As long as man (a relatively "young" species) still exhibited

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<sup>41</sup> Metchnikoff quotes Rousseau's *Emile* to advance his own argument: "'Nous nous inquiétons plus de notre vie à mesure qu'elle perd de son prix. Les vieillards la regrettent plus que les jeunes gens...'" (153).

<sup>42</sup> In fact, as his research progressed and his interests shifted away from immunity, per se, Metchnikoff became more and more interested in how to stave off the effects of *la vieillesse pathologique* (even coining the term "gerontology") enough so that man would reach a harmonious point when he would experience the "accomplissement du cycle complet et physiologique de la vie, avec une vieillesse normale qui aboutit à la perte de l'instinct de la vie et à l'apparition de l'instinct de la mort naturelle" (377).

<sup>43</sup> Metchnikoff offers a vivid example of their *surexcitation*, describing the process by which hair grays: "Les cheveux colorés sont remplis de grains de pigment, disséminés dans les deux couches qui constituent le cheveu. A un moment donné, les cellules de la moelle des cheveux *commencent à s'agiter*; elles sortent de leur torpeur et se mettent à *dévorer* tout le pigment qui est à leur portée. *Bourrées* de grains colorés, ces cellules qui constituent une variété de macrophages (désignés sous le nom de *pigmentophages*, ou mieux encore de *chromophages*), deviennent mobiles et quittent le cheveu, pour se diriger tantôt dans la peau, tantôt en dehors de l'organisme. De cette façon, les chromophages transportent avec eux le pigment des cheveux qui nécessairement deviennent incolores, blanchissent. Le mécanisme du blanchiment des cheveux et des poils présente de ce côté important qu'il indique une *surexcitation des macrophages* comme phénomène prédominant dans la dégénérescence sénile" (317).

evolutionary "growing pains" (the source of his "disharmony"), he would retain his more "atavistic" elements; this was particularly true of the "civilized" man who encountered the most disharmony between his "high" and "low" elements. Metchnikoff establishes a paradoxical hierarchy: while a push toward civilization is preferable, "lower" states of being exist in greater harmony.<sup>44</sup> His formulation of the phagocyte reinforces a notion of a "division of labor" in the body where the most "primitive" cells perform the most vital, "protective" functions; but they also have the potential to run amok. With each "ingestion" by the phagocyte—whether of a "malicious," microbial cell or of a "noble" cell perceived as effete or damaged—the organism, however minutely, changes form, remaining in a state of constant redefinition.

Metchnikoff's cellular-based understanding of the immune system, with its emphasis on immunity's identity conferring role, fell out of favor at the turn of the twentieth century when it failed to account for the phenomenon of immune specificity (the ability of the immune system to "recognize" and "eradicate" specific microbes while tolerating others). The competing German model, proposed by Paul Ehrlich, gained widespread acceptance for much of the first half of the century. Ehrlich's proposal advocated the notion of primary bodily integrity, an offshoot of Bernard's conception of the auto-regulated *milieu intérieur*, where the immune response serves only to *protect* the organism, engaging in a chemical neutralization through the antibody, a term coined by Ehrlich in 1891 (a word that admirably conveys the notion of bodily negation). Ironically, Metchnikoff viewed cellular immunity performed by the visible, "hungry" phagocyte as a more "ancient" and thus less "civilized" (evolved/perfected) form of immunity than Ehrlich's

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<sup>44</sup> Kirill Rossiianov makes a compelling argument about race, reading into Metchnikoff's formulation of the phagocyte an attempt to come to terms with Darwin's assertion of the "inequality of races." Metchnikoff's explanation of the cell as man's most primitive but absolutely vital element takes on Rousseauian overtones in the way it seemingly extols this cellular equivalent of the "noble savage" (while still asserting the superiority of the more "civilized" elements). However, in Metchnikoff's case, the discrepancy between the civilized and uncivilized parts of man was attributable to biology/evolution and not to exposure to culture. Kirill Rossiianov, "Taming the Primitive: Elie Metchnikov and His Discovery of Immune Cells," *Osiris* 23, no.1 (2008): 220.

"extra-cellular" model (225). Metchnikoff's theoretical understanding wouldn't find its relevancy again until the mid-nineteen forties when Frank Burnet, an Australian virologist, returned to Metchnikoff in his investigations of two phenomena for which he was unable to find an explanation using the humoral paradigm.<sup>45</sup> Burnet confirmed immunity as a *biological* (i.e. cellular) endeavor and also elaborated a theory—Clonal Selection Theory (still the most widely accepted model explaining the immune system, though several competing narratives or nuances have since been proposed)—accounting for immune specificity through the passing on of an immune "memory." Burnet proposed that cellular encounters with antigens would become recorded into the biological makeup of the cell, itself, and thus get reproduced through cell division, expanding the repertory of antibody production in later cell lineages. In 1949, based on his observations, Burnet introduced the term self/non-self into the immunological lexicon (Metchnikoff never made this ontological leap in his writing, only ever employing the neutral term "organism") and confirmed the role of the immune system as the primary regulator of biological identity.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> These two phenomena were immune tolerance (the lack of a response of the immune system to a "non-self" presence) and autoimmunity (the response of the immune system to the self as if it were other, what Ehrlich had called *horror autotoxicus*—literally the "horror of self-toxicity"—and had ruled out as an impossibility).

<sup>46</sup> In fact, these opposing viewpoints both draw on ancient notions of the body, as elaborated by Georges Canguilhem. Ehrlich's—and Bernard's—view harkens back to the ancient Egyptians who regarded the body as inherently healthy. Faced with illness, the ontological organism reacts to rid itself of the caustic elements with the goal of returning to its original form. In other words, "La maladie entre et sort de l'homme comme par la porte," leaving the interior essentially unchanged (Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique* [Paris : PUF, 1966], p.11). Metchnikoff's view, on the contrary, finds kinship with the concept held in ancient Greece that regarded both illness and health as internal forces shaping the organism. According to this paradigm, « La maladie n'est pas seulement déséquilibre ou dysharmonie, elle est aussi, et peut-être surtout, effort de la nature en l'homme pour obtenir un nouvel équilibre » (12). Canguilhem finds common ground between the two viewpoints in their shared articulation of struggle: "Ces deux conceptions ont pourtant un point commun: dans la maladie, ou mieux dans l'expérience de l'être malade, elles voient une situation polémique, soit une lutte de l'organisme et d'un être étranger, soit une lutte intérieur de forces affrontées" (13). « Battle, » or more precisely of « war, » continues to be the primary metaphor used to characterize the body's mode of interaction.

## **From G.O.D. to A.N.T.: Metchnikoff's legacies**

Though I do not have the space here to develop an extensive exposition of Metchnikoff's legacies up to the present day, two concepts—the question of immune memory/cognition and self "insensitivity" vs. self recognition/reaction—remain fundamentally unresolved sticking points. Burnet's "Clonal Selection Theory" (CST) is based on the idea that, as an embryo develops, the lymphocyte population<sup>47</sup> is winnowed down (either through self-selection or self-deletion) so that only "self-tolerant" or "self-nonreactive" cells (i.e. cells that do not produce antibodies against tissue coded as "self") survive to continue cloning past the embryonic stage. Meanwhile, as the body comes into contact with various antigens (bacteria, viruses as well as other cells coded as "non-self"), the lymphocytes specialize so that each lymphocyte is programmed with a particular antigen "receptor"; the lymphocyte will activate once it "senses" the presence of the antigen. Within these specializations, the lymphocytes are further divided into two groups: those that create the antibody to neutralize the antigen, and those that conserve the "image" of that antigen so as to pass it on to the "daughter cells," thus making it part of the antibody repertoire or "memory." The creation of this repertory through the "specialization" of lymphocytes is called the G.O.D. mechanism—the "generation of [antibody] diversity."

Within the CST model, the "immune system" (i.e. coordinated subpopulations of lymphocytes) only "sees" and "reacts" to other—it is "blind" and "non-reactive" to self (since the self-reactive lymphocytes are "deleted" early on). During the 1970s, when structuralism was

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<sup>47</sup> Lymphocytes are the group of cells responsible for carrying out adaptive immune functions, which require antibody specificity—i.e. the ability to use the "correct" antibody against any given "antigen." Alfred Tauber calls the lymphocyte the "Rosetta Stone," the key to "fus[ing] humoral and cellular branches of immunity" (Tauber, *The Immune Self*, 120). In contrast, phagocytes form part of innate immunity, meaning they attack all "intruders" indiscriminately, using their only defense: their formidable powers of digestion. Once they have "digested" the cells, certain phagocytes (the macrophage) retain part of the "intruder" to present" to the receptive lymphocyte, triggering the mass production of clones of that particular lymphocyte once the antigen has been "recognized."

being debated across disciplines (a debate we addressed in chapter 1), Niels Jerne, a Danish scientist, reimagined the CST model while still adhering to its essential principles. He proposed that, instead of "seeing" the antigen and retreating back into "blindness" once the offending presence has been "removed," its memory is kept "alive" to the point that it is incorporated into the self-image. Under Jerne's "network" model (very schematically), immunity is a perpetually active state where cells are constantly presenting images of themselves to the other selves: all cells are both recognized and recognizer. "Regulation" and "coordination" are the key words; Jerne erected a complex system of checks and balances based on recognition, memory and acknowledgment not only of "other" but also of "self." Jerne's vision frames the immune system as a parallel to the nervous system, where cells are constantly interacting (self-reacting, self-reflecting, and self-defining) amongst themselves. They work in concert, not as separate, individually vulnerable parts, but rather as a whole. And yet, the main stimulus for the immune response under Jerne's network model is still the encounter with "other."

In the last few decades, GOD has come under scrutiny by a group of immunologists known as the "Paris School" (Antonio Coutinho, John Steward, Francisco Varela, Nelson Vaz, to name only a few). As we mentioned, GOD is based on the notion that immune "stimulation" must come from the "outside"; the system does not inherently react to the self. The Paris School sought to overturn this paradigm, proposing their own competing (more modest) acronym A.N.T.: autonomous network theory.<sup>48</sup> ANT is an elaborated—and liberated—version of Jerne's network model, based on the notion of autopoiesis (from the Greek meaning self-creation or self-production). According to ANT, the system does not need external stimulation. Rather, it is constantly in touch with itself, carrying out its own operations of which antigen "recognition" is

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<sup>48</sup> See Tauber, *The Immune Self*, 172-77.

only one. "Self-reactivity" is a normal activity. The autonomous network relies on a "dual" track system: a "central immune system" (CIS—comparable to the central nervous system) and a "peripheral immune system." The CIS sees to the everyday functioning of the system; it is the core of immune activity. The PIS is in charge of dealing with "foreign intrusion," relegating what had before been considered the main immune activity quite literally to the periphery. In short, this model takes the notion of cognition to yet another level and reinforces the impression of the immune system as a holistic, self-regulating system, not in Bernard's homeostatic sense (with his deeply recessed, withdrawn and unknowable *milieu intérieur*), but rather as constantly interacting, constantly changing entity: a cosmopolitan biological citizen, an engaged member of the greater universe fully responsible for its self-. Anne-Marie Moulin underlines this fundamental sense of unicity at the heart of ANT: "Une première conséquence [du choix de la métaphore de réseau] est le retour à une théorie uniciste de la maladie, où l'accent est mis non plus sur une cause externe, mais sur la responsabilité de l'organisme lui-même."<sup>49</sup>

ANT has led a new generation of immunologists to contest the validity and usefulness of the self/non-self paradigm, the pillar of immunological theory since Burnet proposed the distinction at the end of the 1940s. Theorists such as Thomas Pradeu have returned to fundamental questions of organismal unity: What counts as an individual in the world of the living? Is each living being unique and, if so, what keeps this uniqueness intact? As we saw in our discussion of Nancy, transplant technology has thrown into sharp relief the issue of biological selfhood. A bounded self can now be cajoled/coerced into accepting a "foreign" entity, an integration of other that would otherwise be "naturally" inconceivable but upon which the self is dependent for survival. Similarly, autoimmunity also blurs boundaries between self

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<sup>49</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 407.

and non-self, when the organism seemingly fails to recognize its own constituent parts to its great detriment.

Genetically, the major histocompatibility complex (MHC), a molecule ("discovered" in the early 1980s) that exists on the surface of cells to mediate leucocyte interactions (immune cells) by signaling "self" from "non-self"<sup>50</sup>, would seem to reaffirm self-hood at a cellular level. The genetic MHC basis, infinitely diverse, becomes increasingly specialized as the entity "lives," encountering its "own" environments as well as the genetic makeup and environments of "others." The expression of this particular specialization of immunity (there is a large degree of variation from one being to the next) is called the phenotype, and it is the best way to distinguish one individual from another (14-15).

While these self-markers indisputably play an important role in keeping an organism more or less "together," Pradeu, along with others, suggest they limit and even obfuscate the "reality" of organismal survival. In lieu of self/non-self,<sup>51</sup> which inadequately accounts for biological identity, Pradeu proposes what he calls a theory of "continuity." Immunology, as it is currently conceived and practiced, offers an accurate explanation of *diachronic* individuality. It does not, however, succeed in painting a complete picture of biological identity for two major reasons. First of all, its experimental scope is too limited: it only includes vertebrates in its experimental lens. Pradeu argues that all living creatures—amoebas, algae, fungi, plants and animals—all exhibit immune functions. Secondly, it fails to take into account the extent to which organisms—especially humans—are NOT single-substance entities. Rather, they are complex ecosystems that, to function properly, depend on the interactions of many different

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<sup>50</sup> Pradeu refers to the MHC as the "identity card" for an organism. Thomas Pradeu, *Les limites du soi: Immunologie et identité biologique* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2009), 13.

<sup>51</sup> Pradeu unpacks the semantic slipperiness of the term "self" ("soi"), identifying no fewer than five possible definitions for the word (47-49).



organisms. As Pradeu recapitulates: "...[L]'organism n'est pas une réalité endogène, autrement dit que l'organisme n'est pas l'ensemble des constituants biologiques issus des divisions successives et autonomes d'une cellule œuf..[L]'organisme est, au contraire, une réalité hétérogène, c'est-à-dire faite de constituants d'origines différentes" (19).

In other words, Pradeu advocates pushing man off his clean, closed and shiny "immunocompetent" pedestal, stripping him of his exceptional status and placing him on a continuum of multi-dimensional immune functions that apply to all living creatures. One component of this theory has been a leveling of cell hierarchy. Much of immune theory has focused on the "defensive" cells and, particularly, the "killer T-cells" responsible for eradicating invaders. Under these new theories, there has been a shift of focus away from the "defense" cells to the "definitional" cells, namely to the macrophages—part of the phagocytic family—responsible for "cleaning up" the organism, ridding it not only of the deactivated antigens but of its own dying or malfunctioning cells. As Jean-Claude Ameisen has shown, programmed cellular death and phagocytosis are indispensable to maintaining a healthy organism. He uses the metaphor of the sculpteur to describe the process of cellular "suicide" for neural and immunological cells: "Dans les ébauches de notre cerveau et de notre système immunitaire...la mort cellulaire est partie intégrante d'un processus étrange d'apprentissage et d'auto-organisation dont l'aboutissement n'est pas la sculpture d'une forme mais celle de notre mémoire et de notre identité...Nous sommes, à tout moment, pour partie en train de mourir et pour partie en train de renaître."<sup>52</sup> Ameisen further claims that most diseases—cancer, AIDS, degenerative neural diseases, heart conditions, strokes, etc.—can be traced to a faulty execution of cellular suicide and, by extension, cellular cleanup (17).

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<sup>52</sup> Jean Claude Ameisen, *La sculpture du vivant: Le suicide cellulaire ou la mort créatrice* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003), 16-17.

This renewed interest in the phagocyte family would certainly have pleased Metchnikoff, despite his own wariness of the more "savage," self-directed behaviors of his prized cell. The valorization of the importance of immune auto-regulation and auto-reactivity has also encouraged young scientists to formulate radical solutions to the perplexing problem of autoimmunity. Based on the notion of the importance of a diverse internal ecosystem, a new; provocative theory of the phenomenon has recently been proposed by Moises Velasquez-Manoff who links autoimmune activity to what he calls an "epidemic of absence" in modern, developed, post-capitalist societies.

Velasquez-Manoff identifies the loss of "critical immune stimuli" (the bacteria, virus and parasites so effectively expunged by behavior mandated by the Purell imperative and other such hyper-hygienic directives) as a potential trigger for the inexplicable turning of self against self. While measures to improve sanitation and to ward off illness have indisputably saved countless lives, they have also paradoxically rendered us more susceptible to self-directed maladies— allergies, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, even autism—precisely because they limit the number of germs available to keep our immune systems "occupied." He convincingly charts the inverse relationship between the incidence of infectious disease and that of immune disorders.<sup>53</sup> While he personally pursues the potential benefits of one particular form of therapy (the deliberate introduction of the parasitic hookworm into the body—a therapy makes even the least Purell-inclined of us a little squeamish), he advocates for a more general "ecosystem restoration project" (305). He turns the metaphor of the body at war on its head by insisting on the vital importance of the on-going "peace-making process": "...[T]he body is a country where considerable effort goes toward cooperation with other organisms. The gut, perhaps our

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<sup>53</sup> Moises Velasquez-Manoff, *An Epidemic of Absence: A New Way of Understanding Allergies and Autoimmune Diseases* (New York: Scribner, 2012), 7.

preeminent immune organ, serves as the primary command center for this endeavor...The makeup and dynamism of the living community it houses, therefore, have far-reaching consequences. Perhaps most essential, for the immune system, *peacekeeping is an active process, not an absence of process*. Equilibrium is not necessarily the default setting, but a talent that's developed" (304, emphasis in original). Moreover, he argues that the bacteria that can be found in the modern environment—lingering on computer keyboards, in central air ducts, or in prepackaged food containers—are the ones most harmful to humans. These bacteria only exist in man-made environments: they are unable to survive in more complex, "natural" settings. As he concludes: "Opening the window and letting in outdoor microbes literally makes a room healthier" (306).

In short, the vision of the internal body and the interaction between its mysterious mechanisms and the outside world has evolved dramatically since Claude Bernard first espoused *le milieu intérieur*. What was first imagined as a protected, efficiently running Atlantis has morphed into a messy zone of active tolerance where conflictual interactions are not only inevitable but indispensable, giving us good reason to begin exposing our *terrain* to dirtier terrain.

### **Chapter 3: *Inn  it   and Puncturability* in   mile Zola's *Le Docteur Pascal***

On June 1, 1889, before a gathering of the Biological Society in Paris, Charles Brown-S  quard, the brilliant doctor and physiologist who, in 1878, had succeeded Claude Bernard as the professor of experimental medicine at le Coll  ge de France, revealed the results of an unorthodox experiment he had recently conducted on himself. Noting that he had often wondered whether the reduction of vitality in an older man might, in part, be explained by a decrease in testicular function, the seventy-two year old recounted the administration, first in his arm and then in his thigh, of eight injections. These shots contained a carefully prepared solution of mashed up testicular tissue, testicular blood and semen. The tissue samples had been collected not from fellow humans but rather from dogs and guinea pigs of varying ages (but all “vigorous”). While suffering only some localized swelling at the injection sites and substantial though still manageable pain, the doctor testified to a notable upswing in overall vitality and, euphemistically, in “d’autres forces qui n’  taient pas perdues mais qui   taient diminu  es...”<sup>1</sup> He elaborated his findings, entering into great and intimate detail about the physical infirmities that had been plaguing him (fatigue when trying to work, inability to climb stairs quickly, a weak stream of urine, difficulty defecating). With the help of the injections, he triumphantly attested to having turned back the clock: “Je puis...maintenant sans difficult   et m  me sans y penser, monter et descendre des escaliers presque en courant, ce que j’avais toujours fait jusqu’   l’  ge de

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Brown-S  quard, “Des effets chez l’homme produits par les injections sous-cutan  es d’un liquide retir   des testicules frais de cobaye et de chien,” *Comptes rendus des s  ances de la Soci  t   de biologie et de ses filiales*, vol.41 (Paris, New York : Masson), 418.

soixante ans...[L]e travail intellectuel m'est devenu plus facile qu'il n'a été depuis plusieurs années et... *j'ai regagné, à cet égard, tout ce que j'avais perdu*" (417-418 my emphasis).

Recovering a perceived lost ability to “get (it) up” resonated with a French public still reeling from their devastating loss at the hands of the Prussians in 1870, which was immediately followed by the "autoimmune" uprising of the Commune. While it is likely that the positive effects Brown-Séquard claimed to experience were attributable more to a placebo than to any real effects produced by this nineteenth-century version of Viagra,<sup>2</sup> his “elixir of life” captured the collective imagination. Indeed, the last quarter of the 1800s has been identified by a number of prominent historians as a period of crisis for the model of masculinity in France and in Western Europe, in general.<sup>3</sup> There was a pervasive sense that men had grown physically weak, lacking will, courage, and stamina to the point that their ability to assume and perform their traditional tasks (as builder and ruler over family—and, by extension, country) had come deeply

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<sup>2</sup> We now know that testes do not stock testosterone. Brown-Séquard's experiments did, however, result in the development of organ therapy and, eventually, the birth of endocrinology.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Nye argues the male body subsumed the anxieties surrounding degeneration, reproduction and population during the second half of the nineteenth century. At this time, France was experiencing an unusually low birth-rate, characterized particularly by a dearth of little boys, which was interpreted as a sign of national weakness. *Dénatalité* provoked a crisis of masculinity, since the father was generally assumed to be the decisive factor in the fetus' early development. In a reversal of today's paradigm, according to Nye, women were considered to exhibit a more stable sexual viability, unlike men who were prone to ebbing sexual vigor and waning desire: "The unusual decline of the 'masculine' sex ratio in France was not believed...to be a 'normal' phenomenon. On the contrary, the 'debility' that had caused a drying up of male births was characterized as a general 'sign of exhaustion and regression of the race, a symptom of deplorable degenerescence,' an indication that the 'race was wounded in its virility.' Both of the worrisome aspects of the population 'problem' were therefore also problems of masculinity, of a deficiency of male sexual vigor that was often linked to aged fathers or 'unmasculine' men, but was also observed among men of acknowledged masculine aspect." *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 86-87.

Judith Surkis, in contrast, contests the "crisis" model, claiming that masculinity was always an unstable category, and it was precisely from this instability that the category derived its power: "The contemporary rhetoric of 'crisis' and the tropes that were used to articulate it—depopulation, exhaustion, *déclassement*, criminality, disease, and racial degeneration—were not threats to a presumptively stable male subject. They can be seen, instead, as expressions of a precariousness that constituted the force of masculinity as norm. My account does not paradoxically imply that elite bourgeois men were powerless. Rather I show how instability fueled the regulatory logic by which an idealized masculinity and a specific configuration of social and political power were articulated and maintained." Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 12.

into question. Brown-Séguard's experiment soothed these anxieties, if only momentarily, offering a promising remedy to the worries that, in both young and old, virility, itself, was on the wane.

Brown-Séguard's rejuvenating exploits, emblematic of the perceived power of science—and, more precisely, medicine—to overcome the fundamental vicissitudes of human existence, exerted great imaginative influence not only over the scientific minds of the day but also over France's most illustrious literati. Emile Zola, whose prolific work testifies to the inextricable merging of scientific and literary discourse, without doubt uses Brown-Séguard as one (though not the only) of his scientific models in *Le Docteur Pascal*, the last tome of his formidable 20-volume *Rougon-Macquart* series. Published in 1893, *Le Docteur Pascal* recounts the story of the eponymous doctor, né Pascal Rougon, who devises a “revitalizing” cure very similar to that of Brown-Séguard. One passage, in particular, closely echoes Brown-Séguard's account, and yet Zola pushes the curative possibilities of this treatment further, harboring grandiose plans for its intended use; with his twentieth century alchemical *piqûres*, Pascal hopes to accomplish nothing short of “remaking an entirely new and superior humanity”:

[A]yant doublé et triplé la dose, [Pascal] fut ravi, un matin, au lever, *de retrouver ses jambes de vingt ans*[...] et il respirait plus largement, *il travaillait avec une lucidité, une aisance, qu'il avait perdue depuis des années*. Tout un bien-être, toute une joie de vivre l'inondait[...] Et devant cette trouvaille de l'alchimie du vingtième siècle, un immense espoir s'ouvrait, il croyait avoir découvert la panacée universelle, la liqueur de vie destinée à combattre la débilité humaine, seule cause réelle de tous les maux, une véritable et scientifique fontaine de Jouvence, qui, en donnant de la force, de la santé et de la volonté, referait une humanité toute neuve et supérieure.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. M. le Blond, t.22 (Paris: Bernouard, 1928), 41. All future references will be abbreviated as *DP* and cited in the body of the text.

*Le Docteur Pascal* is positioned at the fraught intersections of conflicting medical discourses where what is at stake is the relationship of influence between the body's inside to the external environment. As we discussed in the last chapter, Claude Bernard, the father of experimental medicine, at the end of the 1860s, had articulated a vision of an internal body cut off from the external world, existing in a self-enclosed, self-regulated and largely impenetrable space. Ed Cohen masterfully shows how, at the height of the Second Empire, Bernard's vision of the internal body translated into a radical understanding of the individual self liberated from society's constraints, accountable only to the self-sufficient maintenance of its *milieu intérieur*. Cohen identifies this dual movement of separation and sealing off as the first consolidated expression of the immune body as we understand it.<sup>5</sup> Zola was seduced by Bernard's vision and methods as well as by this view of the exceptional, self-determined individual. He, however, believed that an individual could never be fully extracted from his *milieu extérieur*. Zola takes Bernard's theories of the *milieu intérieur* and internal determination to what he viewed as the next logical step, employing the experimental method in the literary realm to test and understand man's passions and thoughts—his internal psychical movements—as they relate both to bodily disposition and to their translation into externalized expressions. He was also keenly interested in how outside intervention might help “correct” or “exacerbate” bodily deficiencies and defects. In a word, Zola sought to reintroduce the interior to the exterior while keeping the individual intact.

In his initial outline of what would eventually become his Rougon-Macquart series, Zola proposed two objectives to his publisher: while examining the social make-up and ramifications of the rise and fall of the Second Empire, Zola envisioned offering a comprehensive portrait of a

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<sup>5</sup> Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, 198.

family whose members would be “reliés les uns aux autres par un lien puissant qui en fera un seul et vaste ensemble.”<sup>6</sup> This statement is bursting with irony, given that the “lien puissant”—the thing holding the family (and the writing project) together—is nothing other than the very broken hereditary defect: *la fêlure*—literally translated as the crack, break or rupture.

In his proposal, Zola further elaborates his vision for this “physiological study,” using terms that indicate a profound desire to dig in dark, secluded spaces, to dive into the “crack,” as it were: “Étudier dans une famille les questions de sang et de milieux. Suivre pas à pas *le travail secret qui donne aux enfants d’un même père des passions et des caractères différents* à la suite des croisements et des façons particulières de vivre. *Fouiller en un mot au vif même du drame humain, dans ces profondeurs de la vie où s’élaborent les grandes vertus et les grands crimes, et y fouiller d’une façon méthodique, conduit par le fil des nouvelles découvertes physiologiques*” (*RM* 5, 1756). With the enunciation of his desire to “*fouiller...au vif*,” Zola is handing his publisher a project of methodical dissection not only of the exterior manifestations of this family’s drama, but of its very interior workings.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, his dismissal of the father’s ability to determine his children and his focus on the “secret work” shaping character from within cannot help but evoke the place and space of the mother as a site of differentiation and potential danger.

Adeline Wrona convincingly argues that Pascal can be seen as a mediating figure, then, the link Zola fashions to tarry with scientific conundrum of the day and weave them into his

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<sup>6</sup> Emile Zola, “1<sup>er</sup> plan remis à Lacroix,” in *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire*, ed. Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand, t.5 (Paris : Gallimard [La Pléiade], 1967), 1755. All future references will be abbreviated as *RM* 5 and cited in the body of the text.

<sup>7</sup> Several years after he had finished the *Rougon-Macquart* series and moved on to what has been characterized as his more idealized writing in *Les Quatre Evangiles*, Zola, in a letter to Octave Mirabeau from 1899, reflected on his previous approach in these very terms: “Voici quarante ans que je dissèque, il faut bien permettre à mes vieux jours de rêver un peu.” Emile Zola, *Correspondance: Les lettres et les arts* (Paris: Charpentier, 1908), 347.



fiction.<sup>8</sup> He initially envisioned the good doctor as a fictional incarnation of Claude Bernard;<sup>9</sup> Pascal is, in many ways, the embodiment of Bernard's ideals, endowed with both biological and social immunity in the senses we discussed in the previous chapter. He is a character set apart by his unique expression of heredity and positively cast as an iconoclast outsider. Pascal lives happily separate in a self-enclosed, self-sufficient world, untouched by the troubles plaguing the rest of his family or the society at large. It is this immunity that permits him to assume the role of authorship and engage in projects of edification that have the express intention to "heal." Concomitantly, Pascal serves as a role model for the younger generation who had fallen prey to the degenerative *air du temps*. He has high hopes of dragging France out of its slump and leading it gloriously and resolutely into the twentieth century by rendering its *faiblesses* transparent so as better to fix them. Chastising his mother for having dared utter a negative word against his beloved country, Pascal defends France's future: "Laissez donc la France tranquille, ma mère!...La France a la vie dure, et je trouve qu'elle est en train d'étonner le monde par la rapidité de sa convalescence... certes, il y a bien des éléments pourris. Je ne les ai pas cachés, je les ai trop étalés peut-être. Mais vous ne m'entendez guère, si vous vous imaginez que je crois à l'effondrement final, parce que je montre les plaies et les lézardes. Je crois à la vie qui élimine sans cesse les corps nuisibles, qui refait de la chair pour boucher les blessures, qui marche quand même à la santé, au renouvellement continu, parmi les impuretés et la mort" (*DP*, 98).

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<sup>8</sup> Adeline Wrona, "*Le Docteur Pascal*, Conclusion théorique et conclusion romanesque des *Rougon-Macquart*," *Récits de la pensée: Etudes sur le roman et l'essai*, ed. Gilles Philippe (Paris: Sedes, 2000), 247-255.

<sup>9</sup> The Goncourts quoted Zola expressing his intention to model Pascal after Claude Bernard in their journal entry dated the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1890: "Mais au fond, le livre qui me parle, qui a un charme pour moi, c'est le dernier, où je mettrai en scène un savant...Ce savant, je serais tenté de le faire d'après Claude Bernard, par la communication de ses papiers, de ses lettres. Ce sera amusant...je ferai un savant marié avec un [sic] femme rétrograde, bigote, qui détruira ses travaux à mesure qu'il travaille" (*RM* 5, 1569).

Many scholars consider *Le Docteur Pascal* as the crowning achievement of Zola's naturalism, the depiction of a doctor who has devoted his life to documenting truth objectively, investing his faith in science's ability to usher humanity into a brighter era. According to Zola's preparatory notes on the novel, this reading was, in fact, his optimistic "takeaway."<sup>10</sup> I, however, see a more vexed legacy, locating the novel at the crossroads of naturalism, decadence and modernism. Pascal, considered as Zola's alter-ego, the dispassionate chronicler of his family's cursed heredity, half-way through the novel abandons his commitment to his life's goals and writing. At this point, the narrative retreats from a naturalistic perspective, focused on accurately documenting the external world, into a more internal, irrational reality driven by passion and desire, where decorative artifices abound despite lack of funds, where physical realities and taboos are ignored or transcended by the powerful force of myth and imagination.

Moreover, his own powers of narrative mastery veer off course. Pascal's scientific efforts are consistently challenged by the unanswerable question of origins over which he fails to assert authority. The looming gap of comprehension regarding the beginning of the story is matched by a progressive "opening" of an abyss within Pascal himself. He who had remained isolated and insulated from the family's teleology and from society's degeneration—out of the fray—suddenly finds himself tumbling head first into his own story and into THE story, increasingly manifesting tell-tale traits that resemble those he had long documented in his relatives: obsession (unchecked "passion"), engagement in behavior widely considered forbidden (incest), tendency toward excess (*la folie du don*), and an insatiable appetite (in his case *une faim de jeunesse*, the complement to the voracious appetite of work responsible for "devour[ing] his

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<sup>10</sup> Zola defined his "objectives" at the top of his "Plan définitif": "Un cantique à la vie, Un cri de santé quand même, d'espoir en l'avenir...conclure par une large confiance en la vie" (*RM* 5, 1714).

existence”) (*DP*, 152). At the threshold of sixty, Pascal loses his immune status and is ultimately incorporated into the family’s history: he is left dead, a decadent anti-hero sapped of his vitality, “l’oeuvre...restant quand même inachevée” (283). His “fall” and demise unsettle the reader. How are we to understand the failings of this initially exceptional male body so devoted to scientific pursuits? What legacy—or model—persists when he leaves his family (a microcosm of society) both fatherless and nameless?

On the other hand, the narrative ultimately ends by leaving open the question of authorship while subtly extolling the creative individualism of Clotilde, Pascal’s niece and lover. We are told from the beginning that Clotilde’s “art” departs from traditional forms of representation. Yet, presumably, as Janet Beizer compellingly argues, it is precisely Clotilde who resurrects the entire series from the charred scraps salvaged from the fire.<sup>11</sup> Ending his series (which is *quand même* rooted in the principle of matriarchal “contamination” via *la fêlure*) with the idealization of the powers of this as-yet-undefined feminine, unabashedly maternal horizon, Zola can be considered a precursor to the men of modernity who, as Alice Jardine perceives, deploy “woman-in-effect,” woman as “process” or as “verb” to bolster textual legitimation at the beginning of an era where the father has fallen out of favor and into ruin.<sup>12</sup>

In what follows, I will explore the stakes of this seeming reversal of gender values as the way in which Zola unseals and reorganizes the masculine body. I argue that he challenges Bernard’s widely accepted vision, potentially paving the way for a new discourse about the

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<sup>11</sup> Janet Beizer, “Remembering and Repeating the *Rougon-Macquart*,” *L’Esprit Createur* 25, no.4 (Winter 1985):53.

<sup>12</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, 27. Sarah Harrow takes a prospective approach to Zola’s work, making the case for a “modernist” Zola. See Sarah Harrow, *Zola, The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (London: Legenda, 2010).

workings of the male (read universal) body's interior. At the same time, however, Zola muddies his message to the new generation, throwing into question the place of science, the image of what constitutes a "virile" man and the costs "virility" exacts. *Le Docteur Pascal* offers a cautionary tale of the dangers of opening the body—and oneself—up to "life" while sending an ambiguous message of the male subject's ability to hold up under the exigencies of supposedly "virile" science. Ultimately, it is not dry, sealed-off, masculine scientific discourse that triumphs to birth the new century but rather the open-ended doubts of the mother, which border on vitalistic hope in the face of the poorly understood movements of "life" and determination, whose child's body and words have yet to be decided.

### **Masculinity under siege**

In *The Image of Men*, George Mosse identifies the period after 1870 up until World War I as one of the few that truly challenged the Western masculine ideal. This physical ideal is succinctly depicted by a certain Dr. François Foy in a generic mid-century hygiene manual destined for the masses:

...[L]'homme qui se porte bien a le teint plus ou moins animé, la carnation fraîche, la peau souple, les traits calmes et heureux, le port droit, la stature aisée, la démarche sûre et hardie, le travail du corps et de l'esprit facile, le repos doux et réparateur, les fonctions régulières, l'appétit bon, la digestion prompte, les excréments proportionnelles, la respiration grande, la circulation régulière, l'intelligence en rapport avec le genre des occupations ordinaires, le caractère bon, les passions calmes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> François Foy, *Manuel d'hygiène, ou Histoire des moyens propres à conserver la santé et à perfectionner le physique et le moral de l'homme* (Paris : G. Baillière, 1845), 3.

The descriptive words Foy uses underline normative notions of regularity, proportionality and balance. The inside organs work in concert to assure the calm and contained outer appearance.

The hygienic movement, which flourished under Napoleon I and extended throughout the century, emphasized the relationship between human mental and emotional capacity and the body's inner workings, linking morality with physiology. Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis was the first to articulate clearly this relationship between morality and physiology. With grand hopes of establishing a comprehensive "SCIENCE OF MAN," Cabanis articulated a philosophy around man as primarily a social creature, capable of feeling the pain of others. To limit this pain, Cabanis envisioned an overhaul of the way medicine and health were considered in society. Health was a good to be actively preserved to ensure proper moral practices. Moreover, betraying his own misgivings about heredity's power to pass on corrupt morals, with future generations in mind, Cabanis accentuates the importance of righting—indeed perfecting—man's health in that very moment:

En un mot, en embrassant à la fois le physique et le moral; en indiquant les rapports et les moyens par lesquels ils agissent l'un sur l'autre on doit aspirer à faire servir ces connaissances, une fois bien vérifiées, au perfectionnement de tout l'individu. Et même rappelons ici ce que j'ai fait remarquer ailleurs: l'observation constante des siècles atteste que les dispositions physiques se transmettent des pères aux enfants : quelques faits certains, plusieurs analogies d'un grand poids, et l'ensemble des lois de l'économie animale, portent à croire -, en outre, que certaines dispositions morales se propagent également par la voie de la génération. On doit donc porter ses regards encore plus loin, en traçant des règles de régime; c'est au perfectionnement général de l'espèce humaine qu'on doit aspirer.<sup>14</sup>

Each individual body, for the hygienists, was seen as an element always tied to the greater social context. A body did not exist as a separate entity, but rather was one in a chain of beings,

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<sup>14</sup> Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, *Œuvres complètes de Cabanis*, vol.1 (Paris: Firmin Didot, Père et Fils, 1823), 303-304.

influencing the other links around it. To maintain a healthy society, *everybody* had to be cared for, tended; proper bodily maintenance ensured proper morality. As such, in a “healthy” man, the exterior traits—supple, calm and fresh—were taken to reflect interior, moral qualities of *droiture*, assuredness and strength. Health and general goodness of character go together and are visible, a harmonious exterior reflecting a well-ordered, well-functioning interior.

And yet, at the time when Dr. Foy was writing his description, pronouncements that not only French but human society, in its entirety, had entered into a state of decline, had truly taken hold of scientific discourse. A number of factors contributed to a general sense of perilous deterioration. Poverty and criminality were on the rise while contagious diseases—cholera, tuberculosis and syphilis—continued to ravage the population. The actual ways disease spreads were poorly understood (germ theory, as discussed in the Introduction, was not “discovered” by Pasteur until the 1860s), contributing to a sense of inevitability and helplessness.<sup>15</sup> Benedict Augustin Morel, in his 1857 *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humain*, grouped all of these factors under the umbrella term of « degeneration, » noting his astonishment when faced with “[I]a progression incessante en Europe, non-seulement de l’aliénation mentale, mais de tous ces états anormaux qui sont dans des rapports spéciaux avec l’existence du mal physique et du mal moral dans l’humanité...”<sup>16</sup> Morel defines *dégénérescence* very generally as a “deviation malade d’un type primitif,” reframing the story

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<sup>15</sup> During the cholera epidemic in the 1830s in France, there was considerable debate about how best to stop the spread of disease. Those participating in the discussion primarily fell into two camps: the contagionists and the anticontagionists or infectionists. The contagionists believed that disease was caused by an outside, still unknown agent and spread from person to person. In other words, people, themselves, were the carriers, and the disease traveled with them. The anticontagionists or infectionists believed that disease arose from specific spaces due to poor living conditions. For them, the disease was localized and more or less stationary, attached specifically to urban squalor (Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending* 179).

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Augustin Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés malades* (Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1857), vii-viii.

of the original biblical fall in scientific terms.<sup>17</sup> More disturbingly, this movement away from the “primitive norm” was readily transmissible from generation to generation. Morel thought the “germ” of degeneration capable of barring productivity and progress not only in the “deviated” person but also in his offspring : “celui qui en porte le germe devient de plus en plus incapable de remplir sa fonction dans l’humanité, et que le progrès intellectuel déjà enrayé dans sa personne se trouve encore menacé dans celle de ses descendants” (5). Heredity had become a most dreaded conduit of societal erosion, quietly spreading any and all infirmities and defects. Mostly frighteningly, heredity was not always visible—nor did it seem controllable. It soon became recognized that people could carry hereditary *tares* without giving any exterior indication of them.

The intensity and frequency of these concerns only increased when, during the last few decades of the century, many Western European countries experienced a period of depopulation. The publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (originally published in 1859 in England with translations coming out in 1862 in France and in 1860 in Germany), which posited the theory of natural selection and survival of the fittest, seemed to give credence to Morel’s depiction of generalized degeneration; it confirmed fears on a macro level that the declining number of offspring were an indication that the once great empires were on the road to extinction. Max Nordau, the German Jewish intellectual most famous for his extensive study on *Degeneration*, used the metaphor of temporal stages to categorize this phenomenon of decline.

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<sup>17</sup> As Andrew Mendolsohn remarks, for Morel, who was writing before the publication of the French translation of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* came out, “type primitif” did not refer to some primordial, simian version of man but rather to Adam, as first man (Andrew Mendolsohn, “Medicine and the Making of Bodily Inequality in Twentieth-Century Europe,” 43).

According to Nordau, Europe and particularly French society had entered into the “dusk” of its age.<sup>18</sup>

In France, the gloomy outlook was strengthened by the country’s defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870-1871, resulting in the fall of the Second Empire and the loss of L’Alsace and La Lorraine. French men were failing at the job of creating and ensuring national grandeur, one of the primary tasks that had traditionally been assigned to them. The military debacle, followed by the birth of the Third Republic, was paired with subtle though profound social changes. Democratization had unforeseen consequences; it encouraged the women’s movement and fanned the fire harbored by disgruntled *ouvriers* who had taken notice of the discrepancy between their living conditions and those of the bourgeoisie.<sup>19</sup> These new threats and sense of inequality (which went against one of the fundamental revolutionary ideals of *égalité*) put men on the defensive, making them, and those around them, susceptible to generalized pessimism and doubt.

Christopher Forth persuasively demonstrates how modern society and the imperative that it places on living a “civilized” life was counter-intuitively also a primary force jeopardizing virility. Quoting Jean Starobinski, Forth explains that a conception of “civilization” coalesced around 1750, bringing together “diverse expressions of a preexisting concept [that is, *le civilisé*]...[that] included such notions as improvements in comfort, advances in education, politer manners, cultivation of the arts and sciences, growth of commerce and industry, and

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<sup>18</sup> Max Nordau, “Chapter 1—Book 1: The Dusk of Nations,” *Degeneration*, trans. from the second edition of the German work (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895).

<sup>19</sup> Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 104.



acquisition of material goods and luxuries.”<sup>20</sup> A modern, “civilized” man spent time studying and reading, engaging in reflective conversation, seeking out refined culinary experiences, surrounding and clothing himself in luxurious wares. His days were increasingly sedentary: the life of the mind took precedence over the life of the body. In the wake of the defeat, suddenly, a chasm opened within the masculine ideal, putting civilized, civic man at odds with military man capable of defending the nation’s borders. Civilized men did not wage war; civilized bodies were not fit for the battlefield.<sup>21</sup>

The city—Paris—had especially come to be viewed as potentially toxic for men. Urban living was bad for man’s equilibrium; the city—with its increased pace, noises and jolts—frayed nerves. Train travel, for example, was cited as a possible contributor to pathological nervous conditions (find reference). Additionally, the city offered a host of “unhealthy” forms of distraction. To take a break from his intellectual labors and oppressive social obligations, the civilized man would “se défouler,” frequenting cabarets, bars and brothels that were thought to expose him to a surfeit of sensations and experiences, unhinging his sense of containment. Exposure to an excess of stimulation was shown to be particularly hazardous for an affluent middle-aged man who, by indulging in sensual excesses, risked devolving into a “gaga,” an incapacitated—though not entirely crazy—man with diminished intellectual capacities and uncontrollable inclinations (most sexual) that verge toward the criminal. Dubut de Laforest, one

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Starobinsky quoted by Christopher Forth, “*La Civilisation and its Discontents: Modernity, Manhood and the Body in the Early Third Republic*,” *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics*, eds. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 88.

<sup>21</sup> Zola would disagree with Forth’s assessment. In one of the Zola’s preparatory files entitled *Sur la souffrance*, Zola extols the fortifying powers of civilization, provided it is used correctly: “Le véritable civilisé au contraire, qui baigne dans la civilisation, dans les arts, devient très fort, s’il peut avoir la force de transformer ses sensations non en émotivité mais en travail. Il faut admettre que l’humanité est en progrès, que plus nous aiguïsons notre sensibilité, plus nous faisons travailler notre cerveau et plus nous croissons en force (pas de surmenage, l’usage méthodique, l’équilibre entre la sensation reçue et le travail rendu)” (*RM5*, , 1604.). Zola, however, does not address how civilization affects the military potential of the country’s men.

of the lesser known “decadent writers” who, like Zola, uses a scientific lens to depict exceptional cases of physical and psychological pathology, devotes an entire novel to the abetted fall into “gaga-ism” of a well-respected Parisian senator. He offers this frightening portrait of the condition: “Tous ces hommes au regard éteint ne sont pas des fous, mais des maniaques, des gâteux, des ramollis, des ‘gagas’, selon l’expression populaire. Ayant trop de temps pour réfléchir et ne sachant plus varier leurs occupations, ils exagèrent les tracasseries et les amusements, s’annihilent dans le détail des choses...Gagas, oui, gagas, tous les individus qui n’ont plus la surveillance d’eux-mêmes, la plénitude du libre arbitre, la netteté de vision sur les hommes et les choses, tous les êtres qui se laissent conduire indolemment jusqu’au crime.”<sup>22</sup>

As we might glean from this quote, as much as male vigor was perceived in discourse to be diminishing, the drive to pathologize had never been stronger. In a stunning contrast in terminology, only a year before Brown-Séquard presented his findings and his portrait of the male body in decrepitude and disarray, Charcot, France’s most (in)famous neurologist, was personifying hysteria, extolling its resilience: “Le terme hystérie[...]résiste depuis longtemps aux injures du temps et des hommes. C’est là incontestablement *une marque de vitalité* bien significative. Le mot *vivra* et *continuera* à désigner un groupe cohérent de faits nosographiques enchaînés les uns aux autres. Il faut en prendre son parti.”<sup>23</sup> The healthy person stood little chance when faced with such a vibrant and robust opponent, a force capable of appropriating and gaining strength from any and all physiological and psychological manifestations deemed “abnormal.” In 1885, Charcot opened the doors of the Salpêtrière, where his Clinique des Maladies du Système Nerveux was centered, to male patients. Since the seventeenth century, La

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<sup>22</sup> Dubut de Laforest, *Le Gaga* in *Pathologie sociale* (Paris : P. Dupont, 1897), 220-221.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière*, vol. II, 30 octobre 1888 (Paris: E. Lecroisnier & Babé, 1889), 37 (my emphasis).

Salpêtrière (formally known as the Hospice de la Vieillesse-Femmes) had served as an institution for poor, sick and indisposed women; men had historically been sent farther away to the Bicêtre on the southeastern outskirts of Paris. With this admission of men to the institution and to his special clinic, Charcot “masculinize[d] the traditionally ‘feminine’ diagnosis of hysteria.”<sup>24</sup> Charcot’s nosography of hysteria cemented the *fourre-tout* nature of the term, which, over the centuries, had grown increasingly vast and vague, coming to signify any affliction deemed of “natural” origin that lacked visible lesions. Hysteria covered every possible ailment or deviation from the norm, no longer restricted to criminals or to those who had the simple misfortune of being born woman, Jewish, or poor. It did so surreptitiously, incorporating its lack of a perceivable trace or wound into its very definition.

Civilized society, then, was not only making men soft and nervous to the point of *hystérie*; it was also threatening them from within. Hygienists were worried about the effects of “filth” from industrialization, insalubrious surroundings and potentially contaminated water—not to mention from unhygienic sex or other undesirable exchanges with *la canaille*. Any form of contact at this time was viewed as potentially dangerous. The French (and Europeans, in general) had emerged embattled after their bout with Asiatic cholera during the 1830s; they waited in fear with the knowledge that tuberculosis and syphilis were seemingly lurking behind every corner. Fears and anxieties coalesced around the body—and particularly around the interaction between the outside and the inside of the body. The medical establishment stepped in to assuage but also manipulate these anxieties.

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Micale, *Hysterical Men : The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 124.

The decline of religion through the century and the consolidation of medicine as the discourse of power upset the power structures reigning over the body, particularly at the moment of death. The Catholic Church had long exercised a monopoly over the process of ushering people through death. However, after the Revolution when the legitimacy of the Church, along with the other "old" powers, took a great hit, progressively priests and other religious figures saw themselves displaced in this role. Meddling doctors showed up on the scene, requesting to be present at the administration of final rights, often interceding during this sacred ritual between the dying communicant and God's representative on earth. Moreover, they would often hide terminal diagnoses from their patients and therefore deprive them of the time of preparation upon which the church counts to be able to carry out the sacrament and control this "moment of passage."<sup>25</sup>

Jonathan Strauss offers a lucid window into the tensions arising out of this moment of transition when medicine became the discourse of authority, an authority, as he states, that "depended on a specific relation to the truth...and that involved...a highly original notion of sign systems" (45). Doctors knew how to read the symptoms, to "put [their] finger on the special place that triggers the actions of the hidden illness,... to make it speak" (50). They became the mediators between outside and inside, between life and death. Their language served to "translate" the "irrational" and nonsensical language of the body "into a socially recognizable and meaningful idiom" (58). Moreover, they became the political arbiters in charge of announcing death. They were responsible, for example, in evaluating whether the guillotine had effectively performed its task. To do so, they had to learn to "read" death, "the silent language of the

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<sup>25</sup>Jonathan Strauss, *Human Remains: Medicine, Death, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 36.

corpse" (66). As Strauss compellingly states, this "task" put the doctor in the paradoxical situation of, on the one hand, fighting against death by vocation and training, while on the other having to "administer it" by virtue of recognizing and declaring it. As such, death suddenly became a medical category, and the dead body—the corpse—offered a whole "new" physiological state to be investigated and theorized. Rot and decomposition seized the imagination of the medical community, while, at the same time, posing a significant hurdle to urban hygienists attempting to keep miasmas, infection and insalubrity contained and, ideally, at bay. Death was no longer an absolute end. Putrefaction, decomposition, rot—and, by extension, degeneration—were blurring the lines, representing an in-between state, no longer life but not quite death.

### **Claude Bernard's *Le milieu intérieur* as Model for Zola's Experimental Playground**

As Strauss makes clear, Claude Bernard was no exception to these obsessions; he was also intrigued by putrefaction (109-110). In his quest to understanding the body's *milieu intérieur*, by necessity, he had to pass through "examples" in various states of decomposition. The *terrains* he was able to investigate were all *terrains* that had been drained of their vital liquids and left to stew in the muck. This realization casts his project of "decomposition" (mentioned in chapter two: "...il faut en quelque sorte décomposer successivement l'organisme, comme on démonte une machine pour en reconnaître, et en étudier tous les rouages...") in a new light.

Life and death are determined by whether *le milieu intérieur* properly performs its protective duties of keeping noxious elements at bay; all physiological manifestations can be

reduced to this vital interaction: “L’atmosphère extérieure viciée, les poisons liquides ou gazeux, n’amènent la mort qu’à la condition que les substances nuisibles soient portées dans le milieu intérieur, en contact avec les éléments organiques. En un mot, les phénomènes vitaux ne sont que les résultats du contact des éléments organiques du corps avec le milieu intérieur physiologique.”<sup>26</sup>

In fact, Bernard’s vision of the *milieu intérieur* revolutionized not only the reigning understanding about the body’s relationship to itself and to the world but also the accepted cultural conceptions of what constituted medicine. Through Bernard, medicine became an *individualized* practice focused on treating the specific *differences* between bodies. For Bernard, each person’s *milieu intérieur* was considered idiosyncratic and regulated by the individual’s particular physiology. Vivisection, Bernard’s preferred (if controversial, to say the least) method for observing the laws governing *le milieu intérieur*, became a key component of the practice of experimental medicine. Bernard defended this practice, emphasizing the need to see the processes of death at work: “...pour apprendre comment l’homme et les animaux vivent, il est indispensable d’en voir mourir un grand nombre, parce que les mécanismes de la vie ne peuvent se dévoiler et se prouver que par la connaissance des mécanismes de la mort” (139). Additionally, Bernard codified the specific tasks of the experimental scientist and of the physician. While it is the experimenter’s job to come to know, understand and articulate the laws governing the *milieu*, its habitual functioning (108), it is up to the doctor to put into practice this knowledge to evaluate and treat a given individual’s particular *milieu*, and by extension his or her particular *terrain*: “En effet, le médecin n’est point le médecin des êtres vivants en général, pas même le médecin du genre humain, mais bien le médecin de l’*individu* humain, et plus le

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard, *Introduction à l’étude de la médecine*, 107-108.

médecin d'un individu dans certaines conditions morbides qui lui sont spéciales et qui constituent ce que l'on a appelé son idiosyncrasie" (129). The will to know so as better to control characterizes the efforts of both the experimenter and the doctor: they aspire to being nothing less than "maîtres des phénomènes de la vie" (ibid.).<sup>27</sup>

Reading *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (which Zola did not discover until he was well into writing his series in 1879) was instrumental in Zola's framing of his global project. Swept away by the strength of Bernard's *propos* (indeed, Zola at one point admits to not knowing any *paroles* "plus viriles"<sup>28</sup> than those of Bernard), Zola took a break from his fictional characters to dedicate himself to what largely amounted to an extended gloss of Bernard's text, writing *Le roman expérimental* as what he considered the logical extension of the experimental method. He periodically reminds the reader that it suffices to replace "médecin" or "médecine" with "romancier" or "roman" to understand how the experimental process is to evolve (2; 40). Zola, who had been preoccupied with analyzing/manipulating the internal (hereditary) and external (socially deterministic) forces shaping the individual, envisioned himself as Bernard's literary successor, articulating the laws determining not only man's internal physiology but also his character and passions. In short, faced with science's lingering inability to explain the mechanisms determining thought and desire, Zola imagined his

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<sup>27</sup> Cohen shines light on the violence implicit in Bernard's view of the physician's task. Aside from the obvious aggression involved in cutting open a live creature (even if it is in the name of science), Bernard's depiction of the physician as possess[ing] "arms and striving to "conquer," like the physical scientist, coincides semantically with the war metaphor that today so often frames the interaction between the body and the outside world, a world in which the immune system is most commonly conceived of as a system of defense (*A Body Worth Defending*, 202-203).

<sup>28</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1880), 40.

work as filling the void, offering an experimental playground on which the *le milieu intérieur* is reintroduced to the *milieu extérieur*.<sup>29</sup>

### **“Fouiller au vif”: Zola’s methodological approach to Empiric(al) Bodies**

During the period of crisis that Mosse identifies, European societies—and this holds true for French society, as well—reacted to the sense that traditional masculinity was under siege by focusing attention on the counter models or “outsiders,” groups that had been sufficiently assimilated in society to render them more or less invisible—and thus dangerous.<sup>30</sup> The identification and classification of that which was different, in turn, reinforced the boundaries of and gave sense to the image of what it meant to be a “normal” man: “The manly ideal corresponded to modern society's felt need for order and progress, and for a countertype that would serve to increase its self-confidence as it emerged into the modern age” (77). These categories had a dual and paradoxical effect: they both permitted a reaffirmation of masculine boundaries but also threatened these borders by eating away at the imagined authority embedded within them. At this time, the two primary “outsiders” were identified as Jews and homosexuals. David Caron demonstrates how the two categories functioned as different threats. In the public imaginary, the Jew threatened from without, imagined as a radical “other” deviant in his inability to stay rooted. “Telling” physical traits were pathologized and stereotyped,

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<sup>29</sup> “Un jour, la physiologie nous expliquera sans doute le mécanisme de la pensée et des passions ; nous saurons comment fonctionne la machine individuelle de l’homme, comment il pense, comment il aime, comment il va de la raison à la passion et à la folie ; mais ces phénomènes, ces faits du mécanisme des organes agissant sous l’influence du milieu intérieur, ne se produisent pas au dehors isolément et dans le vide. L’homme n’est pas seul, il vit dans une société, dans un milieu social, et dès lors pour nous, romanciers, ce milieu social modifie sans cesse les phénomènes. Même notre grande étude est là, dans le travail réciproque de la société sur l’individu et de l’individu sur la société” (ibid., 24).

<sup>30</sup> Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 55.



circulating widely in the popular press, as did the image of the “wandering Jew,” which became synonymous with male hysteria.<sup>31</sup> Anti-semitism of this time, of course, culminated in the Dreyfus Affair, the most difficult test of the Third Republic’s ideals that divided the nation and challenged the integrity of its institutions (most notably the military and the judicial system). The homosexual, on the other hand, in his “perverse” search for “inverted” pleasures, came to represent an internal threat, the dark underlining of every man.<sup>32</sup> The homosexual slipped under the radar, exhibiting chameleonic stealthiness, while also lacking containment and exhibiting excessive nervousness. This social category, too, was grouped into the category of male hysteria.

Mosse goes on to identify a third potential disruptive category. Women, as they attempted to seize more control of their destinies and integrate into the public sphere, also began skirting the line between insider and outsider, and thus threatening stable identity boundaries. As mentioned above, concerns about low-birth rate had ignited a debate not only about procreation but also about women's rights, particularly in regards to maternity. The Catholic and Republican women's groups, normally warring factions, united under a common banner for greater governmental support for mothers, abandoned women and children. This French brand of feminism stood in contrast to the Anglo-American movements, which were focused on gaining

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<sup>31</sup> As Sander Gilman reports, Charcot gives an in-depth account of a Jewish man by the name of Klein who appeared at the Salpêtrière in Dec 1888: “He appeared at the Salpêtrière the next day, ’his feet so bloody that he could not leave his bed for many days.’ Klein ‘limped at the very beginning of his illness.’ Charcot reminded his listeners that the patient ‘is a Jew and that he has already revealed his pathological drives by his wanderings.’ His ‘travel-mania’ could be seen in the fact that ‘as soon as he was on his feet again, he wanted to go to Brazil.’ Klein also suffered from the standard numbness ascribed to the hysteric on half of his body. Wandering and limping mark the hysterical Jew as diseased, and diseased because of incestuous intermarriage.” Sander Gilman, “The Image of the Hysteric: The Function of the ‘Real’ Image of the Hysteric in Defining the Nature of Hysteria,” in Sander L. Gilman, et al., *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 406.

<sup>32</sup> Terrific work has been devoted to analyzing the rise of these two social categories at this time. See Sander Gilman, *The Jews Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and David Caron, *AIDS in French Culture: Social Ills, Literary Cures* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 18-30.

legal and political equality for women.<sup>33</sup> But even the fact that women now had a public presence disrupted order, particularly at a time when, to do their duty, women were meant to focus their energy on bridging the baby gap. As the century came to a close, the fantasy of the liberated women took on a life of its own. The image of a riotous female was captured by Marcel Prévost, in 1900, who warned of “*les vièges fortes*” that would conquer “*les vieilles civilizations*”; not even Paris would withstand feminism’s assault (feminism was the term used in the text by the “virgins,” themselves). As one of the young *vièges* exclaims: “Paris frivole, ironique, sensuel, résistera davantage. Mais nous l’aurons. Nous le vaincrons.”<sup>34</sup>

The old man, if not an outsider per se, also challenged the norms of masculinity, an unwelcome reminder of what awaited the young and healthy. The old man came quite literally to embody the sense of decrepitude and degeneration that was dominating public discourse in all domains. He symbolized lost time and lost dreams—or worse, as in Wilde’s cautionary tale or in the portrait of Dubut de Laforest’s *gaga*, came physically to reflect a life lived poorly. The hygienic movement’s emphasis on the duty of the individual to maintain health for the greater good resulted in the increasing marginalization of the old who were subtly being blamed for their infirmities. Quoting the hygienist, Réveillé-Parise, Christopher Forth speaks to this point: “In the final analysis, a man is only the result of his habits, that’s what makes him what he is.’ This emphasis on personal responsibility yielded increasingly negative views of the elderly, whose physical or mental failings could be uncharitably chalked up to a profligate youth or mismanaged adulthood.”<sup>35</sup> The old man—and particularly—the old, half-crazy man emerges as an

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<sup>33</sup> Karen Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France,” *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 648-76.

<sup>34</sup> Marcel Prévost, *Les vièges fortes : Frédérique* (Paris : Alphonse Lemerre, 1900), 100.

understated though ever present body of anxiety—and thus a body ripe (until rotting) for investigation.

In *Le Docteur Pascal*, the problem of the aging man is at the heart of the novel. Pascal, at the threshold of sixty (the determining line between a middle-age and an old man), has his own late-life (geriatric) crisis and presents himself as a very promising candidate for just such experimentation. His scientific endeavors become the literal expression and realization of Zola's stated goal (*fouiller au vif*): "to dig into the heart" of human drama, which, in his novels, means "digging" into the human body--the original site of disorder in all of its myriad forms.

Zola offers further details on how he plans to proceed, proposing to penetrate so as to focus on the body's connective tissues—*les fils*—as well as its vital organs: "D'un côté je montrerais les ressorts cachés, les fils qui font mouvoir le pantin humain ; de l'autre je raconterais les faits et gestes de ce pantin. Le cœur et le cerveau mis à nu, je démontrerais aisément comment et pourquoi le cœur et le cerveau ont agi de certaines façons déterminées, et n'ont pu agir autrement" (*RM* 5, 1756). In this statement, Zola positions himself between two visions—or at least two languages—of the body. His first sentence describes a mechanical body whose hidden springs and strings he intends to reveal. In his second sentence, he embraces a more biological view of the body—verging on the vitalistic: a body composed of "naked" organs whose actions are "easily" explainable. The examples he chooses to mention are not just any old organs; it's not the action of the liver or the kidneys that he is hoping to uncover. He chooses the organs most laden with symbolic meaning: the brain ubiquitously identified in the West with masculinity, the biological site of reason; and the heart, the site of emotion and sentiment

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 79.

generally associated with femininity. The head and heart prove to be at odds in *Le Docteur Pascal*; though technically it is his heart that becomes dried and blocked, it remains somewhat unclear which organ kills the good doctor in the end.

Zola's two bodily visions are linked by the suggestion that determining forces are at work controlling movement and action. The mechanical body is a "dummy" (*le pantin*), pulled and made to move by unnamed forces that are both interior and exterior to it.<sup>36</sup> The biological body is also bound to deterministic laws, preventing spontaneity. "Perfectability" can only be achieved through concerted means, and is unlikely given the state of the world and of men at the time who, according to Zola, are both more fallible and more afflicted with *névroses*: "...[M]a croyance est que les hommes seront toujours des hommes, des animaux bons ou mauvais selon les circonstances. Si mes personnages n'arrivent pas au bien, c'est que nous débutons dans la *perfectibilité*. Les hommes modernes sont d'autant plus faillibles qu'ils sont plus nerveux et plus impatients." (1739). In this context, the individual has little ability to change or evolve over time; in most cases, he or she simply meets fate.<sup>37</sup>

For Zola, the deterministic external *milieu*, itself characterized by "feverish" ("*milieu fiévreux moderne*") and insatiable drives, fosters an environment that is not propitious for the cultivation of strong, healthy, perfectible bodies and characters (*RM 5*, 1738). Zola situates the

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<sup>36</sup> Zola explicitly acknowledges his preference for the neutrality of "force" as a vector of change, a word he sees as "uncompromising" in the sense that it does not denote a divine presence or intervention: "Prendre avant tout une tendance philosophique, non pour l'étaler, mais pour donner une unité de mes livres. La meilleure serait peut-être le matérialisme, je veux dire la croyance en des forces sur lesquelles je n'aurai jamais le besoin de m'expliquer. Le mot force ne compromet pas. Mais il ne faut plus user du mot fatalité qui serait ridicule dans dix volumes. Le fatalisme est un vieil outil. D'ailleurs, ne pas écrire en philosophe ni en moraliste. Etudier les hommes comme de simples puissances et constater les heurts" (1744).

<sup>37</sup> The most glaring example we have of this deterministic inevitability is the scene of Nana's death. Nana, portrayed as the unconscious vector of contamination, corrupting the society through her excessive feminine whiles, ends up disfigured, rotted from the inside out by *la petite vérole*: "Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l'avait pourri." Emile Zola, *Nana* (Paris : Gallimard, 2002), 474-475.

society he is portraying historically and, by necessity, in a post-revolutionary era where hierarchical distinctions that once existed have since collapsed. According to Zola, the wave of democratic liberation following the Revolution leveled society, leaving in its wake a chaotic mix of people driven by unchecked ambition and hunger: “La caractéristique du mouvement moderne est la bousculade de toutes les ambitions, l’élán démocratique, l’avènement de toutes les classes (de là la familiarité des pères et des fils, le mélange et le còtoisement de tous les individus.) Mon roman eùt été impossible avant 89. Je le base donc sur une vérité du temps : la bousculade des ambitions et des appétits” (ibid.).<sup>38</sup> Zola’s parenthetical use in this description offers an inside widow into the ramifications on the family, society’s most basic unit: the confusion and ambivalence produced by the newly sanctioned fraternization between classes and ages (fathers and sons). Louis-Napoleon’s second Empire, ushered in under the strange and hurried circumstances of his plebiscitary coup, exacerbated all of these tendencies and forged a society racing and raging toward self-induced immolation: “L’empire a déchaîné les appétits et les ambitions. Orgie d’appétits et d’ambition. Soif de jouir, et de jouir par la pensée surmenée, et par le corps surmené. ..Fatigue et chute : la famille brûlera comme une matière se dévorant elle-même, elle s’épuisera presque dans une génération parce qu’elle vivra trop vite (*RM* 5, 1740-41).”

The masculine incarnation of “burn-out” was the figure of the “nervous” man. Zola, when planning his series, had to remind himself not to lean too heavily on this character type”

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<sup>38</sup> Naomi Schor underlines the importance of the Revolution in the *Rougon-Macquart* series despite the relative dearth of references made to the events. She astutely observes that Tante Dide and Antoine Macquart consummate their relationship in 1789, thereby linking the conception of the “illegitimate” branch metonymically to the upheaval of post-revolutionary society. Building upon all of Schor’s wonderful speculation about the original “dead woman” haunting the series, “Marie” buried under the tombstone in *La Fortune des Rougon*, I wonder if it wouldn’t be too far of a stretch to suggest that one possible reading of her identity might be Marianne, the symbol of the fledgling Republic buried under the rubble of the Second Empire. See Naomi Schor, *Zola’s Crowds* (Baltimore, ME: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 17-18.

(1742). The “petits crevés,” lacking both “head and heart,” personified the period’s tendencies toward excess. Zola had no sympathy for these wanton bums, whom he portrayed most explicitly through the character of Maxime. Greedy, extravagant and prone to sickness due to his intemperance, Maxime represents this generation of loathsome and feeble young men: “Il est un produit des appétits de son père et cette fortune rapide et volée qui le met à même, dès quinze ans, de se vautrer dans toutes les jouissances. ..[II] représente le produit chétif et malsain d’une famille qui a vécu trop vite et trop gorgée d’argent. Le père est puni par le fils” (1772). In *La Curée*, the second novel of *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, Zola’s rewriting of *Phèdre*, this punishment is doled out in the form of incest: Maxime steals his father’s wife, Renée. In Zola’s fictional universe, incest is one of the risks involved when hierarchical upheavals lead to a society in which classes and generations freely rub elbows. This kind of consorting has the potential of undoing long established, Oedipal taboos; the “mother” is shared (albeit only a stepmother—in this case, quite literally the mother is a stepping stone for the young, opportunistic Maxime) between father and son.<sup>39</sup> Zola’s depiction is meant to serve as a representational warning: “ Il y a là un monde à peindre et à marquer d’un fer rouge” (*RM* 5, 1772).

The end result of hard and fast living is premature aging: these young, nervous types are recurrently compared to old men. Again returning to Maxime as the quintessential example of spoiled youth, in *Le Docteur Pascal*, he visits Pascal and his sister, Clotilde, in the south of France. Clotilde has not seen her brother for many years and is struck by his decline: “*La face*

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas White astutely analyzes the stakes involved in the transgression: “From the start it is clear that Renée and Maxime do not blame themselves...When stepson and stepmother consummate their passion, the husband Aristide is being doubly cheated, both by his second wife, Renée, and by his son by his previous marriage, Maxime. Incest in this case is therefore also adultery...The internalized narrative of adultery postpones the return of the repressed at the level of language even though the taboo has already been broken.” (Nicholas White, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 110.)

*s'était creusée, les cheveux s'éclaircissaient, semés de fils blancs. Pourtant, elle finit par le retrouver, avec sa tête jolie et fine, d'une grâce inquiétante de fille, jusque dans sa décrépitude précoce*" (DP, 62). Maxime is only thirty-two, and yet his voraciousness, along with his bad blood, has transformed him into a man in the winter of his age. Later, Pascal, using his scientific scrutiny to "fouill[er] à fond son neveu" (a repetition of Zola's commitment to "fouiller au vif"), diagnoses Maxime with *ataxie*, "le pire des maux, l'infirmité, le coup de hache qui sépare un vivant de la vie" (DP, 76). *Ataxie* is a neurodegenerative condition resulting in increasingly impaired movement, but it also philosophically connotes a "désordre des mouvements de l'âme" according to the 1863 *Littre*. Maxime, as an ataxic, clearly emblemizes this post-revolutionary society's *bousculade*, the disarray of motivations, impulses and spendthrift endeavors.<sup>40</sup>

Zola counters his admonitory portrait with a direct appeal to France's youth. In "Lettre à la jeunesse," a short text included as part of *Le Roman expérimental*, Zola exhorts the new generation to claim tomorrow as its own, embracing science in its function as temporal midwife:

Demain, c'est ce vingtième siècle dont l'évolution scientifique aide la naissance laborieuse... si nous voulons que demain nous appartienne, il faut que nous soyons des hommes nouveaux, marchant à l'avenir par la méthode, par la logique, par l'étude et la possession du réel. Applaudir une rhétorique, s'enthousiasmer pour l'idéal, ce ne sont là que de belles émotions nerveuses ; les

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<sup>40</sup>The description of Maxime's son, Charles, is even more damning. Charles is the result of Maxime's unfortunate early union; his stupidity and viciousness is repeatedly emphasized. Described as the last member of a dying race, Charles, with his limited intelligence and fragile health, is the spitting image of Tante Dide, his 105-year old great grandmother. In the following passage, Zola intertwines descriptions of the two, emphasizing their interchangeable likeness to the point where it is difficult to decipher which of the two he is describing at any time: "Mais ce qui frappait surtout, en ce moment, c'était sa ressemblance avec Tante Dide, cette ressemblance qui avait franchi trois générations, qui sautait de ce visage desséché de centenaire, de ces traits usés, à cette délicate figure d'enfant, comme effacée déjà elle aussi, très vieille et finie par l'usure de la race. En face l'un de l'autre, l'enfant imbécile, d'une beauté de mort, était comme la fin de l'ancêtre, l'oubliée" (71). Charles dies in front of Tante Dide from an unstoppable nose bleed, "un de ces petits dauphins exsangues...qui s'endorment de vieillesse et d'imbécillité, dès leurs quinze ans" (215).

femmes pleurent, quand elles entendent de la musique. Aujourd'hui, nous avons besoin de *la virilité du vrai* pour être glorieux dans l'avenir, comme nous l'avons été dans le passé.<sup>41</sup>

Birthing is one of Zola's most prevalent metaphors. In this case, it is interesting to note the extent to which man (and man alone, it would seem) is involved in the birthing process. In these circumstances, proper delivery hinges on the correct usage of words.<sup>42</sup> Zola anchors himself and his work at a precise time in textual production, a moment when questions of style and rhetoric—of idealized esthetics—belong to a feminized and weepy past. Tomorrow's writing, according to Zola, unfolds as that of dry, unstylized prose committed to studying—indeed appropriating—the real. In a later passage, Zola more forcefully derides sentimental and embellished writing (poetry and essentially the entire romantic tradition), identifying the deleterious effect it can potentially have on the country's young men. Logic, method and math are called for to ensure vim and vigor. Young men need to steer clear of anything that might tap into their emotions or, God forbid, their imaginations, for fear that they, too, might be touched by delusions of grandeur—or worse, by craziness, *tout court*: “Conduisez donc notre jeunesse en classe chez les savants, et non chez les poètes, si vous voulez avoir une jeunesse *virile*. La *folie* du lyrisme ne peut faire naître que des *fous* héroïques, et il nous faut des soldats solides, sains d'esprit et de corps, marchant mathématiquement à la victoire.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, 60 (my emphasis).

<sup>42</sup> Janet Beizer is correct to identify “birth” as the fundamental metaphor underpinning Zola's conception of creation. As she writes: “Texts are either sired—and textual production is described by metaphors or penetration, insemination, and dissemination—or they are given birth to, and their production is likened to gestation, labor, and delivery.” “The Leak in Clotilde's Head,” in *Ventriloquized Bodies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 169. Zola uses this metaphor directly to summarize *Les Rougon-Macquart*: “...Pour résumer mon œuvre en une phrase: je veux peindre, au début d'un siècle de liberté et de vérité, une famille qui s'élançe vers les biens prochains, et qui roule détraquée par son élan lui-même, justement à cause des leurs troubles du moment, des convulsions fatales de *l'enfantement d'un monde*“ (*RM* 5, 1739, my emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, 98-99 (my emphasis).



## **Bioliterary Devices**

Incisive work has been done analyzing Zola's recourse to gender in describing and bolstering the naturalist project. Janet Beizer adeptly unpacks what she calls Zola's "hermaphroditic authorship," showing how Zola's assertion of writing "the real," "the scientific" and "the masculine" is belied by another side prone to myth making, fantasy and exactly the kind of lyrical flourishes he condemns as promoting weakness amongst the ranks.<sup>44</sup> Dorothy Kelly, on the other hand, calculates the costs of Zola's call to masculinity.<sup>45</sup> As we must recall from above, it is, by implication, the "secret workings" of woman—and her womb—that make it impossible to assure consistency between sons. Her potential powers of *dérèglement* threaten not only her children, but all around her. Zola's supreme embodiment of the corrupting powers of the feminine—Nana, allegorized as "la mouche d'or"—succeeds in contaminating an entire society "rien qu'à se poser sur eux..."<sup>46</sup> To maintain mental and physical purity, men must be sealed off from women so as better to master them.

*Le Docteur Pascal* offers an exemplary case of the powers of female contagion; not even the scientist—the antithesis of *les petits crevés* Zola so abhors—is able to maintain his sealed-off status after allowing Clotilde into intimate proximity. Moreover, taken in the context of the rest of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, a complete reversal of values occurs: incest between Uncle and Niece is an idealized coupling, providing the relational answer to "fixing" heredity's "logic toward the same" by giving it a dose of its own medicine; suspicious liquid, presumably the pinnacle of

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<sup>44</sup>Janet Beizer, "The Leak in Clotilde's Head," 170.

<sup>45</sup>Dorothy Kelly, "Experimenting on Women: Zola's Theory and Practice of Experimenting on Women," in *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 231-246.

<sup>46</sup>Emile Zola, *Nana*, in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, ed. by A. Lanoux and H. Mitterand, t.2. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 1270.

scientific knowledge of the day, injected into men holds the promise of “saving humanity,” in its entirety; and women, usually condemned for their gushiness and flux, come to be viewed as the rock of stability in an otherwise crumbling world.

### *The benefits of "innéité"*

Throughout the series, Pascal has lingered on the diegetic margins, judiciously observing and noting the trials and travails propelling his family—and the narration—forward toward inevitable demise (though varied in its forms). His ability to remain out of the fray and assume the voice of authority, as we saw above in his accurate diagnosis of Maxime, is assured by his freedom from his family’s hereditary flaw: his *innéité*, the biological state of difference and exception, textually preserves him. He is not one of them, his story is not theirs. As such, he devotes himself to three projects of edification that are meant to strengthen and *heal* the familial body—to mend the “tear” within—and by extension the social body.

“Oh! moi, à quoi bon parler de moi? Je n’en suis pas, de la famille !...Tu vois bien ce qui est écrit là : ‘Pascal, né en 1813. Innéité. Combinaison où se confondent les caractères physiques et moraux des parents, sans que rien d’eux semble se retrouver dans le nouvel être...’ Ma mère me l’a répété assez souvent, que je n’en étais pas, qu’elle ne savait pas d’où je pouvais venir!” (*DP*, 121). This is the self portrait that Dr. Pascal paints to Clotilde, his ingénue, niece and the future mother of his son, when they are pouring over the family’s checkered past together. While typically defined as a trait with which one is born (which would logically then be part of one’s heredity), *innéité* acquires a singular meaning in the *Rougon-Macquart* series. We have already commented on the extent to which Zola relied on scientific texts as interlocutors and inspiration. In this case, he cribbed the term *innéité* from Prosper Lucas’s 1847

*Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle dans les états de santé et de maladie du système nerveux.* Zola, in his copious notes, picks up on the counterintuitive opposition that Lucas establishes between *innéité* to *hérédité*. While heredity is the principle of imitation, a "force of organization" and "the law of creation," (RM 5, 1694), *innéité* is a state of natural invention and individual exception; *innéité* is a fluke that leads to originality and organic dissemblance. *Innéité* depends on the specifics of birth to the extent that it breaks the reproductive, imitative machine of heredity. Here is a sampling of the notes Zola took on the subject to get a sense for how *innéité* constitutes a state of exception—and exemption—in his series:

Le livre [de Lucas] consiste à montrer que dans la procréation, comme dans la création, la vie obéit aux lois d'invention et d'imitation—qui dans la procréation deviennent les lois d'innéité et d'hérédité. De l'innéité...il ne peut y avoir d'innéité d'espèce, il ne reste plus que *l'individu à naître*—L'invention est très variée dans l'individu—Originalité, personnalité de l'individu—*Dissemblance des frères, etc. dans structure externe, structure interne, constitution et tempérament...*Dissemblances organiques. Le tempérament des enfants diffère souvent de celui de leurs parents—les constitutions de famille commencent souvent par des individus, et les constitutions les plus enracinées dans le sein des familles, n'y sont pas cependant celles de tous leurs membres.—Un père et une mère de même race peuvent même produire un enfant qui sorte de la race...*Anomalie chez les individus toujours par le fait de l'innéité.* (RM 5, 1697)<sup>47</sup>

In short, for Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, *innéité* offers Pascal a ticket out, the exemption from the family *tare*. As the opposite of heredity, it promises radical difference and regeneration; it is what permits movement forward and beyond the vicious cycle of *la fêlure*.

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<sup>47</sup> Zola also notes cases of "innéité morbide" where a child is born with an illness that neither parent carries. He offers possible explanations for why this would be the case, alluding, in particular, to an unregulated maternal environment that shapes the child without seeming to affect the mother: "Diverses maladies frappent l'enfant dans la vie interne sans frapper la mère. Un enfant qui a la petite vérole dans les entrailles de sa mère.—La goutte venant d'un excès de table du père. Le lieu où se fait le coït peut influencer sur la santé de l'enfant—Enfants naissant malades de parents malades, mais les maladies sont différentes" (1720).

Significantly, as we discern from the “...à quoi bon parler de moi,” *innéité* is also the condition that squelches or obviates stories, which are generated and linked together (the “lien puissant”) through the various manifestations of *la fêlure*. Within Zolian logic, no crack means no story. In Pascal’s case, his *innéité* not only prevents his participation in the family saga, but it even erases his nominal connection. By truncating his name and dropping the Rougon, Pascal obscures his origins (“qu’elle ne savait pas d’où je pouvais venir”); his public identity is subsumed under his vocation: “Va, le peuple ne s’y trompe pas. M’as-tu jamais entendu appeler Pascal Rougon, dans la ville ? Non ! le monde a toujours dit le docteur Pascal, tout court. C’est que je suis à part...J’ai beau les aimer tous, mon cœur n’en bat pas moins d’allégresse, lorsque je me sens autre, différent, sans communauté aucune” (67). This erasure—and the exceptional status that it confers—relieves Pascal and expresses itself in physiological terms, making his heart pump all the more happily in the face of utter freedom from his relatives. He relishes his lack of community, his absolute otherness, literally finding inspiration (in the etymological sense of “inhaling, breathing in”) in his condition of negated ontology (“not being of them”): “N’en être pas, n’en être pas, mon Dieu! C’est une bouffée d’air pur, c’est ce qui me donne le courage de les avoir tous là, de les mettre à nu dans ces dossiers, et de trouver encore le courage de vivre!” (ibid.) Knowing that he is not one of them, Pascal has no reason to fear the process of uncovering them.

Pascal’s innate difference is emphasized from the moment he first appears on the sidelines in the initiatory novel, *La Fortune des Rougon*. Though published in 1871 in the wake of the Empire’s fall, the novel is set during the buildup towards Louis-Napoleon’s *coup d’Etat*. The very first sentence of description the reader is given of Pascal—“l’autre fils”—is that he “ne

paraissait pas appartenir à la famille.”<sup>48</sup> “Tu n’es pas à nous,” his mother states again and again. Spatially, he is presented “à l’écart,” scrupulously observing those around him. He lives by himself on the outskirts of town in an idealized domain called La Souléiade (and its resonances of health—soleil, solitude), with only his housemaid and his science to keep him company: “...il s’enfermait religieusement, s’occupant avec amour d’histoire naturelle” (ibid.). Science, at this early stage of his life, is presented as his mistress, and he, “cet amant discret...men[ant] la belle vie indifférente d’un amoureux...” (72).

His categorical exemption—his immunity, we might say, recalling immunity’s etymological origins, as discussed in Chapter 1, as an exemption from service or obligation (the obligation being the responsibility of passing on the family’s traits)—is the determining principle allowing Pascal to maintain his objective distance in his projects. Pascal hones his powers of observation and his naturalist’s voice in a later, deliberately comical passage from *La Fortune des Rougon* where he performs a physiognomic reading of the “movers and shakers” who have gathered in his mother’s yellow salon, all the while keeping his reserved air of categorizer and classifier.<sup>49</sup> Pascal, one of the republican “*buveurs de sang*” (sharing Zola’s political inclinations) against whom they are plotting, does not actively pursue a political agenda,

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<sup>48</sup> Emile Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon* in *Les Rougon-Macquart* T.1, ed A. Lanoux, H. Mitterand, (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) , 66 ((abbreviated from now on as *FR* and cited in the body of the text).

<sup>49</sup> “...[E]n se trouvant dans le salon jaune, s’amusa-t-il à se croire tombé dans une ménagerie. Il établit des ressemblances entre chacun de ces grotesques et quelque animal de sa connaissance. Le marquis lui rappela exactement une grande sauterelle verte, avec sa maigreur, sa tête mince et futée. Vuillet lui fit l’impression blême et visqueuse d’un crapaud. Il fut plus doux pour Roudier, un mouton gras, et pour le commandant, un vieux dogue édenté. Mais son continuel étonnement était le prodigieux Granoux. Il passa toute une soirée à mesurer son angle facial. Quand il l’écoutait bégayer quelque vague injure contre les républicains, ces buveurs de sang, il s’attendait toujours à l’entendre geindre comme un veau ; et il ne pouvait le voir se lever, sans s’imaginer qu’il allait se mettre à quatre pattes pour sortir du salon” (ibid., 96-97).

however.<sup>50</sup> Instead of concerning itself with the public sphere, Pascal's interest as a writer moves into the most private recesses, following the mysterious hereditary pathways that flow, as an undercurrent, shaping his family under the skin. We see the abrupt shift of his lens at the end of *La Fortune des Rougon* when he witnesses his grandmother—Tante Dide—fall irrevocably into insanity (Pascal is even the one to declare her *folle*). In an instant of clairvoyance (his clairvoyance is remarked upon repeatedly, already betraying to the reader a disposition that does not adhere entirely to the logical and scientific), Pascal, staring at his relatives, suddenly glimpses the fate of his family. Retooling his entomological lens, he jumps metaphorically from the evolving insect to the sprouting tree:

Pascal fixait un regard pénétrant sur la folle, sur son père, sur son oncle; l'égoïsme du savant l'emportait; il étudiait cette mère et ces fils, avec l'attention d'un naturaliste surprenant les métamorphoses d'un insecte. *Et il songeait à ces poussées d'une famille, d'une souche qui jette des branches diverses, et dont la sève âcre charrie les mêmes germes dans les tiges les plus lointaines, différemment tordues, selon les milieux d'ombre et de soleil.* Il crut entrevoir un instant, comme au milieu d'un éclair, l'avenir des Rougon-Macquart, une meute d'appétits lâchés et assouvis, dans un flamboiement d'or et de sang. (FR 301)

Thirty years later, a much older Pascal (he is now 59), “un de ces anciens rois...puissants et doux qui ne vieillissent plus” (DP, 47) has moved from simple observer to edifier, both in the literal sense of the word as “one who builds” (definition from the Latin “to make a dwelling”—*ædificā-re*, < *ædes*, *ædis* dwelling + *-ficā-re* to make) and, as the voice of Zola's positivist

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<sup>50</sup> Though Pascal's imaginings allow him to pass the time, they also betray a more subversive intent. Susan Harrow convincingly argues that this passage establishes Pascal not only as a keen, if passive, onlooker, but as one of the first vectors in the series of Zola's political satire, underlining the instability at the heart of the newly forming power structures (after all, two of the men described—Le Marquis the grasshopper and Vuillet the toad—could easily hop away) while undermining their legitimacy: “...Pascal's fantasy-work discredits the representatives of the new order (“les grotesques”). If Pascal is a caricaturist for his own pleasure (and for ours as readers), his zoomorphic satire is more subversive for being shared with its object, for where the object (Félicité) takes itself seriously and wishes others to do likewise, the satirizing subject counters with unconcealed derision. Thus, when his mother exhorts him to acquire prestigious new patients from among her *salon* regulars, Pascal retorts that he is not a veterinary surgeon (Susan Harrow, *Zola, The Body Modern*, 161-62).

ideology, in the more figurative and accepted sense as one who “informs, instructs; improves in a moral sense.” *Guérison* is, after all, the supreme goal of Pascal’s scientific endeavors—and arguably of Zola’s writing project—as revealed by Pascal’s credo repeated like a mantra at several points in the novel: “Tout dire...pour tout connaître et tout guérir!” (93)

Healing, in this framework, is not restricted to curing symptoms; indeed, the most persistent and pernicious wound is the *fêlure*, the invisible crack (recalling Charcot’s definition of hysteria as any symptomatic condition that does not have a detectable lesion) responsible for innumerable manifestations of uncontrolled vice, excessive behavior and general “leaking,” to quote Janet Beizer, of the kind that Pascal gleaned in his vision. *La fêlure* is the absent symbol of the family. Here we are obliquely reminded of the etymology of “symbol” coming from the greek *symbolon*, “an object cut in half constituting a sign of recognition when the carriers were able to reassemble the two halves.” *La fêlure* could be considered the unbridgeable space separating the two parts, impeding recognition because impeding re-assembly. Pascal’s goal as edifier, in some ways, is to solidify and repair the family’s symbol, making it recognizable, representable—and thus curable (“Tout dire...,” thus sparing none of the insalubrious details).

With these ends in mind, Pascal spends his time alternating between three projects: 1) an external project meticulously maintaining the genealogical tree that he has “erected,” charting the hereditary story of his family and *making visible* the manifestations of the *fêlure* out of which the family was born; 2) an internal project, fabricating his “liqueurs” meant to fortify “*le terrain*” of those who, because of unfortunate heredity, have over the generations seen an impoverishment of their bodily “soil” (keeping his family in mind as prime patients who would benefit from such an internal fortification); 3) finally, a very particular project, with both an

internal and external aspect, solidifying Clotilde (and the resulting child, by extension), who is repeatedly referred to in the text (and especially toward the end) as “cette créature qu’il avait faite” (140), whose heredity he has successfully “corrigé[e]” in two separate steps—first by raising her from infancy, and secondly by rechanneling her natural, somewhat tainted instinct into healthy curiosity (270).

### *Symbolizing "la fêlure"*

The narrative of *Le Docteur Pascal* advances primarily through the tension between Pascal and Félicité, Pascal’s mother, each of whom has a different vision for how best to represent the family. Félicité, *croyante*, meddling and glory-seeking, reviles Pascal’s quiet scientific passions, his interest in revealing the family’s secrets, and his utter disregard for improving the family’s social status. She sees his endeavors as not only fool-hardy, but antithetical to her own projects; while her other sons have bolstered the family name and its prominence, Pascal is a failure, stubbornly living in a hole: “Dieu merci! ce ne sont pas les hommes de valeur qui manquent dans notre famille, mes autres fils m’ont donné assez de satisfaction!...Eh bien ! pourquoi Pascal, qui aurait pu marcher sur leurs traces à tous, vit-il obstinément dans son trou...” (18). We are introduced to Pascal’s mammoth genealogical excavation through her disapproving gaze. Félicité’s thoughts mingle with the narration in an instance of *style indirect libre* to disparage his show-and-tell-all endeavor.

Ah! ces dossiers abominables, elle les voyait, la nuit, dans ses cauchemars, étaler en lettres de feu les histoires vraies, les tares physiologiques de la famille, *tout cet envers de sa gloire* qu’elle aurait voulu à jamais enfouir, avec les ancêtres déjà morts !...Et, avec une belle carrure insoucieuse de savant, il accumulait sur les siens, depuis trente années, les renseignements les plus intimes, recueillant et



classant tout, *dressant cet Arbre généalogique des Rougon-Macquart*, dont les volumineux dossiers n'étaient que le commentaire, bourré de preuves...(20)

Félicité uses the verb “dresser” to describe Pascal’s actions, establishing Pascal as a builder of a very particular kind. A naturalist architect, Pascal does not construct buildings or monuments; his chef-d’oeuvre is, rather, the genealogical tree, a work “si définitif et si total..il n’y a pas un trou...” (105).<sup>51</sup> In fact, we learn later that Félicité and Pascal are both builders seeking to symbolize the family in diametrically opposed ways. Félicité desires to bury the past and the truth along with it, raising a monument in honor of the venerable Rougon. Her monument of choice is a nursing home that would be called “l’Asile Rougon” where, presumably, people would be able to, if not bury, then at least conceal compromising, *old* members of their family. To assure the glory of her *Asile*, Félicité must dismantle Pascal’s project. We will recall that Pascal has a vision of the family *tare* written in blazing letters. Félicité actualizes this blazing in an auto-da-fé,<sup>52</sup> making a decision to foist them into the fire to extinguish their truth telling power at the end of the novel (to her chagrin, the tree remains “standing,” hidden away in plain sight like the purloined letter).<sup>53</sup> Pascal’s construction, the opposite (“l’envers”) of hers, has precisely the intent of making visible the invisible.

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<sup>51</sup> The fact that Pascal “builds” a tree serves as a point of continuity in Zola’s planning for the series as a whole. In the first 1869 version of the genealogical tree, Zola had labeled Pascal as an “agriculteur intelligent,” only later, in the second version from that same year, changing his profession to “médecin.” In all four versions of the tree, though, Pascal is marked by his *innéité*, by the fact that he is “*en dehors complètement*.”

<sup>52</sup> Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> As it happens, Félicité has a long history of taking down trees. In *La Fortune des Rougon*, she is depicted as *la coupable*, responsible for having poisoned to the point of slowly killing the “tree of liberty,” which had been planted by the workers during the 1848 revolt and had come to symbolize the Republic. The destruction of this tree—read as the death of the Republic—ushers in the era of the Rougon, as would have the destruction of Pascal’s tree, had Félicité succeeded in burning it: “L’heure des Rougon était venue. La ville neuve leur fit presque une ovation le jour où l’on scia l’arbre de la liberté planté sur la place de la sous-préfecture. Cet arbre, un jeune peuplier apporté des bords de la Viorne, s’était desséché peu à peu, au grand désespoir des ouvriers républicains qui

While there may be no holes in the tree's structure, at least none that are immediately evident, in contrast to a builder who seeks a solid and fissure-free foundation to erect a house, Pascal plants his tree in Tante Dide's originary lesion—the mythical “*fêlure*”—and watches it branch out from there. As such, there is no question that the family represented by the tree is matriarchal, a fact emphasized by the arboreal description given of Tante Dide, herself, when the family (all five generations represented) go to visit her at the insane asylum Les Tulettes (the inspiration for Félicité's *Asile*): “Sa chair était comme mangée par l'âge, la peau seule demeurait sur les os...Et, squelette jauni, desséchée là, *telle qu'un arbre séculaire dont il ne reste que l'écorce*, elle se tenait pourtant droite contre le dossier du fauteuil, n'ayant plus que les yeux de vivants, dans son mince et long visage” (*DP*, 69). Tante Dide's body, reduced to dry bark, is compared to a “secular tree” in contradistinction with the Biblical tree of knowledge, though equally responsible for the proverbial fall of its “fruit.” A few pages later, watching Tante Dide cry (further drying out), Pascal marvels at the “implacable logic” of heredity before his eyes as each member of the family morphs into one of the trunk's offshoots: “C'était que, devant ses yeux, s'évoquait toute la lignée, la *branche* légitime et la *branche* bâtarde, qui avaient poussé de ce *tronc*, lésé déjà par la névrose. Les cinq générations étaient là en présence, les Rougon et les

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venaient chaque dimanche constater les progrès du mal, sans pouvoir comprendre les causes de cette mort lente. Un apprenti chapelier prétendit enfin avoir vu une femme sortir de la maison Rougon et venir verser un seau d'eau empoisonnée au pied de l'arbre. Il fut dès lors acquis à l'histoire que Félicité en personne se levait chaque nuit pour arroser le peuplier de vitriol. L'arbre mort, la municipalité déclara que la dignité de la république commandait de l'enlever. Comme on redoutait le mécontentement de la population ouvrière, on choisit une heure avancée de la soirée. Les rentiers conservateurs de la ville neuve eurent vent de la petite fête; ils descendirent tous sur la place de la sous-préfecture, pour voir comment tomberait un arbre de la liberté. La société du salon jaune s'était mise aux fenêtres. Quand le peuplier craqua sourdement et s'abattit dans l'ombre avec la raideur tragique d'un héros frappé à mort, Félicité crut devoir agiter un mouchoir blanc. Alors il y eut des applaudissements dans la foule, et les spectateurs répondirent au salut en agitant également leurs mouchoirs. Un groupe vint même sous la fenêtre, criant: - Nous l'enterrerons, nous l'enterrerons! Ils parlaient sans doute de la république. L'émotion faillit donner une crise de nerfs à Félicité. Ce fut une belle soirée pour le salon jaune” (*FR* 91).

Macquart, Adélaïde Fouque à la racine... Il n'y avait pas de lacune, la chaîne se déroulait, dans son hérédité logique et implacable" (72).<sup>54</sup>

Pascal's blueprint is unveiled a few chapters later the night he catches Clotilde in the process of trying to destroy his files. In this scene of revelation, the reference to Genesis and the Biblical tree is expanded, the story of Adam and Eve reimagined.<sup>55</sup> Another tree also undergirds the exposition of Pascal's *chef-d'oeuvre*, firmly attaching it to enlightenment principles: the "Arbre généalogique" from *L'Encyclopédie*, which charts the various branches of human understanding.<sup>56</sup> Clotilde begrudgingly agrees to indulge her curiosity and his wishes to enlighten her, "domptée" by Pascal's "autorité virile" (105). The genealogical tree is unfolded before her eyes. "C'était une grande feuille de papier jaunie, aux plis coupés par l'usure, sur laquelle s'élevait, dessiné d'un trait fort, un arbre symbolique, dont les branches étalées, subdivisées, alignaient cinq rangées de larges feuilles; et chaque feuille portait un nom, contenait, d'une écriture fine, une biographie, un cas héréditaire" (ibid.). It is as if the scene at the asylum had been transposed onto this yellowed, cut-up and used paper. Pascal's family

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<sup>54</sup> The Old Testament subtends *Le Docteur Pascal* as a counter model. In addition to Tante Dide's implicit comparison with the Tree of Knowledge, the genealogical tree lies in stark contrast with the Bible, which is also written on *pages jaunies*, portraying a family opposite to the Rougon-Macquart and, particularly, displaying an ideal of eternal, healthy man: "...les naïves gravures sur bois continuaient à défiler, ce monde biblique qui s'évoquait des pages jaunies, cette poussée libre d'une race forte et vivace, dont l'œuvre devait conquérir le monde, ces hommes à la virilité jamais éteinte, ces femmes toujours fécondes, cette continuité entêtée et pullulante de la race, au travers des crimes, des incestes, des amours hors d'âge et hors de raison (187)—almost a word-for-word repetition of another passage that doesn't speak of *les pages jaunies* (154).

<sup>55</sup> Pascal and Clotilde only become conscious of their half nudity at the end of their intent exploration of every branch and leaf of the genealogical tree: "Mais ils se virent, dans leur demi-nudité" (125). The Edenic allusions in this passage cannot be overlooked. In this way, "l'arbre généalogique" metonymically stands in as the proverbial apple, the fruit of seduction. For a discussion of the influence of Genesis on this scene, see Michel Serres, *Feux et signaux de feu* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1975), 48-49.

<sup>56</sup> *L'Arbre généalogique* has at its root the principle of "entendement" or deep understanding. Out of this root sprout three branches: la mémoire, la raison, l'imagination, all of which will be called upon in the scene, and, later, in the reconstitution of the series if we accept Beizer's assertion of Clotilde as the assumed symbolic figure of authorship after Pascal's death.

portrait is characterized by strength of line and organization, each leaf representing the biography of a different family member, logically connected by branches to other family members, all rising from a shared maternal, rotted root.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Pascal had symbolically taken Tante Dide's jaundiced frame and hanging, bark flesh—"des os recouverts du parchemin de la peau"—and repurposed it, written over it, ordering, with paper and pen, the chaos that issued out of it. With its subdivisions, aligned rows and unbroken flow, his construction does more than simply rein in and systematize the various examples (of which there are many) of heredity gone awry. Its primary purpose is to fill in and staunch the biological *fêlure*, which is also described in arboreal terms: "...la fente rouge, pareille au coup de hache qui ouvre le tronc et laisse couler la vie des grands arbres."<sup>58</sup> Bluntly, Zola acts as the "ax man," "hacking" away so as "to fabricate" textually the originary gaping hole of the mother's vagina:

Unlike most family trees, which are used to establish pedigree and connection to an illustrious and esteemed ancestor, this genealogical enterprise has the inverse result of putting on display *les dégâts* of Tante Dide's two unions. In this sense, the tree functions metaphorically as a unifying force offering a synthesized image of the family body. This "planche anatomique" brings together and recognizes two halves of a split, one side "legitimate," the other "illegitimate," but both linked by the imaginary *fêlure* out of which the tree grows (106). But,

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<sup>57</sup> The tree is the summation of all of the supplementary background work contained in the dossiers. When taken at the fragmentary level, each leaf represents a person, his or her story (a previous book of the series) summed up in a few brief phrases identifying his or her name, date of birth, marital history, children. Then in parentheses, as if to highlight an inward turn, the expressed hereditary traits are recorded: whether it is direct or indirect heredity, heredity "en retour" (or *innéité*), the "election" or interior likeness, either from the mother or the father, along with the exterior likeness. Within the parentheses any manifestation of *la fêlure* is also indicated. The notation ends on a statement of either the person's profession or his or her current life (or death) status.

<sup>58</sup> Emile Zola, *La joie de vivre* in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, ed. A. Lanoux, H. Mitterand, t.3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 1096. We are struck here by the comparison of "la fente rouge" to the *action* of the axe cutting ("un coup de hache"—a blow of an axe) rather than the mark left by the axe. The fact that emphasis is placed on the stroke highlights the vagina as a site of negative activity, as an active opening forcing the sap out.

the tree can also be read in another way, symbolizing above all else, as Viviane Casimir suggests, the pulsating movement of heredity, itself. Following this logic, the tree opens onto a metonymical reading in which each person stands in for his or her illness:

Heredity becomes life itself in its movement and beings become the material support by which its work can be accomplished. Heredity moves from the position of means or tool to the position of subject with its own goal and intention. Heredity is thus *personified* and life does not result from organization of matter but rather, exists prior to it, and needs matter as a support. Heredity here manifests itself only in a negative way: it is on the side of diseases. As a result of this reversal of priority from object/tool to subject, diseases in the genealogical tree are *characters* themselves. The genealogical tree becomes a catalogue of diseases for which people's names are just signifiers. The diseases are in fact the signifieds, the real characters.<sup>59</sup>

Casimir's formulation aligns with Deleuze's reading of *la fêlure* as Heredity, in a large sense; for Deleuze, "Heredity," with its "grande H" (with its own "coup de hache"), is the death instinct, a force lurking within, looking for the right conditions to manifest.<sup>60</sup> Casimir echoes the conception of heredity that Zola, himself, develops in his *ébauche* as not only movement, but "communicated" movement that creates both individuals and worlds: "L'hérédité, c'est un *mouvement communiqué*. En somme, l'hérédité fait le monde, et si l'on pouvait intervenir, la connaître pour disposer d'elle, on ferait le monde. Cette intervention part de cette idée que le

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<sup>59</sup> Viviane Casimir, "Homme Machine and Homme Organisme in *Le Docteur Pascal*," *Excavatio*, n.4-5 (1994): 44.

<sup>60</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Zola et la fêlure," in *Logique du sens*, 424-436. According to Deleuze, there are two forms of heredity at work in Zola's series: heredity (with a lower-case "h"), which is a heredity of instincts and dispositions that transmits itself through a logic of resemblance determining the state into which a child is born: "par exemple, un fond de santé se retrouve, ou bien la dégradation alcoolique passé d'un corps à l'autre, les synthèses instinct-objet se transmettent en même temps que les modes de vie se reconstituent" (Deleuze 427). The second kind of heredity, "Hérédité de la fêlure" (with its upper-case H), reproduces itself identically, completely and implacably: "Elle n'est pas liée à tel ou tel instinct, à une détermination organique interne, et pas davantage à tel événement extérieur qui fixerait un objet. Elle transcende les genres de vie, aussi va-t-elle de façon continue, *imperceptible et silencieuse*, faisant toute l'unité des Rougon-Macquart. La fêlure ne transmet que la fêlure" (ibid.).

monde est mauvais, qu'il faudrait le corriger pour le rendre bon. Et c'est là une idée de médecin qui a vu de près la maladie, la souffrance et la mort..." (RM 5, 1601).

Zola explicitly frames heredity as "communicated movement," what we might otherwise rephrase as a "flow of information"; heredity speaks its own language. Zola suggests, if we could only co-opt the flow—" intervenir, la connaître pour disposer d'elle"—and "break the code," we could manipulate the communication to other ends: create other "worlds." He likens this action to the work of a doctor who has seen, *de près*, the way heredity works (creating suffering, illness and death). It is no accident, then, that breaking heredity's code is exactly the task he assigns to his doctor.

***"L'hérédité a ses lois, comme la pesanteur."*<sup>61</sup>**

Today, questions of heredity are immediately subsumed under the all-encompassing umbrella of genetics, the starting point for any conversation about "expressed" or "unexpressed" traits. As Evelyne Fox Keller declares, the twentieth century was "the century of the gene." Watson and Crick's discovery of the double helix in 1953 revolutionized the understanding of life, at its most basic level. The gene instituted itself as THE basic building block of human biological individuality. The word, gene, was offered in 1909 by Wilhelm Johannsen who was anxious to create a concept "free from any hypotheses...express[ing]s only the evident fact that, in any case, many characteristics of the organism are specified in the gametes [a cell that fuses with another cell during fertilization] by means of special conditions, foundations, and determiners which are present in unique, separate, and thereby independent ways..." (quoted by

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<sup>61</sup> Zola, *FR*, 3.

Keller, 2). As the term gained traction, it solidified into a "fixed and unitary locus of structure and function" that engaged in a process of predictable self-replication.<sup>62</sup> It was endowed with causal agency, responsible for "constructing" the organism. Francis Crick articulated the "central dogma" of this "master molecule" in 1957, confirming DNA's constitutive role of biological personhood: "DNA makes RNA, RNA makes protein, and proteins make us."<sup>63</sup>

At the turn of the century when Zola was writing, people were just beginning to systematize the laws of inheritance, and the gene had yet to appear on the horizon. William Bateson, reviving Gregor Mendel's research through a Darwinian lens, publicly coined the term "genetics" in 1906 when he went before the International Congress of Botany on Plant Hybridization to propose the founding of a new branch of physiology: "To this study we may

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<sup>62</sup> Evelyne Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Keller (ibid., 54). Over time we have learned, however, that the law of DNA replication does not always hold. Moreover, genes have proven themselves much less stable than previously thought. They are mutable, and understanding this mutability has occupied a great deal of scientific research over the last forty or so years. Genes can be manipulated and fixed if they are malfunctioning. They can also be corrupted. And they can be turned on and off. Much current scientific inquiry is devoted to understanding what makes a gene "light up," so to speak, while other genes remain "extinguished": is it the latent power of hereditary factors or environmental exposure or some combination of the two? The age-old debate of nature and nurture still rears its ugly and undecidable head, the Medusa that can't be killed.

Scientists, hoping to get a handle on these discrepancies, designed the Human Genome Project. It was originally intended to "make visible" the map of genetic sequencing of the chemical base pairs that constitute DNA, thus charting all of the variations of a particular gene to determine its physical expression and function. However, instead of solidifying knowledge, the Genome Project revealed all of the epistemological gaps, disrupting even the idea of genetic self-identity. It is not even clear now whether the gene exists as a bound, physical entity, upending (in a post-structuralist gesture) the assumed stability of the most fundamental and intimate structures of biological personhood. Keller plainly spells out the consequences of these findings:

"We have learned not only that function does not map neatly onto structure but also that function must be distinguished from a particular and pre-specified locus of the chromosome [The chromosome is the coiled structure into which DNA is packed. It is not visible in the cell's nucleus.] To the extent that we can still think of the gene as a unit of function, that gene (we might call it the *functional gene*) can no longer be taken to be identical with the unit of transmission, that is, with the entity responsible for (or at least associated with) intergenerational memory. Indeed, the functional gene may have no fixity at all: its existence is often both transitory and contingent, depending critically on the functional dynamics of the entire organism" (70-71).

give the title Genetics."<sup>64</sup> Bateson is known for his discovery that some biological characteristics are not distributed continuously, with a normal distribution, but discontinuously—or dimorphically. Reminiscent of Lucas' perplexity over what he called *innéité*, Bateson saw the persistence of two forms in one population as a challenge to the then current conceptions of the mechanism of heredity, causing him to wonder whether dimorphism actually marked a division into a separate species.

Pascal struggles with similar questions when he is trying to draw up the tree. He wonders how best to represent this "language" of heredity and the complexity of the relationships it establishes between inherited internal disposition, external reflection and similarity or differences vertically and across generations.<sup>65</sup> Why does a particular hereditary trait express itself? Why are there a variety of expressions? Do the expression of traits change as one ages? And, most importantly for him, why does he express none of the hereditary traits of his family? Pascal's hypothesis that responds to these questions is a premise of "aborted cells," a theory that, in fact, posits change as a negative aberration, as a consequence of accident: "Et il avait abouti à ce qu'il nommait l'hypothèse de l'avortement des cellules. La vie n'est qu'un mouvement, et l'hérédité étant le mouvement communiqué, les cellules, dans leur multiplication les unes des autres, se poussaient, se foulait, se casient, en déployant chacune l'effort héréditaire; de sorte que si, pendant cette lutte, des cellules plus fiables succombaient, on voyait se produire, au

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<sup>64</sup> William Bateson quoted in Evelyne Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>65</sup> He mentions a first round attempt when he tried and failed to use pure logic to construct the tree: "Il avait, pour sa famille, d'abord dressé un arbre logiquement déduit, où les parts d'influence, de génération en génération, se distribuaient moitié par moitié, la part du père et la part de la mère. Mais la réalité vivante, presque à chaque coup, démentait la théorie. L'hérédité, au lieu d'être la ressemblance, n'était que l'effort vers la ressemblance, contrarié par les circonstances et le milieu" (*DP*, 39).



résultat final, des troubles considérables, des organes totalement différentes” (ibid.).<sup>66</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that Pascal’s hypothesis should involve negating the conduit of heredity, which, as we have seen, is birth through the mother;<sup>67</sup> aborted cells break the “implacable logic” of heredity---a maternal logic—and reinvent the creative forces at work, which, in this case, are presented in negative terms as “troubles considérables.” Pascal’s hypothesis allows him to account for his own conditions of existence, which, up until that point, had eluded him.

And, it is fitting that this hypothesis should involve questions of birth and death, since ultimately what is at stake is the question of origins. We are reminded of Zola’s dual vision of the body and are struck by the vitalist *principles* motivating the cells. This is not the world of the body-machine with predictable pulleys and levers—this is a body animated by principles that cannot be explained by occurrences in the physical outside world. Cells, here, are personified; they “push,” “strain,” “marry,” and expend effort to express themselves (*DP*, 39).<sup>68</sup> We are confronted with a strange and somewhat paradoxical vision of survival of the fittest where in fact

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<sup>66</sup> What is remarkable is that this theory is actually a basis for the current understanding of how cells work. As we discussed in the second chapters, Jean Claude Amien argues that an organism constantly redefines itself through a process of self-destruction. See Jean Claude Ameisen, *La Sculpture du vivant: Le suicide cellulaire ou la mort créatrice* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, heredity is etymologically derived from the Latin *hereditatem* (nominative *hereditas*) meaning "heirship, inheritance, condition of being an heir." These words were derived from *heres* (genitive *heredis*) meaning "heir, heiress," from PIE root \*ghe- "to be empty, left behind" (cf. Greek *khera* "widow"). The single woman, dispossessed of family, lingers at the heart of heredity, just as she is situated at both the origin—and the end—of Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

<sup>68</sup> This theory is presented at a moment when Pascal is reviewing all of his scientific work up until that point. We see in this passage a hesitation between the vision of the body as machine and a body animated by still yet unexplained forces. Zola dismisses vitalistic propositions in *Le Roman expérimental*, emphasizing that, eventually, their ideas, too, will conform to the more mechanistic conceptions. "Les corps vivants, dans lesquels les vitalistes admettaient encore une influence mystérieuse, sont à leur tour ramenés et réduits au mécanisme général de la matière... Quand on aura prouvé que le corps de l'homme est une machine, dont on pourra un jour démonter et remonter les rouages au gré de l'expérimentateur, il faudra bien passer au actes passionnels et intellectuels de l'homme. Dès lors, nous entrerons dans le domaine qui, jusqu'à présent, appartenait à la philosophie et à la littérature ; ce sera la conquête décisive par la science des hypothèses des philosophes et des écrivains. On a la chimie et la physique expérimentales; on aura la physiologie expérimentale ; plus tard encore, on aura le roman expérimental" (*Le roman expérimental*, 22).

the most “reliable” expressions risk being overturned and suppressed; and yet, these “reliable” cells, within the Rougon-Macquart family, would precisely be the ones most likely to transmit *la fêlure*. These cells, in theory, would be the least desirable to have triumph.

In this passage, Pascal—and Zola—are grappling with the question “why” that normally, for the experimental scientist, lies outside the field of exploration. Quoting Claude Bernard, Zola repeats the necessity to content oneself with “how” and avoid asking “why”: “[I]a science expérimentale ne doit pas s’inquiéter du *pourquoi* des choses ; elle explique le *comment*, pas davantage” (13).<sup>69</sup> And yet, one of the interesting blind spots of *Le Roman expérimental* is Zola’s wavering on this point. At two other times in the text, he unconsciously reverses this hierarchy: “ Toutes ces considérations [les considérations de Bernard] sont strictement applicables au roman expérimental. Pour ne point s’égarer dans les spéculations philosophiques, pour remplacer les hypothèses idéalistes par la lente conquête de l’inconnu, il doit s’en tenir à la recherche du *pourquoi* des choses. C’est là son rôle exact, et c’est de là qu’il tire, comme nous allons le voir, sa raison d’être et sa morale “;”<sup>70</sup> and again “ Notre rôle d’être intelligent est là: *pénétrer le pourquoi* des choses, pour devenir supérieur aux choses et les réduire à l’état de rouages obéissants” (28). This may seem like a trivial point, but it expresses the difference between the possibility of virile mastery and the *impuissance* before the unknown.

Once “why” is asked—why this or that expression instead of another? why a boy baby? why a girl?—Pascal is faced with the limits of his tree, with the impossibility to know either

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<sup>69</sup> As we discussed in chapter 2, Claude Bernard quickly dismisses as futile the search for understanding origins: “C’est...seulement la question du pourquoi qui est absurde, puisqu’elle entraîne nécessairement une réponse naïve ou ridicule. Il vaut donc mieux reconnaître que nous ne savons pas, et que c’est là que se place la limite de notre connaissance” (Bernard, *Introduction*, 113).

<sup>70</sup> Zola, *Le roman expérimental*, 26.

where it begins or later where it will end: "...car tout arbre généalogique a des racines qui plongent dans l'humanité jusqu'au premier homme, on ne saurait partir d'un ancêtre unique, on peut toujours ressembler à un ancêtre plus ancien, inconnu..." (DP, 39). At the other extreme, once he learns of Clotilde's pregnancy, he inscribes the child on the tree as "l'Enfant inconnu à naître en 1873. Quel sera-t-il?" (301) The tree does not offer a predicative or predictive model for his progeny. Though he hopes, through the solid conditioning of Clotilde's influence and their more or less fortunate hereditary expression, the child will be pardoned from la *fêlure*, he can't be sure: *Messie* ou *l'Antéchrist*, both are possible. Similarly, the tree remains mute on the question of his creation and his resemblance. During one of his periods of crisis, he interrogates the tree to no avail: "*Pourquoi*, mon Dieu! l'Arbre ne voulait-il pas lui répondre, lui dire de quel ancêtre il tenait, pour qu'il inscrivît son cas, sur sa feuille à lui, à côté des autres ? S'il devait devenir fou, *pourquoi* l'Arbre ne le lui disait-il pas nettement, ce qui l'aurait calmé, car il croyait ne souffrir que de l'incertitude?" (137)

As he goes down this rabbit-hole, his *chef d'oeuvre* no longer appears "si définitif, si total"; even the certainty of his own hereditary expression has been shaken. He responds to his doubts with a new project in mind. This project will obviate the necessity of knowing origins and will fully make use of his conclusion of life's "perpétuel devenir" that seems at odds with the hereditary determinism grounding his static tree. Pascal sets to work on a *liqueur* that will do nothing short of assuring the health and happiness of mankind by fortifying "l'humanité vieillie," making it "vigoureuse enfin et intelligente" (193). Pascal's second project of edification moves inward, seeking to correct heredity and *milieu*—any lack (or potential *fêlure*) in constitution—by manipulating the body's insides.

### *Fortifier le terrain*

Zola's preoccupation with "terrain" is evident from the very beginning of the series; *Les Origines*, the "scientific title" of *La Fortune des Rougon*, commences with an in-depth description of the mythical terrain, *L'Aire Saint Mitre*.<sup>71</sup> This "forgotten" corner of Plassans, the small, imaginary town in Provence where *Les Rougon-Macquart* (in their plurality) originate, had once been a cemetery. Despite valiant efforts by the town to repurpose the space, it retains physical traces of its haunted history.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, *L'Aire Saint Mitre*, as Naomi Schor very

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<sup>71</sup> As legend has it, Saint Mitre was a Catholic saint of Greek origin who left his home country to live a life of charity and devotion. He arrived at Aix-en-Provence and found work under Arvendus, one of the Roman priests there. Mitre was intent on helping Arvendus find the virtuous path. Arvendus grew tired of Mitre's reproaches and concocted a plan to get rid of him. He ordered his servants to harvest and crush all of the grapes in the vineyard that Mitre was tending, intending to pin the crime of theft on Mitre, himself. His servants executed his wishes and reported back to him. The next day, when Arvendus expected to go to the vineyard and see plucked vines and filled vats, he instead found the vats empty and the vines magically overflowing with ripe, juicy grapes. Arvendus accused Mitre of witchcraft and had him beheaded. Mitre is then reported to have picked up his head and walked to one of the Aixoise cathedrals where he deposited his head and then died. Zola, who spent his childhood in Aix-en-Provence, was no doubt intrigued by this story. Saint Mitre's beheading haunts *La Fortune des Rougon*. The saw mill set up on the premises serves as a repurposed double of the guillotine: "Cette scierie est toute primitive: la pièce de bois est posée sur deux tréteaux élevés, et deux scieurs de long, l'un en haut, monté sur la poutre même, l'autre en bas, aveuglé par la sciure qui tombe, impriment à une large et forte lame de scie un continuuel mouvement de va-et-vient." (Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon*, 8.) The most obvious victim of beheading is Silvère whose head is blown off as he falls onto "Marie's" tomb (which doubly serves as the tomb of Miette, his beloved, who has also been killed and placed on the stone). More generally, though, beheading is the primary trope of the series: the fear of "losing one's head," which, in this context, means falling victim to *la fêlure*, is, as we have discussed, the origin of the family—and thus of the story.

<sup>72</sup> *L'Aire Saint Mitre* lies on the outskirts of Plassans (modeled after Aix-en-Provence). The history of this indeterminate and closed-off stretch of land ("une place qui ne conduit nulle part") is traced in detail by the narrator. As mentioned, the reader learns that the space had been used as a cemetery for years, absorbing body after body ("la terre... que l'on gorgeait de cadavres..."). Eventually, the saturated ground, personified, started "sweating" death. The town abandoned it, building another graveyard to accommodate the new corpses. Out of the soil enriched with human remains (we are reminded later, albeit in a more sinister, political context, that "Le sang est un bon engrais" (Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon*, 98) grew a sea of wild vegetation, which produced "monstrous" pear trees and "death eating" flowers. The public, both mystified and disgusted by the fertility of this bone and blood-drenched earth, set out to re-appropriate and tame the space: "On abattit les murs longeant la route et l'impasse, on arracha les herbes et les poiriers. Puis on déménagea le cimetière. Le sol fut fouillé à plusieurs mètres, et l'on amoncela, dans un coin, les ossements que la terre voulut bien rendre." (Ibid., 6.) Excising—and exorcising—the soil's top layers succeeded in calming the vital forces at work below. Except for one sliver of land along the very back wall of the plot (which functions as a space holder for the return of the repressed), the space adjacent to Macquart's hovel, the *Aire de Saint Mitre* effectively exchanges its rich inner life for an animated surface: "...on le peupla. Quand les pieds des promeneurs eurent usé le tapis d'herbe, et que la terre battue fut devenue grise et dure, l'ancien cimetière eut quelque ressemblance avec une place publique mal nivelée." Progressively, the *Aire* becomes a hybrid space of human industry (a rudimentary saw mill is set up on the premises)

carefully and persuasively argues, figures as a dystopic Garden of Eden, the symbolic space of coupling and of original violence in the series.<sup>73</sup> Both branches of the Rougon-Macquart family are forged along the margins of this conflicted space.<sup>74</sup> The *Aire Saint Mittre* functions as the terrain of all terrains, quite literally the motherland of the family. David Caron, in his study of the homosexual as Zola's inadvertent "Other," explicitly lays out the link between soil and reproduction in the series: "The health of the characters, and therefore of the community, is measured by their relation to the land, a gendered, heterosexual relation."<sup>75</sup> In accordance with this principle, *L'Aire Saint Mittre*, a repurposed cemetery and thus the site of degeneration, *par excellence*, could only produce ill-begotten fruit.

Ever in search of symmetry, it should be no surprise that Zola would return to the question of terrain come the end of the series. In *Le Docteur Pascal*, the mysterious and macabre generative powers of the *Aire Saint Mittre*—Tante Dide's "estate," so to speak—are transferred into the body's most inner cavities. In fact, Zola was one of the first *hommes de lettres* to employ the term "terrain" in the medical sense (a quote from *Le Docteur Pascal* is often used in dictionaries to illustrate this particular meaning of the word). The terrain that interests Zola—

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and of human exile (the land becomes a temporary home to the "bohemians" and other, singular outcasts who pass through the region); the original "depeopling" of the cemetery's depths, which amounted to a stripping of its reproductive powers, gives way to an alternative "populating," of which *Les Rougon-Macquart* are a part.

<sup>73</sup> Schor, *Zola's Crowds*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> We are told that Tante Dide's family, Les Fouque (a name already embedded with pathological and deterministic resonances—*Fou-que*), who at a time prior to the Revolution had been the richest vegetable producers and sellers of the region, owned a wide swath of land abutting *L'Aire Saint Mittre*. Tante Dide inherits this land and takes up residence there with her gardener and husband-to-be, Rougon; it is on this land, next to *L'Aire Saint Mittre*, where they begin building their life and family. After Rougon dies (in contrast to Pascal, Rougon is never given a first name), Tante Dide crosses over into *L'Aire*, proper. Her lover Macquart inhabits a hovel nestled in the very back of the *Impasse Saint Mittre*, adjacent to the sliver of land that is "haunted" by the dead that once resided there. This hovel eventually becomes Tante Dide's home until she is moved to the insane asylum by her son, Pierre.

<sup>75</sup> David Caron, *AIDS in French Culture : Social Ills, Literary Cures* (Ann Arbor: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 35.

and his alter-ego Pascal—is the terrain “impoverished” by heredity. Pascal believes that if he can internally strengthen the body, he can cure it, thereby ensuring the creation of a healthier, happier race: “Son rêve aboutissait à cette pensée qu'on pourrait hâter le bonheur universel, la cité future de perfection et de félicité, en intervenant, en assurant de la santé à tous” (*DP*, 40).

Pascal arrives at this lofty goal by remembering his work on tuberculosis. Though he determined that tuberculosis was not directly inherited, he noted that each of the children he treated suffered from “un terrain dégénéré” (41). This internal condition resulted from the unhappy marriage of poor inheritance combined with unhealthy living conditions (external *milieu*), facilitating the development of the illness. Pascal hopes to use experimental medicine to create a substance that would “refertilize” the body’s “soil”: “... enrichir ce terrain appauvri par l’hérédité, pour lui donner la force de résister aux parasites, ou plutôt aux ferments destructeurs qu’il soupçonnait dans l’organisme, longtemps avant la théorie des microbes” (*ibid.*)

In this passage and through Pascal, Zola inserts himself into the middle of a scientific debate raging about disease causation and the imagined relationship between the exterior and the interior of the body. Zola was writing *Le Docteur Pascal* after Robert Koch, the well-known German bacteriologist (and rival to Pasteur), had successfully identified the tuberculosis bacillus in 1882. So as not to be accused of ahistoricity (*Le Docteur Pascal* is set in the early 1870s, before Koch’s discovery), he endows Pascal with the intuition that tuberculosis is caused by “germs.” However, as Andrew Mendolsohn demonstrates, contrary to what one might think, the discovery of the agent “responsible” for causing tuberculosis did not silence questions of etiology. Quite the contrary was true; the identification of the germ highlighted individual *differences* and fundamental *inequality* between bodies, bringing to the fore the fact that one supposed “absolute” cause (the necessary “germ”) triggers widely varied responses from person

to person. Scientists were struggling to explain why someone who had, without question, been exposed to the bacterium manifested few if any symptoms while another died in a very short period of time. The debate was roughly split along the lines of the contemporary nurture/nature debate, which has long preoccupied scientists seeking to explain differences in everything from disease manifestation to intelligence. Should one attribute cause of difference to the role and strength of the agents working on the body from without? Or does the explanation lie rather in differences of internal (pre)disposition?

Zola, in his representation of Pascal's endeavors, walks a tight rope between these two theories, at least initially. Though he mentions germs and viruses only a few times in the series,<sup>76</sup> Zola was very invested in the way the outside could effect change on the inside (and *vice-versa*). Pascal's injections—his “cure” for the impoverished terrain—concretize Zola's objective of “reintroduction” of the outside to the inside. Through Pascal, Zola tests the limits of Bernard's theory, recasting *le terrain*—and the *le milieu intérieur*—as a dynamic and changeable space. Pascal, endowed with both the experimenter's and the doctor's grandiose desires to

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<sup>76</sup> The word "virus" appears only three times: once in *Nana* ("Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l'avait pourri.") (*Nana*, 1485); once in *Œuvre* ("Elle est certainement innocente de ce que son maçon de père a eu l'ambition stupide d'épouser une fille de bourgeois, et de ce qu'ils l'ont si mal fichue à eux deux, lui le sang gâté par des générations d'ivrognes, elle épuisée, la chair mangée de tous les virus des races finissantes.") Émile Zola, *L'Œuvre* in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. le Blond, T.15 (Paris: Bernouard, 1928), 180; once in *Argent* ("Oui, c'était fini, le monstre était lâché par le monde, à l'avenir, à l'inconnu, ainsi qu'une bête écumante du virus héréditaire, qui devait élargir le mal à chacun de ses coups de dent.") Émile Zola, *L'Argent* in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. le Blond, t.19 (Paris: Bernouard, 1928), 425.

The word "germe" appears more frequently, but only twice in the pathological sense :

*Œuvre* : "écoute, le travail a pris mon existence. Peu à peu, il m'a volé ma mère, ma femme, tout ce que j'aime. C'est le germe apporté dans le crâne, qui mange la cervelle, qui envahit le tronc, les membres, qui ronge le corps entier. Dès que je saute du lit, le matin, le travail m'empoigne, me cloue à ma table, sans me laisser respirer une bouffée de grand air;" (*L'Œuvre*, 285).

*Dr. Pascal*: "Il ne sortait plus, abandonnait ses malades, vivait dans ses papiers, sans air, sans exercice. Et, au bout d'un mois de ce surmenage, qui le brisait sans apaiser ses tourments domestiques, il tomba à un tel épuisement nerveux, que la maladie, depuis quelque temps en germe, se déclara avec une violence inquiétante. Pascal, à présent, lorsqu'il se levait, le matin, se sentait anéanti de fatigue, plus appesanti et plus las qu'il n'était la veille, en se couchant." (*DP*, 131).

“know” and thus to “master” nature (“Tout savoir, tout dire...pour tout guérir!”), undertakes a project based on the express intention of disrupting the static mechanisms of the *milieu intérieur*. His “coup de genie” involves provoking a reaction between the internal and the external so as to *change* the internal disposition.

He comes to the idea of a potential cure through his medical research, stumbling upon an old text that presupposes a strong organic correspondence across species: “Vers ce temps, le docteur, lisant un vieux livre de médecine du quinzième siècle, fut très frappé par une médication, dite ‘médecine des signatures’. Pour guérir un organe malade, il suffisait de prendre à un mouton ou à un bœuf le même organe sain, de le faire bouillir, puis d’en faire avaler le bouillon. La théorie était de réparer par le semblable [...]” (*DP*, 79).<sup>77</sup> This short passage, whose primary principles come to underpin Pascal’s subsequent theory and practice, posits healing through a dual logic of reinscription and supplementarity. Like Brown-Séquard with his injections of pulverized animal testes, Pascal composes his remedy of animal substances and proceeds with a similar belief in cross-species reparation. The “medicine des signatures” assumes a shared signifying system between animals; nature “speaks” only one language of organization despite producing seemingly endless morphological variety, and one form of animal can leave a lasting imprint on another. Thinking fondly of his old horse, Pascal emphasizes the depth of this reciprocal influence : “...Et tiens! notre Bonhomme...est-ce que tu ne crois pas

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<sup>77</sup> It is impossible to know whether Zola had any particular in text in mind when he was writing this passage, as he makes no direct mention of it in his notes. However, one possible inspiration might be the *Paragranum* by Paracelsus, a late fifteenth and early-sixteenth century physician, botanist, alchemist and occultist who proposed a curative approach similar to *la médecine des signatures*. Paracelsus argued against Galenic dualism that assumes opposites cure (or at least neutralize), maintaining instead that “like cures like.” Roberto Esposito quotes Paracelsus speaking about his “homeopathic principle of the similar”: “You should be able to recognize diseases according to their anatomy, for it is in its anatomy that the remedy is identical with the agent that caused the disease...Arsenic cures arsenic poisoning, the heart the heart, the lungs the lungs, the spleen the spleen...that which corresponds to the brain in the outside world can cure the human brain” (Paracelsus quoted by Esposito, *Immunitas*, 125).



qu'il a mêlé de son sang au nôtre, et que désormais il est de la famille? Nous l'avons modifié comme lui-même a un peu agi sur nous, nous finissons par être faits sur la même image..."

(120). To extrapolate, according to the logic of "signatory medicines," each animal has a similar enough internal *organization* or structural logic to allow for interchangeability, while having the possibility of being sufficiently different in *qualitative* structure to encourage replaceability. In the context of his curative project, by introducing fluids imbibed with the "signature" of a healthy organ, Pascal imagines actually "rewriting" the internal structures of the flawed organs through a process of repair fostered through shared likeness.

It is understandable how Pascal could conclude that "reparation by the similar," would appear a perfect antidote to heredity and, particularly, to "*terrains appauvris*" by heredity. In contradistinction to *innéité*, nature's principle of radical innovation and invention (of which Pascal is a product), heredity is defined as a phenomenon that works through "an effort toward resemblance" (39). Its "communicated movement," one could reason, might be receptive to integrating outside elements if they were sufficiently similar, able to integrate through mimesis. And even more than simple integration, within the "communication" of heredity, these external elements might swap out or fill in where the hereditary "linguistic chain" was missing a link. For Pascal, this possibility of completion or closure is what holds the most promise; Pascal hopes to use the principle of "*la médecine des signatures*" to treat what he views as the most serious ailment plaguing society—and his own family. The scientific knowledge of the day recognized the brain and the nerves associated with the brain as the command center over all other organs. Weak nerves, as we have discussed, is the condition primarily "communicated" through heredity. Pascal's specific application of the "*médecine des signatures*," then, would entail reinforcing the nerves, "adding" material where it lacks and thereby reconfiguring the entire *terrain*:

“Puisqu’il voulait régénérer les héréditaires affaiblis, à qui la substance nerveuse *manquait*, il n’avait qu’à leur *fournir* de la substance nerveuse, normale et saine” (ibid., my emphasis).

As such, Pascal’s *liqueurs* are a prime example of derridean supplementarity.<sup>78</sup> The supplement, we will recall, is an *external* substance that is *added* to fill-in an inherent lack. Eventually, that which is added comes to *replace* what it was meant simply to enhance. “Mais le supplément supplée. Il ne s’ajoute que pour remplacer. Il intervient ou s’insinue *à-la-place-de* : s’il comble, c’est comme on comble un vide. S’il représente et fait image, c’est par le défaut antérieur d’une présence. Suppléant et vicaire, le supplément est un adjoind, une instance subalterne qui *tient lieu*. En tant que substitut, il ne s’ajoute pas simplement à la positivité d’une présence, il ne produit aucun relief, sa place est assignée dans la structure par la marque d’un vide.”<sup>79</sup> Reading *la fêlure* as this inherent “*vide*,” it becomes clear that Pascal’s unspoken hope is that his concoctions might just be enough to fill in where nature left a gap.

Pascal develops his own curative method out of this fundamental idea of “signatory” and supplementary medicine. Instead of boiling the organs, he takes a more concentrated approach: “[...] il inventa de piler dans un mortier de la cervelle et du cervelet du mouton, en mouillant avec de l’eau distillée, puis de decanter et de filtrer la liqueur ainsi obtenue.” (ibid.) His mixtures, ingested, have no perceivable effect. He then moves to a more direct form of incorporation, using hypodermic injections. His first intended use of the *liqueur* is precisely the

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<sup>78</sup> For an analysis of how *Le Docteur Pascal* serves as supplement to the entire *Rougon-Macquart* series, see: Pascale Krumm, “*Le Docteur Pascal*: un (dangereux) supplément? La problématique féminine dans le cycle zolien,” *Cahiers naturalistes*, no.73 (1999): 227-240.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 208. Pascale Krumm shows how the notion of supplementarity underscores *Le Docteur Pascal*, reading the text, in its entirety, as a supplement to the *Rougon-Macquart* series. She concludes by showing how “l’enfant inconnu” ultimately comes to replace Pascal who is eliminated in the text once he is effectively “de trop.” Krumm does not, however, discuss Pascal’s fabrication of *liqueurs*, which I consider the most evident example of supplementarity.

hope to recover lost stamina—to stave off impending *vieillesse*. Pascal is his own best example of success: just as they did with Brown-Séguard, Pascal’s *liqueurs* revive him and, later, draw him out of the darkness of the neurasthenia he experiences during the period of “persecution.”

### ***Productive puncturability?***

Larry Duffy underscores the importance of the injections’ specific contents in his framing of Pascal’s work.<sup>80</sup> What strikes me as important, however, is the way in which the *male* body is initially represented as productively *puncturable*. Once Pascal takes his *piqûres* on the road as his preferred form of treatment, it cannot go unremarked that the “success stories” of Pascal’s cure (until they are successful no longer) are all men: for Sarteur, the homicidal “mad hatter,” “[...] les piqûres de substance nerveuse donnaient de la volonté, puisque le fou était là, sortit le matin même de l’Asile, jurant qu’il n’avait plus de crise, qu’il était tout à fait guéri de cette brusque rage homicide...” (*DP*, 191), as for Lafouasse, the ataxic cabaret owner (who, like Tante Dide Fouque, has madness written in his name), “[...] remis debout après une dizaine de piqûres, criait-il déjà sa guérison partout...” (52). The young Valentin, victim of a weak terrain kept in prolonged contact with his consumptive father’s microbes, also shows promising responsiveness to the remedy: “[...] il renaît à vue d’œil, il engraisse, depuis que je le pique..” (49). What is meant to “*comble le vide*,” to function as the missing link at the heart of “implacable logic of heredity” paradoxically results not in closure but in bodily opening and receptiveness to change.

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<sup>80</sup> Larry Duffy, “Incorporations hypodermiques et épistémologiques chez Zola,” *Revue Romane* 44:2 (2009), 299.

This “bodily openness,” according to Yves Chevrel, applies to the naturalist endeavor, in general. Chevrel uses the metaphor of the ever-extendable chain to characterize the naturalist *corpus*: “Un texte naturaliste [...] se manifeste comme une vaste chaîne à laquelle l’auteur ajoute, à son gré, des maillons.”<sup>81</sup> As such, the naturalist text benefits from and is also reinvigorated by the insertion of new, heterogeneous “links.” In this same vein, Larry Duffy cleverly reads Pascal’s injections, in particular, as a metaphor for Zola’s approach; Zola revitalizes his fictional writing through the incorporation of external, somewhat dubious scientific material just as Pascal claimed to revive his patients through his alchemical injections. Zola takes what might otherwise have been fallow terrain—pure realist description—and enriches it by adding scientific layers and an *esprit* of experimentation. However, what Duffy does not address is *how* the text is *modified* by these incorporations. Pascal, in fact, suspects that the explanation for the burst of new-found energy in his patients can be found in the body’s reactive capacities; in keeping with alchemical principles, the patients achieve transmutation through fire: “[Pascal] soupçonnait que l’énergie de ses convalescents venait en partie de la fièvre qu’il leur donnait” (*DP*, 42). On the meta-textual plane, do the additional *maillons* neutrally modify the text by simply extending the possibilities of discourse? Every addition is potentially reactive. In this case, the ways in which these discourses meet in the same imagined sphere produce something that transmogrifies cool naturalist observation into something more mystical and metaphysical; the practice of discursive eclecticism functions alchemically, producing a kind of text that strays from the naturalist imperatives of sterile truth and verges on the “decadent” writing of such authors as Huysmans and Dubut de Laforest.

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<sup>81</sup> Yves Chevrel, *Le naturalisme: Etude d’un mouvement littéraire international* (Paris: PUF, 1993), 109; 27.

As we see from the descriptions of the “cured,” particularly in the case of Sarteur, the treatments transcend the purely physiological. What Pascal truly hopes to confer is *force*: “Donner de la force, tout le problème était là; et donner de la force, c’était aussi donner de la volonté...” (*DP*, 41). In the *Ebauche*, Zola attempts to elaborate on the imagined process at work: “Même sous la peau d’un sujet irritable et colère, l’excitant calme, à cause de *la force de résistance* qu’il lui fait déployer. La force, c’est pouvoir résister aux impulsions. On donne donc de la volonté” (*RM* 5, 1587). Zola slips quickly from describing a physiological response (and a paradoxical one, at that: “*l’excitant calme*”) to positing a change in psychological character. Pascal’s animal injections are presented as strengthening far more than just the internal organs; they also have the possibility of fortifying moral fibers. It is precisely in this description of the “cure” where we glimpse Zola’s ideological agenda, what at least one critic has described as “une métaphysique vraiment singulière,” going beyond the purported intention of the straight-up naturalist’s goal to “describe the real” using the objective tools of science.<sup>82</sup> The Doctor Pascal is doling out “will,” hoping to buttress *terrains* far and wide—of his patients, of his family, of humanity at large.<sup>83</sup> Zola, in his fiction, is hoping to do the same; with the

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<sup>82</sup> Thierry Ozwald, “Un remède contre le mal du siècle: *Le Docteur Pascal* ou l’évangélisme thérapeutique chez Zola, *Cahiers naturalistes* 75(2001), 130-131.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, Pascal’s attempts to “cure” his family members most afflicted by *la fêlures*—Tante Dide and the young Charles, who is the spitting image of his great-grandmother-- are thwarted. He tries to inject Charles, but the boy’s veins do not hold up, resulting in an accumulation of blood under the skin: “Pascal n’ajouta pas qu’il avait, un instant, fait le rêve de [...] donner [à Charles] de la cervelle et des muscles, en le traitant par les injections de substance nerveuse ; mais il s’était heurté à un continuel accident, les moindres piqûres déterminaient chez le petit des hémorragies, qu’il fallait chaque fois arrêter par des pansements compressifs: c’était un relâchement des tissus dû à la dégénérescence, une rosée de sang qui perlait à la peau...” (*DP*, 68.) Only once does he contemplate attempting to “cure” Tante Dide, but fear overcomes him: “Aussi, un instant, avait-il songé à expérimenter la médication sur la vieille mère ; puis, des scrupules lui étaient venus, une sorte de terreur sacrée, sans compter que la démence, à cet âge, était la ruine totale, irréparable.” (73).

injection of “virile” words and ideas, he is hoping to shore up the French public, hastening and abetting it in its “convalescence.”

Derrida reminds the reader that all supplements “menace de mort.”<sup>84</sup> Pascal’s *liqueurs* are no exception, straddling the line between medicine and folly.<sup>85</sup> From the beginning of the story, we know of their potential danger; the reader quickly learns that his brews have already provoked one fatality and have nearly caused another. The regular rhythmic sound of Pascal, grinding the “*pilon*” in the mortar as he mashes up the organs for his potion, strikes fear and dread in the hearts of the women listening down below. Wild rumors circulate about Pascal’s methods: “Elles te diront qu’il pile des os de mort dans du sang de nouveau-né” (*DP*, 17). Pascal himself likens his work to witchcraft: “Alors, tu ne l’admires pas, ma liqueur de sorcier, qui réveille les morts ?” (43) The line between science and the occult blurs in the small, sparsely furnished, dark room—reminiscent of both a monkish bed chamber and a mad scientist’s laboratory—where Pascal ceremoniously “cooks” his solutions.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 223.

<sup>85</sup> The danger of the liquid is expressly highlighted by Zola in the *Ebauche*. “[I] pile de la substance nerveuse de mouton, cervelle, cervelet, moelle, centres nerveux : il pile dans un mortier, avec de l’eau distillé, puis il filtre, filtre en feutre. Cela fait un liquide très dangereux, à cause des impuretés, les microbes, et en outre les parcelles qui peuvent amener des embolies” (*RM* 5, 1587).

<sup>86</sup> It is interesting to compare the depiction of Pascal’s quarters with those Dubut de Laforest evokes in “La transfusion de sang.” This short story recounts the tale of an Italian scientist who is trying to cure his father’s madness. The father, who had worked for an International monetary commission, went crazy when faced with a large pile of money. The Italian man is presented as a scientist much like Pascal, inhabiting a secluded and dark laboratory cluttered with various scientific experimental machines. This story has, at its heart, the question of circulation—circulation of money, of people (the people who are broached to give their blood to regenerate the crazy father are all from different European countries—the story, in this sense, glorifies cosmopolitanism, which is viewed as very suspicious at this period in France) and, most importantly, of blood. I would love to give a longer analysis of this text, but simply don’t have the room here. Ultimately, the father is revived by the blood transfusion, but in his revival, he exhibits great force and pulls out the mechanism that controls the flow of blood when his son is donating. The father lives, but the son dies, bleeding to death because there is no mechanism to stop the flow.

The resulting liquid, “trouble, opalin, irisé de reflets bleuâtres,” (*DP*, 42) through its colored *reflets*, prefigures the “petite flamme bleue” (202) fatally sparked from the other “*fontaine de jeunesse*” (42): Uncle Macquart’s *eau-de-vie*, the dark “double” of Pascal’s *liqueurs*. In a very famous scene often criticized for its lack of scientific credibility, Félicité looks on as her brother-in-law (a member of the family she is all too happy to lose), asleep in an intoxicated stupor, spontaneously combusts after his pipe falls on his lap: “[...] et, par le trou de l’étoffe, large déjà comme une pièce de cent sous, on voyait la cuisse nue, une cuisse rouge, d’où sortait une petite flamme bleue” (202). After spying the way the little blue flame dances over the alcohol-soaked body, Félicité decides not to intercede, symbolically incriminating herself, as she closes the door behind her, by leaving behind one of her gloves. In this way, the two blue agents of death link Pascal and Félicité; they cast the shadow of murder respectively on son and mother: one for intervening too much with his hands, the other for doing too little—to the point, one could argue, of leaving her “hand” (in the form of the glove) behind.<sup>87</sup>

One by one, Pascal’s success stories unravel. Pascal inadvertently kills Loufasse one day, injecting an “impureté” into his vein. Loufasse dies of an embolism, “la mort s’éta[nt] produite en coup de foudre, les lèvres bleues, le visage noir” (129). Valentin finally succumbs to tuberculosis. And Sarteur, who senses the return of his homicidal tendencies, hangs himself before he can strangle another. This *médecin guérisseur*’s promising results are replaced by doubts; the injections, at their best, functioned more as a placebo than as anything else. Pascal’s

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<sup>87</sup> We learn that Félicité had, at one point, been dabbling in the administration of her own liqueurs with Uncle Macquart, not to cure but rather to accelerate his deterioration. Ironically, the alcoholic *eau-de-vie* really did seem to function as a *fontaine de jeunesse* for Macquart: "Jadis, lorsqu[e] [Macquart] était venu s'établir aux Tulettes, [Félicité] lui avait fait des cadeaux de vin, de liqueurs, d'eau-de-vie, dans l'espoir inavoué de débarrasser la famille d'un gaillard vraiment malpropre, dont on n'avait à attendre que du désagrément et de la honte. Mais elle s'était vite aperçue que tout cet alcool paraissait au contraire l'entretenir en belle allégresse, la mine ensoleillée, l'œil goguenard ; et elle avait supprimé les cadeaux, puisque le poison espéré l'engraissait" (200).

loss of faith is complete, as Henri Mitterand declares: “ Pascal, au terme d’une carrière où, par le fait, il a tué autant de malades qu’il en a guéris—lui aussi : ‘responsable, mais non coupable’ — ne croit plus dans les ressources de la médecine, ni même dans sa mission.”<sup>88</sup>

With failure—as well as blood—on his hands, Pascal relinquishes his desires actively to seek changing the physiological—and by extension moral—states that nature has created. Not only does he see his previous project through the lens of defeat, but he begins to question its basic premise of “rewriting” the body, wondering if, in attempting to do so, he was not in fact jeopardizing the greatest intangible gifts that life has to offer: “Corriger la nature, intervenir, la modifier et la contrarier dans son but, est-ce une besogne louable?...Peut-être tout est-il bien. Peut-être risquons-nous de tuer l’amour, le génie, la vie elle-même...” (192). Admitting to Clotilde his change of heart, Pascal renounces his pursuits of modifying the body’s interior : “ Tu entends, je le confesse à toi seule, le doute m’a pris, je tremble à la pensée de mon alchimie du vingtième siècle, je finis par croire qu’il est plus grand et plus sain de laisser l’évolution s’accomplir” (ibid.).

Pascal drains his *piqûres* of their contents and reinvests his energy outwards; the boundaries between inside and outside slide back into place as he readjusts his metaphorical glasses and envisions a new project. His previous vision of man’s biological interaction with the world had been founded on a linguistic model of sorts, a theory of essential signifying correspondence between organisms where biological *dérèglement* could be explained as a flawed or missing link in the linguistic chain. This link was imagined reparable by a supplementary link incorporated from the outside. The vision of *terrain* with modifiable fertility or fallowness is

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<sup>88</sup> Henri Mitterand, “Fêlures du sens, clivage des forms: *Le Docteur Pascal*, d’Emile Zola,” in *Mélanges offerts à Jean Peytard*, vol 1 (Paris: Diffusion Les Belles Lettres, 1993), 114.



eclipsed by the more predictable fixity of the machine in a world external and fundamentally different from it. Dreams of fortification are replaced by aspirations toward achieving balance and sufficient response, making sure that the systems of mediation are properly working.

According to the new model, the outside world sends signals to man's senses, which are then translated as sensations into prescribed action and thought. Health is determined and ensured by the correct functioning of the machine—its ability effectively to convert the signals into meaningful endeavors:

L'homme baignait dans un milieu, la nature, qui irritait perpétuellement par des contacts les terminaisons sensibles des nerfs. De là, la mise en œuvre, non seulement des sens, mais de *toutes les surfaces du corps*, extérieures et intérieures. Or, c'étaient ces sensations qui en se répercutant dans le cerveau, dans la moelle, dans les centres nerveux, s'y transformaient en tonicité, en mouvements et en idées ; et il avait la conviction que se bien porter consistait dans le train normal de ce travail : recevoir les sensations, les rendre en idées et en mouvements, *nourrir la machine humaine par le jeu régulier des organes*. Le travail devenait ainsi la grande loi, le régulateur de l'univers vivant. (297)

All liquids have been neutralized in their capacity fundamentally to change organisms. As Pascal asserts to Clotilde and later to Ramond, his presumed successor: “Le liquide injecté n’importe donc pas, il n’y a donc là qu’une action simplement mécanique...” (296). It is fluidity that counts—the necessity to keep things moving in a closed system of input and output. Occasionally, the input gets clog or moves sluggishly, creating an imbalance in the mechanisms. The doctor's role is then to intervene in these moments to promote recalibration: “Dès lors, il était nécessaire que, si l'équilibre se rompait, si les excitations venues du dehors cessaient d'être suffisantes, la thérapeutique en créât d'artificielles, de façon à rétablir la tonicité, qui est l'état de santé parfaite” (297). The tools at his disposal are largely exterior, meant to stimulate from without: “Et il rêvait toute une médication nouvelle: la suggestion, l'autorité toute-puissante du médecin pour les sens ; l'électricité, les frictions, le massage pour la peau et les tendons ; les

régimes alimentaires pour l'estomac ; les cures d'air, sur les hauts plateaux, pour les poumons..." (ibid.). For persistent difficulties, an occasional lubing or flushing—the injection of water—may be necessary to encourage proper circulation. In all cases, balance between the exterior and the interior—finding *le juste milieu*—is the ultimate goal of treatment: "...[E]nfin, les transfusions, les piqûres d'eau distillée pour l'appareil circulatoire. C'était l'action indéniable et purement *mécanique* de ces dernières qui l'avait mis sur la voie, il ne faisait qu'étendre à présent l'hypothèse, par un besoin de son esprit généralisateur, il voyait de nouveau le monde sauvé dans *cet équilibre parfait*, autant de travail rendu que de sensation reçue, le branle du monde rétabli dans son labeur éternel" (ibid., my emphasis).

Pascal's second project of edification, then, which begins on the question of *terrain* and interior *modification*, ends on a return to a conception of *l'homme-machine*, already determined, whose *rouages*, like those of any mechanical device, need "greasing" or "flushing" periodically. This vision is much closer to the understanding laid out by Claude Bernard, in which the inside and the outside are virtually separate. Zola, through Pascal, seems to abandon his desire to improve upon Bernard's model by investigating what is produced when the inside meets the outside through experimental injection. Or, rather, he defaults to a different—and certainly more prosaic (though just as risky, given the stakes of reproduction in the *Rougon-Macquart* series)—form of external/internal interaction: the fantasized eternal promises and fortifications of male and female exchange.

### Donner un ‘moi’ solide

Several critics have made note of Zola’s construction of the novel. *Le Docteur Pascal* is split into an even number of chapters (fourteen to be exact—as with many of his novels): two even halves, one in which Pascal, loyally and fervently, devotes himself to science; the other in which he abandons science for love. Clotilde, his young niece, eventual lover and mother of his child, revivifies—and revirilizes—him in ways that his previous cerebral “mistress” never did. With this transition to a more romantic focus, Zola also seems to ditch any aspirations of evolving science through the novel, indulging in an entirely different kind of corporeal edification.

When we meet her at the beginning of the text, Clotilde is described in Pascal’s words as having “‘une bonne petite caboche ronde, nette et solide’” (10). This phrase is repeated periodically (with slight modifications to syntax) throughout the first half of the text. The repetition, instead of reassuring the reader of its veracity, has the inverse effect of highlighting the uncertainty (according to Pascal) of the statement. Indeed, the solidity of Clotilde’s head is anxiously brought into question early on when, in a oft-quoted and critiqued remark, Pascal exhorts Martine to “sew up” the “leaks” (“recousez-moi donc aussi cette caboche-là, qui a des fuites...”) (12). The rest of the text can be read, in fact, as a “buttoning up,” a “redressing” of Clotilde. In the end, Clotilde is both more suitably “clothed” (which, in this case, paradoxically means perfectly unclothed, offering her milk-laden breasts to her voraciously hungry infant) and “remedied,” “set right.” Indeed, Pascal’s last and greatest effort to “correct” his family’s heredity lies in his ability to “correct” Clotilde—in making her physically and psychologically solid, immune to *fêlures*.

Henri Mitterand, in his study of the preparatory notes for *Le Docteur Pascal*, references Zola's interest in "la théorie du moi" (a rudimentary precursor to Freud's understanding of the "ego"), a hypothesis expounded by Jules Déjerine in his 1886 medical treatise on *l'Hérédité dans les maladies du système nerveux*.<sup>89</sup> Zola used Déjerine's study primarily to inform his treatment of Tante Dide. Déjerine explained that a "morbid psychological state" begins when "le moi" "falls" below a certain "threshold." Once this happens, the individual no longer reacts in a "normal" way to external stimulants. Zola notes: "'Sur le 'moi'. Pascal a donné un 'moi' solide à Clotilde, parce que le moi est le noyau solide qui résiste à l'impulsion [...] L'homme naturel qu'est Pascal croit au milieu, à l'éducation, comme correction" (*RM* 5, 1578). I read Pascal's last project of edification, assuring the "solidity" of Clotilde, as an attempt at conferring to her a "moi" sufficiently robust—and, thus, predictable—that it will limit the maternal powers of potential disorganization of the child's body, "*le travail secret*," as Zola reflected in his notes, effected by the woman's body (*ibid.*).

### *Staunching leaks*<sup>90</sup>

As a prefiguration of Collette's Sido or Breton's Nadja, Clotilde is caught drawing fantastical flowers of her own creation, flagrantly shirking her duties to replicate, with precision and exactitude, the phenotypes of roses she is meant to catalogue for Pascal's Mendelian-like records. The reader learns over the course of the first chapter that Clotilde's "leaks" flow from two sources: one being her fertile imagination; the other her strong faith. Clotilde takes off on flights of fancy and keeps Pascal's science at a distance with her skepticism. She balks at

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<sup>89</sup> Henri Mitterand, "Préface," *Le Docteur Pascal* (Paris: Gallimard [Collection Folio], 1993), 8.

<sup>90</sup> This title is inspired by Beizer, "The Leak in Clotilde's Head," 173.

Pascal's early attempts to explain away the universe in exclusively scientific terms; he tried to subsume the existence of a "higher" power under the secret workings of life itself, which, according to his understanding, is driven by heredity. ("La vie, c'était Dieu, le grand moteur, l'âme de l'univers. Et la vie n'avait d'autre instrument que l'hérédité, l'hérédité faisait le monde" [40].) Once Pascal realizes that Clotilde has been won over by Martine and Félicité in their religious war against his science, Pascal despairs that he did not do more to mold her in his image. He reflects on Clotilde's knack—a knack she has had since she was a little girl—to bring him face-to-face with the ends of his knowledge: "En quatre questions, elle l'acculait chaque fois à son ignorance fatale ; et, quand il ne savait plus que répondre, qu'il se débarrassait d'elle, avec un geste de fureur comique, elle avait un beau rire de triomphe, elle retournait éperdue dans ses rêves, dans la vision illimitée de tout ce qu'on ne connaît pas et de tout ce qu'on peut croire" (10). Clotilde's ability to linger at the heart of not only "comment" but "pourquoi" without any discomfort, and to synthesize her scientific acumen with her spiritual convictions,<sup>91</sup> challenges Pascal who, in such moments, finds himself left out in the cold with his logic and math.

The first part of the plot is driven, then, by the confrontation between Pascal's science and Clotilde's doubt. It all comes to a head the night when Pascal catches Clotilde red-handed, stealing his files from the giant armoire where they are stored. It is the first time we see him brutally assert his role as "master" to "punish" Clotilde and make her "obey." This also happens to be the moment of transformation when Clotilde loses her status as "enfant" and becomes a sexualized woman:

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<sup>91</sup> "Son esprit, nourri de science, partait des vérités prouvées, mais d'un tel bond, qu'elle sautait du coup en plein ciel des légendes. Des médiateurs passaient, des anges, des saints, des souffles surnaturels, modifiant la matière, lui donnant la vie ; ou bien encore ce n'était qu'une même force, l'âme du monde, travaillant à fondre les choses et les êtres en un final baiser d'amour, dans cinquante siècles. Elle en avait fait le compte, disait-elle" (83).

--'Quand une enfant vole, on la châtie !'

Quelques gouttes de sang avaient paru, près de l'aisselle, le long de son épaule ronde, dont une meurtrissure entamait la délicate peau de soie. Et, un instant, il la sentit si haletante, si divine dans l'allongement fin de son corps de vierge, avec ses jambes fuselées, ses bras souples, son torse mince à la gorge menue et dure, qu'il la lâcha... Elle s'approcha, elle l'aida, domptée, brisée par cette étreinte d'homme *qui était comme entrée en sa chair*. (102, my emphasis)

Pascal enters Clotilde without entering; the markings left by his masculinity rest, for all intents and purposes, superficial. In contrast to the male bodies, which are repeatedly punctured in the text, Clotilde's body—though bruised, crushed, squeezed—remains, at least in language, unpenetrated. This particular bruise is the mark that irrevocably imprints Pascal “in her.” Strangely, in another passage, she emphasizes the way his “penetration” occurs from a distance: “Toujours je te sentais en moi. Ton geste, à distance, me faisait tressaillir, car il me semblait qu'il m'avait effleurée” (169). The verb *effleurer* means colloquially “to brush against,” “to graze,” but, more literally, it means “to pluck the flower off of the plant” (*ôter les fleurs, détacher les fleurs d'une plante*): Pascal's distant touch “deflowers” Clotilde: he “plucks” her bud.<sup>92</sup> Claudie Bernard traces the way in which Clotilde is metonymically linked in the text to flowers—and, in particular, to budding flowers.<sup>93</sup> Clotilde's fantastical floral drawings—in defiance against exact *reproduction* of the roses—establish the initial relationship of contiguity

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<sup>92</sup> This in contrast to the other aging man depicted in the text, Monsieur Bellombre. At several occasions, Pascal, in the depths of his despair, envies the way Monsieur Bellombre has conserved himself, “toujours aussi vert,” seemingly untouched by the ravages of time. Most importantly, he has remained free from the emotional *tracasseries* tormenting Pascal. “Ce fut par un de ces mauvais jours que Pascal, s'étant approché d'une fenêtre, aperçut son voisin, M. Bellombre, le professeur retraité, en train de faire le tour de ses arbres, pour voir s'ils avaient beaucoup de boutons à fruit. La vue du vieillard si correct et si droit, d'un beau calme d'égoïsme, sur lequel la maladie ne semblait avoir jamais eu de prise, le jeta brusquement hors de lui.” (Ibid., 144.) Unlike Pascal, M. Bellombre leaves his buds on the tree. M. Bellombre is ultimately dismissed as a model, though, because his égoïsme has led to a solitary, sterile life. As Clotilde reminds Pascal, “...he is not loved.” (Ibid., 45.) He may, though, represent the fictional, true incarnation of Claude Bernard's ideal body—self-sufficient unto himself, removed from all troubling interactions, “la joie de vivre en dehors de la vie” (284).

<sup>93</sup> Claudie Bernard, “Cercle familial et cycle romanesque dans *Le Docteur Pascal*,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes*, no.67 (1993), 139.

for the reader. One of her drawings—the one “leaking” out when Pascal implores Martine to stitch up her head—is described in detail, and, in fact, offers a visual representation of what this “leaking” might look like: “Ce jour-là, sur la feuille sabrée à grands coups de crayon noir c’était *une pluie d’étoiles pales*, tout un *ruissellement de pétales* infiniment doux; tandis que, dans un coin, un épanouissement *innomé*, un bouton aux chastes voiles” (*DP*, 11). In this drawing, the “chastely veiled bud” is sectioned off in a corner, an as-yet-unrecognized blossom. Later, after Pascal has “left his mark,” Clotilde seizes upon the metaphor of the barely opened bud to describe her body, entreating Pascal to “take” and “inhale” her:

Maître, prends mes lèvres puisqu’elles sont fraîches, prends mon haleine puisqu’elle est pure, prends mon cou puisqu’il est doux à la bouche qui le baise, prends mes mains, prends mes pieds, prends tout mon corps, *puisque’il est un bouton à peine ouvert*...Tu entends ! maître, que je sois *un bouquet vivant*, et que tu me respirez !...Je suis ta chose, *la fleur qui a poussé à tes pieds* pour te plaire...Et je ne suis rien, maître, si je ne suis pas tienne! (243)

### ***Button up***

There is nothing novel about the association of a “blossoming,” young girl with a flower; the analogy is as old as the ages. What is interesting is the way the meaning of *bouton* slides around in the text, weaving an intricate web of signification. In fact, Zola employs some variant of the word “bouton” at several key moments of Clotilde’s evolution. Tracing the signifying chain over and through its slippery associative knots, we realize that *bouton* as bud is intimately tied to the extent to which Clotilde does or does not remain “buttoned” (*boutonnée*), a *va-et-vient* between metaphorical opening and closing. The first usage, as we already remarked, was the appearance of the as-yet-undiscovered “*bouton*” in her drawing. This *bouton* does evoke “bud.” But, hidden in its undisclosed (and *undisclosed*) corner, this *bouton* also gives the impression of

having been lost or perhaps torn from the rest of the scene. *Le bouton aux chastes voiles*, in the reader's mind, could easily fall into the lexicon of sewing and mending, obliquely setting the stage for Pascal's call to Martine's crafty needlework. The second instance occurs during Clotilde's period of spiritual isolation, when, won over by a visiting monk, she adamantly rejects Pascal's scientific influence. Clotilde strays from her habits and stops caring for her physical self in the depths of her estrangement: "...[T]out en elle disait son détachement de la vie extérieure, de son existence accoutumée... ce ne devait pas être à sa toilette qu'elle passait ces longues heures, car elle perdait de sa coquetterie de femme, à peine peignée, vêtue à la diable d'une robe *boutonnée de travers*..." (84). Clotilde's dress, "buttons askew,"--a reflection of her misaligned thoughts--contrasts with Pascal's riding coat, always "correctement boutonné." The distance between Clotilde and Pascal is closed after Clotilde turns *le bouton* (as knob) of the door, physically penetrating Pascal's dark, solitary chambers for the first time: "Puis, le matin du second jour, comme la jeune fille, par hasard, tournait *le bouton*, la porte céda...Et elle put entrer librement dans cette pièce où elle n'avait jamais mis les pieds..." (142). This initial entry into private space paves the way later for Pascal to enter her room and to place on her bed the first gift, *le corsage* made of lace—and of buttons, as the last instance of *bouton* at the end of the text reveals: "Dans la salle de travail, Clotilde *reboutonna* son corsage, tenant encore, sur les genoux, son enfant, à qui elle venait de donner le sein" (327).<sup>94</sup>

Pascal, relishing the idea of "dressing her himself" ("la parer lui-même"), gives her the corset to make her "très belle et toute blanche pour le don de son corps" (161). Hannah Thompson asserts that the seemingly insignificant detail of this exchange functions as the

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<sup>94</sup> Clotilde, in many ways, represents the diametrical opposite of *Nana*. Janet Beizer suggestively reads the scene of *Nana* in front of her mirror as a strip-tease. She highlights a sentence in which *Nana*, too, is rebuttoning her corset. See Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 179.



“privileged manifestation of [Pascal and Clotilde’s] perverse desire.”<sup>95</sup> Pascal’s “folie du don,” his “fashioning” of Clotilde, is ultimately what scandalizes the public and puts rumors into circulation: “Et cela tournait au scandale, cet oncle qui avait débauché sa nièce, qui faisait pour elle des folies de jeune homme, *qui la paraît comme une Sainte Vierge*” (DP, 181). Thompson focuses on the implied sexuality—and even extends the metaphor of lace to discuss Zola’s writing strategy of the series, as a whole—but she does not discuss one of the paradoxical effects of this seemingly tawdry economy: the fact that Pascal—and the text—ultimately keeps Clotilde and her body “buttoned up.”

The reticence to describe the female body is, of course, consistent with Zola’s habit of evoking all without *really* evoking it. (Janet Beizer and Peter Brooks have exhaustively discussed this anti-naturalistic *pudeur* in *Nana*.) This omission, as it has been argued, comes at the cost of violating Zola’s tenets as a naturalist writer. Beizer draws on Barthes’ conception of textuality as either revelation or process, cleverly employing the metaphor of the striptease in *Nana* to tease out both the promise and process of disclosure. In *Le Docteur Pascal*, Zola makes no gesture to disclose anything. Through the tissue of the text, and true to the resonances in her name, Clotilde stays closed. “Chaste veils” are kept intact. Unlike Barthes’ subject, Clotilde *ne se défait pas*, her purity—even saintliness—remains uncompromised.<sup>96</sup> Though the corset’s lace may encourage the imagination to peak through the ornate openings, glimpsing the scintillating

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<sup>95</sup> Hannah Thompson, “Ornamental Desires: The Scandal of the ‘détail inutile’ in Emile Zola’s *Le Docteur Pascal*,” *Romance Studies* 21, no.2 (July 2003): 93.

<sup>96</sup> Barthes reminds us of the sartorial origin of text: “*Texte* veut dire *Tissu*; mais alors que jusqu’ici on a toujours pris ce tissu pour un produit, un voile tout fait, derrière lequel se tient, plus ou moins caché, le sens (la vérité), nous accentuons maintenant, dans le tissu, l’idée générative que le texte se fait, se travaille à travers un entrelacs perpétuel; perdu dans ce tissu—cette texture—le sujet s’y défait, telle une araignée qui se dissoudrait elle-même dans les sécrétions constructives de sa toile.” Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 85-86.

skin through the “*entrelacs*,” it does not outrightly reveal what lies beneath in any textual or euphemistic way; quite the contrary. Here Zola’s “realist screen” could not be more opaque.

This willful obfuscation applies as well to the way Clotilde and Pascal’s relationship is framed. In the rumors, as we see from above, Clotilde is compared (though ironically) to Mary, the immaculate virgin. But the most pressing analogy established is the one likening the relationship between Pascal and Clotilde to that of David and the young Abisag—and then, by extension, to the other biblical examples where an old king weds—or beds, as it were—a much younger woman. Pascal reads these stories as a sign of the kings’ enduring virility, claim to immortality and power over the ever fertile, if “weaker” sex:

Quelle foi en la longévit  de l’homme, en sa force cr atrice, en sa toute-puissance sur la femme, ces extraordinaires histoires d’hommes de cent ans f condant encore leurs  pouses, recevant leurs servantes dans leur lit, accueillant les jeunes veuves et les vierges qui passent... C’ tait toute cette pouss e libre d’un peuple fort et vivace, dont l’ uvre devait conqu rir le monde, ces hommes   la virilit  jamais  teinte, ces femmes toujours f condes, cette continuit  ent t e et pullulante de la race, *au travers des crimes, des adult res, des incestes, des amours hors d’ ge hors de raison*. Et son r ve,   lui, devant les vieilles gravures na ves, finissait par prendre une r alit . Abisag entra dans sa triste chambre qu’elle  clairait et qu’elle embaumait, ouvrait ses bras nus, ses flancs nus, toute sa nudit  divine, pour lui faire le don de sa royale jeunesse. (*DP*, 154)

The incestual truth is lightly dismissed as part and parcel of the way “these races” perpetuate themselves. Clotilde’s body vanishes into myth as she comes to incarnate Abisag who, though naked, remains enveloped in “la soie liliale de sa peau”—again tethering Clotilde (as Abisag) to the flower (and not just any flower, but, as we might extrapolate, the flower—le fleur-de-lys—that has traditionally symbolized France.) The identification is so complete that, when she recreates the engravings, tapping into her “other self” unbridled from the exigencies of realistic representation, she replaces the faces of the old king and his concubine with Pascal’s and her own. As with her initial artistic fantasy, upon a similar background of “fleurs en pluie d’ toiles ”

(we will soon be discussing the significance of these “ stars ”), she creates a dream scene: “...une de ces compositions envolées où l’autre elle-même, la chimérique, mettait son goût du mystère. Sur un fond de fleurs jetées, des fleurs en pluie d’étoiles, d’un luxe barbare, le vieux roi se présentait de face, la main posée sur l’épaule nue d’Abisaïg ...[E]lle termina les visages en quelques coups de crayon : le vieux roi David, c’était lui, et c’était elle, Abisaïg, la Sunamite” (168).

Nicholas White points out that Pascal and Clotilde’s coupling always occurs “en dehors de tout, par-dessus tout”—outside of time, outside of space—and outside of the text.<sup>97</sup> Herein lies the true scandal—the obscenity—of *Le Docteur Pascal*, in the sense that, to preserve Clotilde’s purity, their relationship is repeatedly consummated “off scene,” precisely in these liminal spaces beyond figuration and beyond reproach. The transportation of their intimacy onto another plane permits the text to continue its veiled denial of the transgressive nature of Pascal and Clotilde’s relationship. Incest is a violation both in social and potentially in hereditary terms—thus the impulse to stifle it in the portrayal of their idealized union.

As much as Pascal hopes their story will be absorbed into a mythical canon passed on through the ages, he and Clotilde both scorn the typical love story in which “[l]e sexe des héros, dans les romans...n’était plus qu’une machine à passion” (*DP*, 194). As good naturalists, both Pascal and Clotilde acknowledge and subscribe to nature’s “objective”: the baby. “Lui seul importait, lui seul devenait le but, toutes les précautions se trouvaient prises pour que la semence ne fût point perdue et que la mère enfantât” (*ibid.*). No chance here that the “oeuvre de vie” will

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<sup>97</sup> Nicholas White, *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 105.

be forgotten amidst all of the juicy, “pleasurable” details, which, by lack of elaboration, are left to the reader’s imagination. Narrative “sémences” in this text will not be squandered.

Which leads us to another paradoxical aspect of Clotilde and Pascal’s gift exchange: while Clotilde’s sexuality remains discreetly covered, Pascal’s is exposed. In addition to the corset, Pascal’s other most enduring gift to Clotilde is a strand of seven pearls. She keeps the necklace tucked into her corset; it melds to her to the point where, when she takes it out to show Pascal that she has not sold it off, “...il sembla qu’elle sortait un peu de sa nudité intime, que tout le bouquet vivant de son corps s’exhalait de cet unique bijou, gardé sur sa peau, dans le mystère le plus caché de sa personne“ (*DP*, 248). The pearls are described repeatedly as “des étoiles laiteuses.” Henri Mitterand, reflecting on the use of tropes in Zola’s work, reminds the reader that small details such as these—”artifices décoratifs ”--should never be easily dismissed: “Les carnets d’enquête révèlent que ce ne sont nullement des artifices décoratifs, mais que l’image et le symbole sont indissociables du premier coup d’œil jeté par Zola sur le réel...”<sup>98</sup> What, then, might these “milky stars” symbolize?

Claudie Bernard offers one compelling explanation. She cleverly speculates about the explicit procreative connotations of the pearls: “Le lait, substance féminine par excellence, n’est produit que grâce à la médiation masculine du sperme: voyez apparaître sur la gorge gonflée de la jeune femme, le cadeau passionné de Pascal, ce collier d’'étoiles laiteuses’ ...qui ne la quitte pas, et qui est comme de la semence solidifiée.”<sup>99</sup> Following this reading, Pascal’s sexuality—his very procreative ability—is exteriorized and locked around Clotilde’s neck, integrated into her

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<sup>98</sup> Henri Mitterand quoted in Catherine Boschian-Campaner, “L’esthétique du portrait féminin dans *Le Docteur Pascal*,” *Excavatio: Emile Zola and Naturalism*, 4-5 (1994): 10.

<sup>99</sup> Claudie Bernard, “Cercle familial et cycle romanesque dans *Le Docteur Pascal*,” 128.

being. Blaise Pascal (Pascal's namesake?), the seventeenth century philosopher and mathematician, after an intense religious epiphany and conversion to Christianity, records his experience on a piece of paper and sews it into the lining of his coat, which he wore for the rest of his life.<sup>100</sup> Here, we see an oblique reversal of this story: it is man (in his very biological essence)—Pascal, himself, his reproductive material—that becomes a part of Clotilde: the mystical has been replaced by the physiological. This reading of “les étoiles” casts a new light on Clotilde's drawing from the beginning, which, in retrospect offers a clairvoyant snapshot of their relationship: next to the sectioned off “bud,” “*une pluie d'étoiles pales*” gushes out of “la feuille sabrée.” The “bud” represents both Clotilde and the baby, the “liquefied” stars are Pascal and his virility. Like the “mark” of virility that “made her his” and the corset that made her pure, the milky-white “pearls” are an extension of Pascal's external conditioning of her—and, by extension, of their baby.

### *Maternal horizons*

Ultimately, while Clotilde and her sexuality may remain veiled, the pro-natalist ideology in *Le Docteur Pascal* could not be less subtle. As several critics have argued, Clotilde is a

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<sup>100</sup> Pierre Guerrier, one of Pascal's friends and author of the second copy of fragments of *Pensées*, records the discovery of this paper: "Peu de jours après la mort de M. Pascal [19 août 1662], un domestique de la maison s'aperçut par hasard que dans la doublure du pourpoint de cet illustre défunt, il y avait quelque chose qui paraissait plus épais que le reste, et ayant décousu cet endroit pour voir ce que c'était, il y trouva un petit parchemin plié et écrit de la main de M. Pascal, et dans ce parchemin un papier écrit de la même main : l'un était une copie fidèle de l'autre. Ces deux pièces furent aussitôt mises entre les mains de Madame Périer [Marguerite, nièce de Pascal, fille de sa sœur Gilberte] qui le fit voir à plusieurs de ses amis particuliers. Tous convinrent qu'on ne pouvait pas douter que ce parchemin, écrit avec tant de soin et avec des caractères si remarquables, ne fut une espèce de *Mémorial* qu'il gardait très soigneusement pour garder le souvenir d'une chose qu'il voulait avoir toujours présente à ses yeux et à son esprit, puisque depuis huit ans [le *Mémorial* est en effet daté du 23 novembre 1654, soit huit ans avant la mort de Pascal] il prenait soin de le coudre et de le découdre à mesure qu'il changeait d'habits." <http://www.jdarriulat.net/Auteurs/Pascal/PascalIntrod5.html>

precursor to the über-fertile Marianne in *Fécondité*.<sup>101</sup> Both characters symbolize the Third Republic's hope (according to Zola) for France's regeneration. "Quand même, elle était l'espérance. Une mère qui allaite, n'est-ce pas l'image du monde continué et sauvé ?" Laura Spagnoli, linking Zola's Clotilde to the decadent, Villiers d'Isle Adam's creation of the female automaton, Hadaly, sees the text as a model of male creation, "the story of a scientist who creates the perfect woman to underpin the novel's embrace of life."<sup>102</sup> According to Spagnoli, Clotilde is simply a perfectly conditioned extension of Pascal, a creation in which female difference has been quarantined and eradicated: "*Le Docteur Pascal* eliminates the threat while appearing to accept it and, at last, conquers nature in order to save it."<sup>103</sup> While I agree that Zola—and Pascal—go to great lengths to "master" Clotilde, I would not go so far as to say the story eliminates her creative powers. Quite the contrary—it is Clotilde's creativity, to take up the Barthes quote again, that dissolves or absorbs the subject and *his* "constructive secretions" in her artistic "toile."

Andrew Medelsohn explains that during the 1890's in France, anxiety regarding depopulation and a burgeoning interest in puericulture and pediatrics together buttressed the medical belief that the child, like an organ or an appendage, was considered an extension of the mother's body. Mother and embryo, mother and child formed a single biological unit; a healthy mother meant a healthy baby, and vice-versa.<sup>104</sup> Within this paradigm, the mother steps in where

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<sup>101</sup> Carment Mayer-Robin, "The Formidable Flow of Milk in *Le Docteur Pascal* and *Fécondité*: Two Feminine Allegories for the 'République en Marche,'" *Excavatio: Emile Zola and Naturalism* 13 (2000): 69-80.

<sup>102</sup> Spagnoli, Laura, "Le Docteur Pascal's Cure: Creation as Procreation and the Treatment of Difference in the Rougon-Macquart," *Excavatio: Zola and Naturalism* 16, no.1-2 (2002):84

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>104</sup> Mendolsohn, "Medicine and the Making of Bodily Inequality in Twentieth Century Europe," 42.

God once existed as an ordering and organizing power in the deepest, most primordial sense. Though the father plants his seed, it is the mother (and her body, healthy or otherwise) who determines how the seed will grow.

The strongest example of solidity, one might argue, is Félicité, who quite literally builds a rock-solid foundation on and out of her fortune, glorifying the family.<sup>105</sup> The book ends with two competing images: one of Félicité planting the first stone of her Asylum for the elderly, bells ringing in the air; the other of Clotilde, quietly sitting and listening as she nurses her newborn. In his comments on the text's conclusion, Zola emphasizes Félicité's triumph: 'Félicité ne mourra pas, quand Tante Dide, Charles, Macquart, et le docteur lui-même sont morts, elle triomphe, elle croit avoir anéanti les papiers, anéanti la science, et elle donne une fête. Elle triomphe dans la ville... Bien entendu, la scène de Clotilde accouchée et de l'enfant termine quand même le volume'" (*RM* 5, 1585). In both cases, *Les Rougon-Macquart* ends with the victory of the mother, or at least the maternal, in the absence of the paternal.

And, curiously given his evident skepticism *vis-à-vis* the woman's internal powers, Zola seems content at the end of the *Rougon-Macquart* to leave the baby in the mother's hands without any sustained paternal influence (we can presume that the Doctor Ramond will be an

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<sup>105</sup> In Zola's last novel, it is the women who plan for the future. Martine, the miserly servant, is repeatedly mocked for her extreme frugality, even as Pascal has all but exhausted his monetary reserves : "Pascal et Clotilde...recommençaient les plaisanteries qui les amusaient depuis dix ans, en se racontant que, lorsqu[e] [Martine] beurrerait des légumes, elle les faisait sauter dans la passoire, pour ravoire le beurre par-dessous." (*Ibid.*, 180.) She is the model of economy, but also of hidden generosity: drawing from her precious savings, she provides the figurative life raft to keep the household afloat once it is known that Pascal has nothing left. Martine is the saver; she is also the mender. When Pascal urges her to "patch up" Clotilde's skull, she is in the process of darning the torn upholstery of a chair that, itself, has begun spilling its "insides": "Elle ne parla pas, alla s'asseoir à terre devant un fauteuil, dont la vieille tapisserie laissait passer le crin par une déchirure ; et, tirant de sa poche une aiguille et un écheveau de laine, elle se mit à la raccommoder. Depuis trois jours, elle attendait d'avoir une heure, pour faire cette réparation qui la hantait" (*DP*, 12). It would, at this point, be useful to recall Barthes' linkage of the word "texte" with "tissu": Martine, "haunted" by tears that need fixing. While easily dismissed as a secondary character, Martine, at crucial moments, is the character responsible for keeping the story hanging together.

intermittent presence in the baby's life, but he undoubtedly will have his own family to tend to). Messiah or Anti-Christ, the genealogical tree gives us no clear indication of how the baby will evolve. Moreover, the baby has no name—the paternal influence does not even exert itself within a signifying system. The name of the Father –and along with it, the Father's law—is unilaterally denied. In fact, Pascal's legacy and influence—his creative powers—are not assured at all.

Pascal's last scribbles on the tree (which include noting Maxime's death, his union with Clotilde, his own death and, with “une écriture défaillante,” the prospective birth) explicitly pose the question of determination: “L'enfant inconnu—Quel serait-il?” How does a baby become what it is? Early on in the text, the reader is given a rather sordid detail of Pascal's scientific pursuits, an undertaking that perfectly marries his interest in bodily organization, in heredity and in disease causation:

Comme toujours, le hasard avait eu sa part, en lui fournissant toute une série de cadavres de femmes enceintes, mortes pendant une épidémie cholérique. Plus tard, il avait surveillé les décès, complétant la série, comblant les lacunes, pour arriver à connaître la formation de l'embryon, puis le développement du fœtus, à chaque jour de sa vie intra-utérine ; et il avait ainsi dressé le catalogue des observations les plus nettes, les plus définitives. (*DP*, 37)

Though not vivisections, Pascal's forays into the inaccessible recesses of the woman's body—the epistemological endeavor to “fouiller au mort” to better understand what it might mean to “fouiller au vif”—does not fully seep in or illuminate these questions when he comes face-to-face with life's reality. The living body of Clotilde remains textually unexplored—particularly during her pregnancy, which is all but eclipsed in the text—an ignorance metaphorically performed when, again, Pascal is accosted with Clotilde's questions: “S'il lui montrait une fleur, elle lui demandait pourquoi cette fleur ferait une graine, pourquoi cette graine germerait. Puis, c'était le



mystère de la conception, des sexes, de la naissance et de la mort, et les forces ignorées, et Dieu, et tout” (83). Clotilde is the flower that refuses to divulge its reproductive secrets. The best Pascal can hope is that his fashioning of her—turning Clotilde into his “bien,” “mastering” her body, “marking” her, locking his “étoiles” around her neck, making her “solide”—will impart his influence, giving him peace of mind (or at least hope) that their baby really will take on his characteristics, becoming “...la continuation, la vie léguée et perpétuée, *l'autre soi-même* !” (287) But this remains a hope—not a certainty; and perhaps another *soi-même* is not ultimately what the new world needs, for it is precisely Pascal that gets evacuated—or exorcised—from the story.<sup>106</sup>

In a poignant passage in *L'Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, Claude Bernard discusses an element of the organism—the only one—that does not seem to obey determinative laws, or at least laws that can be easily ascertained by the physiologist or doctor. It is one instance when Bernard entertains the possibility of vitalistic principles at work, of an organizational direction that life seems to follow. This “*idée directrice*” resists explanation by chemical or physical principles and maintains a fundamental openness (which softens an otherwise closed vision of the body):

Quand un poulet se développe dans un œuf, ce n'est point la formation du corps animal, en tant que groupement éléments chimiques, qui caractérise essentiellement la force vitale...mais ce qui est essentiellement du domaine de la vie et ce qui n'appartient ni à la chimie, ni à la physique, ni à rien autre chose, c'est *l'idée directrice de cette évolution vitale*. Dans tout germe vivant, il y a une idée créatrice qui se développe et se manifeste par l'organisation. Pendant toute sa durée, l'être vivant reste sous l'influence de cette même force vitale créatrice, et la mort arrive lorsqu'elle ne peut plus se réaliser. *Ici, comme partout, tout dérive de*

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<sup>106</sup> Claudie Bernard discusses the way in which Pascal serves as a scapegoat to Zola: “Mais si la famille, l'Histoire et l'histoire sont destinées à se perpétuer, reste que l'individu Pascal échoue dans les trois domaines : il ne verra pas son fils, ne marquera pas dans l'Histoire, et ne rassemblera pas ses résultats...En ce sens, Pascal est un peu son bouc émissaire” (“Cercle familial et cycle romanesque” 135).

*l'idée qu'elle seule crée et dirige; les moyens de manifestation physico-chimiques sont communs à tous les phénomènes de la nature et restent confondus pêle-mêle, comme les caractères de l'alphabet dans une boîte où une force va les chercher pour exprimer les pensées ou les mécanismes les plus divers.*<sup>107</sup>

Zola, through Pascal, aspired to unlock the secrets of this word-generating force. Well before the discovery of DNA, described during the 1950's (and still by many lay people) as "nature's code," Zola, through his own pairing of words, dives into nature's alphabet box to spell out nature's "secret work." ("Suivre pas à pas *le travail secret qui donne aux enfants d'un même père des passions et des caractères différents...*"). Untangling social conditioning is one of side of the equation; mastering the mother is the other. By the end, however, it would appear that he had relinquished the second part of this ambition. As he wrote in his notes: "Donc à la fin reprendre le Credo scientifique de Pascal, qui est la conclusion logique de ma série, mais en *l'élargissant avec le point d'interrogation de Clotilde*" (RM 5, 1601, my emphasis). Clotilde's "question mark"--along with her propensity for subjective wonderings and wanderings—inscribe the slightest mark of what Alice Jardine has called a *gynema*—"a [feminine] horizon, that toward which the process is tending" characteristic of the masculine writers and thinkers of *modernité*--into Zola's writing.<sup>108</sup> Clotilde's questions trump certainty—and ultimately, the suggestion of her chimerical art trumps virile scientific objectivity. And Zola is fine with that, happy to revel in the sheer wonder that, by nature's calculation (and in utter defiance against man's logic), one and one makes three.

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<sup>107</sup> Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, 131.

<sup>108</sup> Jardine, *Gynesis*, 25.

**Solide, peut-être ! seulement, le cœur n’y est plus.**

Much has been written on the poetics of liquids in Zola’s writing. In most of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, liquidity is by-and-large associated with the feminine—and with the dirty, excessive, pathological, and uncontainable feminine, at that.<sup>109</sup> The masculine—and the healthy-err toward dryness and solidity, privileged matter. We are reminded from Zola’s exhortation to the young that “virile” writing is the opposite of the kind of drippy writing that would make women “weep.” However, in *Le Docteur Pascal*, this traditional hierarchy is overturned or at least complicated: it is the men whose liquidity is out of balance. As discussed above, Pascal’s *liqueurs*, destined for masculine consumption, are thought to transform male “terrain.” Even once Pascal has abandoned the idea that the specific properties of the liquid would supply a missing element or “link,” he still believes in the benefits of injecting water to clean-out and rebalance a clogged system. Moreover, male bodies have difficulty containing their liquids—both Uncle Macquart and Charles perish because their outside does not sufficiently keep in the internal—or internalized—liquids (alcohol and blood). Finally, liquid reserves—in the financial sense—are also at peril, in danger of drainage by men who are prone to *fuites*. M. Grandguillot flees with Pascal’s funds, leaving Pascal’s household temporarily destitute. Most importantly, Pascal, in Emma Bovaryesque fashion (though, unlike Emma, he directs his expenditures toward someone else), squanders what little money remains, buying extravagant gifts for Clotilde when he can’t afford to do so.

For Daniel Pick, Pascal’s choice of Clotilde over science overthrows Zola’s naturalism. Predicated on a method that sought, above all, to remain dispassionate in face of all save truth, the naturalist’s gaze, as it is assumed by Pascal (*l’élue*—Zola’s chosen observer) blurs once

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<sup>109</sup> See Janet Beizer’s discussion of *Pot-Bouille* in *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 188-200.

Pascal begins to look through love's rose-colored glasses or, worse, as he succumbs to its blindness. In many ways, the text ends up undermining the very thing that it set out to do: to be the "scientific" capstone to the series. Moreover, the depiction of Pascal, himself, as a scientific man untouched by his family's poisoned heredity is very much in question by the end.

We are already tipped off to Pascal's tendency towards extremes in the description Zola gives of his lifestyle before Clotilde. In the depths of what Zola, in his notes, describes as Pascal's period of neurasthenia,<sup>110</sup> we learn that our faithful protagonist has had virtually no sexual activity through his life. Locked up with his books, his days wiled away in sterile, scientific pursuits, Pascal has led the life of a benedictine monk. Apart from one woman (now dead), whose fingers, let alone lips, he never got to kiss, Pascal's sexual pursuits had been limited to brief escapades to Marseilles: "Sans doute, il faisait parfois des voyages à Marseille, découchait ; mais c'étaient de brusques échappées, avec les premières venues, sans lendemain" (*DP*, 129). The narrator uses the expression "without doubt"—which suggests that we can't be entirely sure this happened—while the word, "échappées," highlights the futility of these jaunts: all of the sperm released were simply escapees, wasted seeds. Before Clotilde, Pascal had, in fact, "never lived." The "reservoir" of his virility—portrayed metaphorically as another liquid imbalance—was brewing, more active as the arid season of old age approached: "Il n'avait point vécu, il gardait en lui toute une réserve de virilité, dont le flot grondait à cette heure, sous la menace de la vieillesse prochaine" (*DP*, 129). The need to undam the "reservoir" had become so insistent that any form of warm affection could have unleashed it: "Et il se serait passionné pour

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<sup>110</sup> David Caron clearly identifies neurasthenia as a symptom of degeneration. Pascal's tendency toward neurasthenia, then, would already tip the 19<sup>th</sup> century reader off to an imbalance in his character: "Neurasthenia and albulia (or male hysteria, as it was sometimes called) the two main diseases of the will, were characterized by the loss of certain faculties associated with manliness: moral strength, physical activity, analytical skills, and the ability to make decisions, to name a few...They fell prey to unrestrained imagination, and everything about them was both lacking and obsessive" (*AIDS in French Culture*, 23).

une bête, pour le chien ramassé dehors, qui lui aurait léché les mains..." (ibid.). This sentence taken at face value would suggest that Clotilde stepped in just in time to save him from finding his release in zoophilia. The hint of pathology is present. Instead of portraying his scientist as strong and self-sated, Zola depicts Pascal as quite literally hungry—hungry for youth, hungry for life. The phrase “faim de jeunesse,” a refrain in the text, captures Pascal’s desire:

Ah ! la jeunesse, il en avait une faim dévorante !... Ah ! la jeunesse, comme il y aurait mordu à pleines dents, comme il l’aurait revécue avec l’appétit vorace de toute la manger et de toute la boire, avant de vieillir... Et la jeunesse chez la femme, une jeune fille qui passait, le troublait, le jetait à un attendrissement profond. C’était même souvent en dehors de la personne, l’image seule de la jeunesse, l’odeur pure et l’éclat qui sortait d’elle, des yeux clairs, des lèvres saines, des joues fraîches, un cou délicat surtout, satiné et rond, ombré de cheveux follets sur la nuque... Ses regards suivaient l’apparition, son cœur se noyait d’un désir infini. (155)

He revels in “feasting” on Clotilde’s youth, breathing in her “odeur de jeunesse.” The focus on her neck, particularly, reminds the reader of vampire narratives, of the transfer of vitality through blood from the young to the old: “...et il se voyait aveuglé, affolé, lui dévorant le cou, lui dévorant la nuque, à pleine bouche” (158). At the end of the “royal festin,” Clotilde had given herself completely: “Il régnait, il s’appuyait en maître puissant et aimé, sur cette sujette élue entre toutes, si orgueilleuse d’avoir été choisie, si ravie de donner à son roi *le sang réparateur* de sa jeunesse” (185). Whereas Pascal’s blood has now been contaminated by “...the bad blood of the family,” Clotilde’s offers the promise of reparation.<sup>111</sup>

This reading casts what appears as a seemingly positive and joyful scene in a much more sinister light. On a day when Pascal and Clotilde are lazily strolling in the open countryside, the narration describes the two lovers: “...[I]ls en étaient plus vivants et plus beaux, sous le ciel

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82-83 (my emphasis).

toujours bleu, d'où tombait la claire flamme d'une perpétuelle passion. Elle, abritée un peu par son ombrelle, s'épanouissait, heureuse de ce bain de lumière, ainsi qu'une plante de plein midi ; tandis que lui, reflourissant, sentait la sève brûlante du sol lui remonter dans les membres, en un flot de virile joie" (*DP*, 189). Clotilde is, of course, covered by an umbrella, protected, while Pascal, exposed, feels "burning sap" running up his limbs. This might just be the very moment when Pascal loses his immune status and gets "converted," becoming one of his family's own. The "burning sap" may just be the same liquid animating the tree he has so carefully charted: "En tout cinq générations, un arbre humain qui, à cinq printemps déjà, à cinq renouveaux de l'humanité, a poussé des tiges, sous le flot de sève de l'éternelle vie!" (106) Later, as he is dying, Pascal confirms his participation in the family's story, acknowledging and accepting his place in the fold : "Et il n'en tremblait plus, il ne s'en irritait plus, de cette hérédité manifeste, fatale et nécessaire sans doute... Les monstres seuls poussaient à l'écart. Et être de sa famille, mon Dieu ! cela finissait par lui paraître aussi bon, aussi beau que d'être d'une autre..." (282).

In a pivotal scene, Pascal confesses his doubts regarding his *panacée* to Clotilde. At this moment, Pascal and Clotilde seem to swap "credos."<sup>112</sup> Clotilde, previously dubious and fearful of Pascal's scientific endeavors, regarding them as an assault on her faith, is the one who holds onto his dreams of cure and fortification (191), while Pascal abandons any desire to alter nature to suit his will. "Ne comprends-tu pas que vouloir tout guérir, tout régénérer, c'est une ambition fautive de notre égoïsme, une révolte contre la vie, que nous déclarons mauvaise, parce que nous la jugeons au point de vue de notre intérêt ? Je sens bien que ma sérénité est plus grande, *que j'ai élargi, haussé mon cerveau*, depuis que je suis respectueux de l'évolution..." (193). Annelise

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<sup>112</sup> We have a double conversion in the text. We have already discussed Clotilde's "conversion" ensured by the necklace. Here, with the exchange of credos, we observe the effect Clotilde has had on Pascal (Clotilde, after all, was the name of the Saint who converted the Frankish king Clovis to Christianity), inserting her doubt into him.

Maugue, discussing the way organs are gendered, makes a wry note that we can aptly apply to Pascal's reflection on the state of his brain: "Quoi de plus révélateur d'une terrible angoisse que l'identification exclusive de l'homme au cerveau, cet organe perché en altitude, invisible, protégé par la boîte crânienne de tout contact direct avec le monde extérieur?"<sup>113</sup> In fact, the underlying ghost haunting *Le Docteur Pascal* is the possibility that it is Pascal's—not Clotilde's—brain that demonstrates questionable solidity; he is the one who might "perdre la tête." Or even if he doesn't lose his head entirely, there is the distinct chance that his head might be at least a little "cracked," confirming the rumors and his mother's conviction that he is nothing but "un vieil original à demi fêlé."

In Pascal's case, contrary to the rest of his family members whose cracks tend to make them leak out, his crack dries him up. In a prescient moment, Ramon visits him and remarks how "solide" he looks. "Pascal hochait la tête.— Oh ! oh ! solide, peut-être ! seulement, le cœur n'y est plus" (*DP*, 162). Though perhaps not lost, Pascal's heart has been irrevocably touched. It is not clear whether it was the *surmenage* that led to this condition or the broken heart of having to lose Clotilde, to whom he had given both his head and his heart.<sup>114</sup> In any case, he dies of a hardened heart (cardio-sclérose). We can read this death in many ways. Zola, in his notes, chooses this condition because it was the one responsible for taking the lives of many of the century's great positivists/scientists (Claude Bernard, Paul Bert, Jules Ferry, Renan) (*RM* 5, 1608-1609). In this very literal way, a hardened heart leads to the death of science. And, with

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<sup>113</sup> Annelise Maugue, *L'Identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle 1871-1914* (Paris : Editions Rivages, 1987), 32-33.

<sup>114</sup> "Toi que j'ai faite, toi qui es mon élève, mon amie, mon autre pensée, à qui j'ai donné un peu de mon cœur et de mon cerveau! Ah! oui, j'aurais dû te garder tout entière pour moi, ne pas me laisser prendre le meilleur de toi-même par ton bête de bon Dieu!" (*DP*, 75)

this reading, Zola leaves the reader with an ambiguous message: the costs of living a scientific, rational life are indeed great.

In an amazing scene, Pascal gives the reader a blow-by-blow account of the physiological processes failing him; it is almost as if he is narrating his own vivisection as life slowly ekes out. And yet, the heart, ultimately, remains silent on its inner workings. After receiving confirmation of the *sclérose* that has formed, impeding the blood circulation, Pascal, with his *clairvoyance*, has a vision: “Je le vois, mon coeur...Il est couleur de feuille morte, les fibres en sont cassantes, on le dirait amaigri, bien qu’il ait augmenté un peu de volume. Le travail inflammatoire a dû le durcir, on le couperait difficilement...” (*DP*, 298). The image of the “dead leaf” (a contrast to all of the “living” leaves of Pascal’s genealogical tree and dossiers) and the heart that resists cutting (and thus opening to exploration) suggest that at least one part of the body remains stubbornly resistant to scientific exploration, unpuncturable as it were.

### **Decadent Demeures**

Zola, in a speech given to the students of Paris three days after the last installment of *Le Docteur Pascal* appeared, expresses the uncertainty of the legacy he has left and his fears that a new mysticism and anti-scientific reaction have taken hold of young minds, threatening the edifices he has so valiantly tried to erect:

Voici, hélas! que j’arrive à un âge où le regret de n’être plus jeune commence, où l’on se préoccupe de la poussée des jeunes hommes qu’on sent monter derrière soi...Je suis un peu comme l’ouvrier qui termine la maison où il compte abriter ses vieux jours, et qui s’inquiète du temps qu’il fera désormais. La pluie va-t-elle lui endommager ses murs? Si le vent souffle du Nord, ne lui arrachera-t-il pas son toit? Et, surtout, a-t-il construit assez solidement pour résister à la tempête?...que je périsse donc, et que toute ma génération périsse avec moi, si réellement nous ne



sommes bons qu'à combler le fossé, pour aider ceux qui nous suivent à marcher vers la lumière. (*RM* 5, 1610)

Like Pascal's *Souleiade*, which had been "à moitié détruite par un incendie" (*DP*, 33), (perhaps a prefiguration of *incendies* to come or a spatial representation of Pascal's mind à demi-fêlé), Zola's textual artifice seems all but sure. Will the exterior hold up against the winds of time? will rain slowly erode its walls? or currents, mont[ant] derrière [lui], carry it all away? Zola's attempts at edification are just as jeopardized as Pascal's: did he and his generation succeed in filling in the "cracks" so that those coming after them might march on without tripping? In Zola's case, it remains to be seen whether the primordial "fossé" (if *la fêlure* might be called that) was "comblé" or further deepened. Although, in the discourse, Zola continues to espouse his old truths of science and reason against mysticism, religion and aggrandizing (though empty) rhetoric, his has softened and borders separating the different strains of dialogues are less easy to trace.

Along the lines of shifting discourse, Henri Mitterand, in his many writings on *Le Docteur Pascal*, repeatedly identifies the decadent impulses running through the text. "...*Le Docteur Pascal*," writes Mitterand, "à ceci d'étrange que cette démonstration exemplaire des vertus de la recherche, de l'effort et de l'optimisme s'accompagne à la fois d'une totale fantaisie dans le choix des motifs biologiques et médicaux, et d'une hantise constante de la solitude et de la mort. C'est que le naturalisme fin-de-siècle du *Docteur Pascal* fait en réalité bon ménage avec un décadentisme fin-de-siècle. L'œuvre, dans ses profondeurs, participe des anxiétés qu'elle prétend combattre."<sup>115</sup> Reading Zola's architectural metaphor through this lens, we are

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<sup>115</sup> Henri Mitterand, "Fêlures du sens, clivage des forms, 114. Henri Mitterand and Antoine Compagnon both analyze the decadent impulses in Zola's work. Whereas Mitterand examines the mixture of naturalism and decadence explicitly in *Le Docteur Pascal*, Compagnon takes a broader approach, studying the presence of decadent

reminded of Séverine Jouve's identification of the decadent *demeure* as the space to which the self has retreated in the absence of God. In general, according to Jouve, the center—or “heart”—remains *insondable*, obstructed by an eclectic mix of objects, memorabilia and clutter—an internal chaos. The encumbered *demeure*—an image that well applies to Zola's textual house—might also extend equally to the body: “...[d]errière le désordre apparent se dissimule un ordre véritable. Il semble pourtant difficile de déchiffrer un intérieur qui—de par sa dissonance et la complexité de ses figures—apparaît comme le lieu d'un conflit continué entre les objets disparates, prisonniers d'un univers instable et changeant. »<sup>116</sup>

Perhaps overwhelmed by the chaos within and the dangers without, Zola, inhabiting his own, aging body, ultimately sets his sights on the tentative promises (expressed so hypothetically in the imperfect subjunctive) of new soil: “Pour qu'un nouvel art fleurît, pour qu'une croyance nouvelle changeât la direction de l'humanité, il faudrait à cette croyance un nouveau sol qui lui permit de germer et de grandir, *car il n'y a pas de société nouvelle sans un nouveau terrain*” (*RM* 5, 1614). With this expression of hope, Zola's goals meet up with those of Pascal—and of Brown-Séguard—who also dreamed of fostering new terrains or fortifying old ones, of profoundly altering bodies and restructuring their interior disorder, of puncturing them so as to make them more solid...leaving the greatest promise of solidity in the chimerical flourishes, the unorthodox and subjective sketches (and writings) of a young mother for whom the horizon remains open.

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figures and themes in several of Zola's works. See Antoine Compagnon, “Zola dans la décadence,” *Cahiers naturalistes*, no.67 (1993), 211-222.

<sup>116</sup> Séverine Jouve, *Obsessions & perversions dans la littérature et les demeures à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Hermann, 1996), 106.

## Chapter 4: *Habit-ations*: Immunity and Forced Tolerance in Albert Camus' Pestilent Writing

“...[L]a vie se couvre de longs espaces de temps vide comme des peaux mortes. Et il faut alors désirer d'autres villes.”<sup>1</sup>

### Prologue: The Age of Prometheus

“II. Le Mythe de Prométhée (révolte).”<sup>2</sup> This was Albert Camus's categorization of his texts produced in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the moment when the “narratives invented by men,” as Alice Jardine bluntly calls them, first began to break down in Western Europe as ideological motors capable of capturing imaginations with impunity.<sup>3</sup> At this time, the world was grasping to comprehend the horrendous atrocities carried out by the multifarious and methodical death machines (the Nazi “Total Solution,” the Atomic Bomb) that arose under the *aegis* of “modern” discourses touting progress, efficiency and organization. Camus writes eloquently—and ironically—of this chaos in “intelligence,” of the deep epistemological crisis sending Europe—and subsequently the rest of the world—reeling in the wake of unimaginable destruction:

L'intelligence moderne est en plein désarroi. La connaissance s'est distendue à ce point que le monde et l'esprit ont perdu tout point d'appui. C'est un fait que nous souffrons de nihilisme. Mais le plus admirable sont les prêches sur les 'retours.' Retour au Moyen Age, à la mentalité primitive, à la terre, à la religion, à l'arsenal

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets, II: janvier 1942-mars 1951* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 328 (my emphasis).

<sup>3</sup> Alice Jardine, *Gynesis*, 24.

des vieilles solutions. Pour accorder à ces baumes une ombre d'efficacité, il faudrait faire comme si nos connaissances n'existaient plus—comme si nous n'avions rien appris—feindre d'effacer en somme ce qui est ineffaçable. Il faudrait rayer d'un trait de plume l'apport de plusieurs siècles et *l'indéniable acquis* d'un esprit qui finalement (c'est son dernier progrès) recrée le chaos pour son propre compte. Cela est impossible. Pour guérir, il faut s'arranger de *cette lucidité*, de *cette clairvoyance*. Il faut tenir compte *des lumières* que nous avons pris soudain de notre exil. L'intelligence n'est pas en désarroi parce que la connaissance a bouleversé le monde. Elle est en désarroi parce qu'elle ne peut pas s'arranger de ce bouleversement. Elle ne 's'est pas faite à cette idée'. Qu'elle s'y fasse et le désarroi disparaîtra. Il ne restera que le bouleversement et *la connaissance claire* que l'esprit en a. C'est toute une civilisation à refaire.<sup>4</sup>

Camus employs Enlightenment language derisively. He cloaks the “knowledge” put to “good” use before and during the war in words reminiscent of Voltaire, Diderot or Rousseau, evoking “l'indéniable acquis,” “cette lucidité,” “cette clairvoyance,” “des lumières,” and “la connaissance claire” to emphasize the absurdity of how these notions, meant to illuminate a path for man out of chaos, ultimately resulted in a man-made mayhem more dark and horrific than any nature (with its obscure and mysterious forces) could have conjured. At the same time, in this quote, Camus underlines the cowardly promotion in Pétainist propaganda of a “return” to a simpler time, to homier values (“travail, famille, patrie”) as a solution to modernity's ills. Romanticizing such a return, Camus states, conveniently entails the “forgetting” of all of the “great” knowledge accrued through the centuries, a wiping of the slate that would also imply the erasure of complicity and culpability.

Camus's notion of revolt emerges in response to this willful denial as a contestation of the *aegis* of modernity. Indeed, to extend the metaphor, Camus sees this version of Zeus' mythical shield of skin for what it is, and offers this condemning description: “Nuremberg,

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<sup>4</sup> Camus, *Carnets*, II, 26.

60000 cadavres sous les décombres...Sur les abat-jours en peau humaine on aperçoit une très ancienne danseuse tatouée entre les deux mamelles” (171). The vision of the old female dancer, skinned and splayed to reveal the indelible Nazi identification number between her breasts, is particularly haunting in its insinuation of (and *insinew*-ation to) the devastating negation of both art and life; no beauty is possible in a world where man-made illumination passes through stretched human parchment always already inscribed with death.

Somewhat surprisingly, Camus embraces Prometheus, the thief of light who has come to represent epistemological advancement, human striving and ingenuity in the Western classical tradition, as his hero. This trickster figure hoodwinked the gods, proverbially sneaking past Zeus’ *aegis* to steal their fire.<sup>5</sup> While *L’Homme révolté* (1951) makes explicit reference to revolt in its title and features Prometheus as its champion (with his devotion to fighting for men against their miseries—and in spite of themselves), the connection between this designation and some of Camus’ other works published during the same period is less clear. In the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus’ well-known depiction of the Titan (and the text Camus cites in *l’Homme révolté*), Prometheus enumerates all of the contributions (in addition to fire) he made to humanity. Medicine as a curative science is among the first he mentions.<sup>6</sup> His therapeutic gift—and, with it, his self-appointed status as the first doctor—offers one way to account for the inclusion, in this “second cycle,” of *La Plague* (1947) and *L’État de siège* (1948), two texts that

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<sup>5</sup> According to the myth, Zeus punished Prometheus for his trickery, chaining him to a rock to have his liver (eternally regenerating) gnawed out by an eagle day after day.

<sup>6</sup> “Hear the rest and you shall wonder the more at the arts and resources I devised. This first and foremost: if ever man fell ill, there was no defence [sic]—no healing food, no ointment, nor any drink—but for lack of medicine they wasted away, until I showed them how to mix soothing remedies with which they now ward off all their disorders. Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [Loeb Classical Library Volumes 145], 1926), verses 477-485.

privilege epidemic illness to signify the recent political and societal strife, and in which self-effacing, male doctors play the leading role.

### **Wearing/Wearying Immunity**

While the question of who does and does not survive the epidemic figures at the heart of the novel and the play, the word “immunity” appears only once. Describing the arrival of fall and, with it, chilly weather, the narrator of *La Peste* notes an emerging trend of clothes made from shiny, rubber material. He explains that local newspapers, drawing on archival testimony, had recently suggested the possibility of warding off sickness by covering oneself in glossy garments: “...[O]n remarquait un nombre surprenant d’*étouffes caoutchoutées et brillantes*. Les journaux en effet avaient rapporté que, deux cents ans auparavant, pendant les grandes pestes du Midi, les médecins revêtaient des *étouffes huilées* pour leur propre préservation. Les magasins en avaient profité pour écouler un stock de vêtements démodés grâce auxquels chacun espérait une *immunité*.”<sup>7</sup>

The assumption of immunity through the donning of slippery, unfashionable attire gestures toward the larger narrative strategy of the novel. If this text is a *tissu*, as Barthes might have us recall, it is certainly one that, at least from the outset, allows little seepage or permeability. *La Peste* does not aspire to risky play with the materiality of language; it sloughs off sticky imperatives of innovation to which experimental literature of the interwar period adheres. It secures itself by paradoxically suturing rhetorical elements of the nineteenth century novel (with its commitment to depicting the world in “transparent” language) to the inherently

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Camus, *La peste* in *Théâtres, Récits, Nouvelles*, ed. R. Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 1409 (future references will indicated directly in parentheses in the body of the text).

opaque, symbolic functioning of allegory, always at a level removed from a “one-to-one” correspondence with “reality.”

Unlike Zola and Guibert who incorporated the bio-medical linguistic and epistemological apparatus into their texts (Zola with heredity along with theories of disease causation and Guibert with the retrovirus, as we shall see in the next chapter), Camus's engagement with the science of *la peste*—both linguistically and epistemologically—remains superficial. And yet, though lexically scarce, immunity, as a concept with all of the associations we discussed in the introduction, underpins both *La Peste* and *L'État de siege*. It functions as the text's primary logic, the generative device through which the text comes into being. Rieux, the narrator in *La Peste*, remains physically untouched by the plague, and is thus able to deliver his testimony of these “curieux événements” (1217). Through Rieux, the reader is made aware of the costs exacted by this immunity, the price of living with “la peste” (as we are reminded: “chacun *la porte en soi*...parce que personne...au monde n'en est indemne” [1423, my emphasis]), “knowing” it intimately, while not succumbing to it. By the end of the novel, Rieux has come face to face with the casualties of survival—the loss of interiority, the loss of friendship—as well as with its weighty obligations, namely the imperative to know, to remember and to recount: “Rieux, qu'avait-il gagné ? Il avait seulement gagné d'avoir connu la peste et de s'en souvenir, d'avoir connu l'amitié et de s'en souvenir. Tout ce que l'homme pouvait gagner au jeu de la peste et de la vie, c'était la connaissance et la mémoire” (1457).

A year following the publication of *La Peste*, Camus revisits his allegory, this time on stage, in his critically panned *L'État de siège*.<sup>8</sup> We have already signaled Antonin Artaud's role in catalyzing the bodily reflections of the post-structuralist theorists discussed in chapter one. Here again, Artaud's "Théâtre de la peste," with its proposition of "total theater" serves as great inspiration to Camus. The writer teamed up with the actor/director Jean-Louis Barrault, and the two sought to put "le corps" back into theater.<sup>9</sup> Immunity subtends this text, as well, not as a generative principle but rather as a condition to be compromised and overridden. In contrast to the deliberate *retenue* in tone of *La Peste*, *L'État de siège* verges esthetically toward excess, throwing in a multitude of theatrical devices as it hesitates irresolutely between genres.<sup>10</sup> Medical language—talk of vaccines, serums, symptoms—has all but disappeared in the play; the appearance of black marks on the armpits and the groin (for which the "black plague" is named),

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the various critical responses to the resounding *échec* of *L'Etat de siège*, see Paul-F. Smets, "Camus: *L'État de siège*, Chroniques pour éclairer la mémoire d'un échec cinquantenaire, *La Revue Générale*, no.1 (janvier 1999): 51-63.

<sup>9</sup> Camus hastily notes in his *Carnets*: "Le corps dans le théâtre: tout le théâtre français contemporain (sauf Barrault) l'a oublié." Albert Camus, *Cahiers, I: mai 1935-février 1942* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 237. The collaboration between Camus and Barrault was, for all intents and purposes, a failure. In his *témoignage*, Jean-Louis Barrault attributes one reason for the *échec* to a lack of agreement between the two men regarding what *la peste* represents and how it should be esthetically translated. While Barrault seized on Artaud's exaltation of the plague, viewing it as a redemptive force, for Camus, *la peste* always signified *le Mal* to be resisted. Barrault writes: "Pour moi, la Peste était *salvatrice* par l'accumulation des forces noires développées jusqu'au paroxysme: conception initiatrice, magique, inspirée par Artaud. Cela devait donner à la pièce un lyrisme eschyléen. Pour Camus, la Peste ou le dictateur était le Mal, le mal social que seule la peur entretenait, mais que la suppression de la peur faisait fuir. Le style en était plus moderne, mais pouvait aussi devenir aristophanesque." Cited in Albert Camus, *L'État de siège*, ed. Pierre-Louis Rey (Paris: Gallimard [folio], 1998), 213.

<sup>10</sup> Jason Herbeck quotes Camus and his intentions for the play: "*L'Etat de siège* avait pour ambition 'de mêler toutes les formes d'expression dramatique depuis le monologue lyrique jusqu'au théâtre collectif, en passant par le jeu muet, le simple dialogue, la farce et le chœur...' [II] devait ressembler aux 'autos sacramentales' d'Espagne, une 'sorte de spectacles allégoriques qui mettaient en scène des sujets connus à l'avance de tous les spectateurs.' » Jason Herbeck, "Prise de conscience et mise en scène dans *L'Etat de siège: Anatomie d'un échec*," in *La Passion du théâtre: Camus à la scène*, eds. Sophie Bastien, Geraldine F. Montgomery, and Mark Orme (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 133.



“worn” by the victims, is the only continuity in terms of disease representation between the two works. In *L'État de siège, la peste* exchanges its depersonalized, “natural” attire for a man’s decorated uniform: “[L]’homme est corpulent. Tête nue. Il porte une sorte d’uniforme avec une décoration.”<sup>11</sup> Personified as a dictatorial traveler arriving, terrorizing and taking over the Spanish city of Cadix,<sup>12</sup> the plague carries out his lethal program by relying on the efficient, bureaucratic methods of his secretary, death, herself clothed in a clean, white uniform (“col et des manchettes blancs” [ibid.]). Immunitary logic does not hold sway under the plague’s regime. As the plague makes clear, there are no exceptions or exemptions to be made to their program: “Une seule mort pour tous et selon le bel ordre d’une liste” (229). Death effectuates her work methodically, taking individuals down one by one, drawing a single *trait de plume* through their name: to state it succinctly, “elle raye” (280). Even in the rare instance when a name gets overlooked, he who had been hitherto spared ends up compromising himself by not being able to contain his words: “De loin en loin, on en oublie un. Mais ils finissent toujours par se trahir” (269).

In this chapter, I argue that Camus frames immunity not so much in terms of the biological body but rather in relation to “occupied space.” Immunity creates what I will categorize as (in)habit-ations of forced tolerance in Camus’s pestilent texts, spaces where disparate and antagonistic elements have to coexist until one eventually cedes to the other (or simply recedes). Etymologically derived from the Latin *habitus*, “habit” carries within its two

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<sup>11</sup> Albert Camus, *L'Etat de siège* in *Théâtres, Récits, Nouvelles*, 215 (as with *La Peste*, future references will be indicated directly in parentheses in the body of the text).

<sup>12</sup> Cadix also happens to be the name of a Polish-French intelligence center that operated out of Uzès, a small town located close to Nîmes in the Southern part of Vichy France, from 1940-1942. It is likely Camus knew of this center, given his involvement in the Resistance.

syllables a rich translinguistic polysemy. It connotes: 1) dress (*un habit*, in French, means a general piece of clothing, whereas, in English, it has retained its associations as a specific form of dress defining an activity or a group—as in a riding habit or the habit of a nun or monk); 2) a fixed custom, tendency or routine (as in, “it is difficult to break one’s habits”; or in the verb form “to habituate,” to make someone grow accustomed to something); and, finally, 3) an occupied, claimed space (as in the verb “inhabit,” or the nouns “habitation,” “habitat,” or “*habitants*”).<sup>13</sup>

All three of these meanings come to bear on Camus’s pestilent texts. We have already noted the close-knit relationship established between *La Peste* and clothing—either the clothing inclinations it imposes (the raincoats or masks the doctor’s wear); or the adorned garb it/she/he wears (the decorated uniform in *L’Etat de siège*). As for the second layer of meaning, one of the major themes in both *La Peste* and *L’Etat de siège* is the way in which the plague, first experienced as a radical disruption of routines, soon settles in as the numbing force defining habits, fixing the banal and, in so doing, draining life of signification. Finally, for the spatial connotations, Camus emphasizes the primordial relationship between literature and space in his *Carnets*: “...[L]a littérature contemporaine, du fait des circonstances (interpénétration des frontières) vise à un universel historique. Ce n’est pas l’homme de tous les temps, c’est l’homme de *tous les espaces*.”<sup>14</sup> Time and space become increasingly superimposed within the text as traditional distinctions and boundaries between spaces— national/international, private/public, sacred/secular, self/other—are blurred. These obscured borders result from the plague’s blind indifference to human constructs, especially those communicated through the paradoxically fixed

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<sup>13</sup> The polysemy of “habit” reminds us of the polysemy of “propre”/“proper,” which Derrida (followed by Hélène Cixous) unpacks so deftly.

<sup>14</sup> Camus, *Carnets, II*, 114.

and, yet, unlimited temporal and spatial frame of the literary act (an act quite literally contained within the margins for both writer and reader).

My examination will bring habits and inhabitation together, resulting in a sartorial/spatial analysis as inflected by the notion of immunity. I will begin by scrutinizing bodily space in *La Peste*, examining how the doctor immerses as a privileged body, superficially and subcutaneously. Rieux's exceptional status is never overtly discussed; it rather emerges in his interactions with the other men, and particularly Tarrou. I will then move to the administrative space of the city, *the modern space, par excellence*. As Camus writes of his *époque*: "C'est le temps des grandes villes...Il n'y a de conscience que dans les rues!" (160) City space and *la peste* become synonymous; whether from Oran or Cadix, all *habitants* live in *la peste* and are aware of the dangers of this proximity. While beginning with a brief reflection on the rats, the uncontrollable unconscious of Oran, I focus most of my analysis in this section on *L'État de siège* considering how *la peste* sets into motion an organizational machine that transforms the city into a tightly controlled, yet capricious bureaucratic space. Finally, I will consider the habits of words and the heteroclitite nature of textual space. As we have briefly mentioned, both texts attempt to weave together heterogeneous generic elements, allegory being the common fabric to both. I will investigate allegory's status as an "other speak" in Camus's work, focusing my analysis on *La Peste*. Allegorical language is "immune" because exempted from "meaning what it says." By its very nature—cut off, torn from any sturdy swathe of signification—allegory cannot be held to the same standards that other forms of communication (a word that shares its etymological root, *munus*, with both immunity and community) must meet. For Camus, the historical circumstances in which he was writing necessitated this recourse to "language...in

exile”;<sup>15</sup> the atrocities of the war and the compromises of occupation had rendered naked representation impossible. The incongruous layers of realism and allegory in *La Peste*, or theatrical *metissage* and allegory in *L'État de siege*, protect the text from a porosity that would put it and the reader into undesirable contact. They wrap and seal the narrative, both shielding it from the reader's abilities to tug on the threads and subsequently unravel its coherence, while, at least at first glance, appearing to defend the reader from contagion. As such, Camus' particular bolt of allegory sneakily envelops the reader in its draping. It forces her to feel the full weight of the fabric now laid in her hands and, ultimately, hung on her shoulders in a manner more fitting, not of Prometheus, but of his brother Atlas, fated to carrying the world on his back.

### **Cleaning Bodies and Driving Distractions in *La Peste***

Camus, in his *Carnets*, makes clear that *La Peste* is the story of masculine solitude: “...[I]l n'y a que des hommes seuls dans le roman.”<sup>16</sup> The epidemic restricts its powers of vestimentary assimilation to the poor men of Oran who, by the end of their ordeal, all look alike in their ragged isolation, giving a morose spin to the adage “the clothes make the man”:

“...[T]ous ces hommes avaient fini par *prendre le costume* du rôle qu'ils jouaient déjà depuis longtemps, celui d'émigrants dont le visage d'abord, *les habits maintenant*, disaient l'absence et la patrie lointaine...”(1463). Aside from *La Peste*, herself (*la peste* being the only consequential and active “female” presence in the novel), all of the bodies of interest are male bodies: three of

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Stamelman, *Lost Beyond Telling: Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets, II*, 80. Camus explicitly identifies “separation” as the main theme of the novel, emphasizing that this separation affects the men: “En pratique: *il n'y a que des hommes seuls dans le roman*” (Ibid.).

whom exhibit innate immunity to the siege (Rieux; Rambert, the Parisian journalist who gets marooned in Oran once the city's gates are closed; and Cottard, the suicidal and eventually homicidal smuggler); one who acquires immunity through exposure (Grand); and, finally, two who succumb to the illness—one priest who dies in doubt (Paneloux, whose flickering belief is marked ironically by Rieux's inconclusive determination of the cause of his death: un "cas douteux" [1408]) and one secular "saint" who sinks into the illness's murky oblivion (Tarrou, whose name suggests a lack of spatial tethering [Terre-où] as it raises the possibility of a lack of defection ["Tare où"—to fish out one of Zola's favorite words]).

While foundational to the text, the question of Rieux's indemnity is addressed only obliquely. Unlike Pascal's *innéité*, which Zola casts in a positive light as something that allows the character to transcend his family's *tare* and to live harmoniously on the margins of their trials and tribulations (until, he, himself, falls victim to his own *fêlure*), Rieux's immunity is presented ambiguously—even negatively—as an isolating force that pushes the doctor into the ranks of those who are "séparés pour jamais" (1465). The allusion happens mid-way through the novel, in a brief conversation that takes place after Tarrou, the elusive, well-connected stranger, has volunteered to form a group of "sanitary volunteers" to help in the doctor's cause. As the men emerge from the dark stairwell leading down from Rieux's apartment and climb into his car, the doctor urges Tarrou to come to the hospital for a "preventive vaccination" (whose effectiveness, throughout the *récit*, is dubious at best):

'Il faudra, dit [Rieux], que vous veniez demain à l'hôpital pour le vaccin préventif. Mais, pour en finir et *avant d'entrer dans cette histoire*, dites-vous que vous avez une chance sur trois d'en sortir.

'Ces évaluations n'ont pas de sens, docteur, vous le savez comme moi. Il y a cent ans, une épidémie de peste a tué tous les habitants d'une ville de Perse, sauf précisément le laveur des morts qui n'avait jamais cessé d'exercer son métier.'

‘Il a gardé sa troisième chance, voilà tout, dit Rieux d’une voix soudain plus sourde. Mais il est vrai que nous avons encore tout à apprendre à ce sujet.’ (1323, my emphasis)

Rieux urges Tarrou to get the vaccine before “entering into the story,” a precaution Tarrou dismisses. However, contrary to Docteur Pascal who used himself as a guinea pig for his *liqueurs*, not once is there mention of Rieux receiving or administering the vaccine (or doctor Castel’s “new” serum) to himself.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Rieux’s indemnity is never *mise en cause*; the only sign of hesitation or doubt about his own condition is the sudden deafening of his voice in the quote above as he admits to the limits of his understanding. Tarrou’s anecdotal example belies the hypothesis of a one-in-three chance of having a strong enough immune system to keep the microbe at bay. Rieux is the Persian “washer of the dead”: he figuratively cleans up the corpses and prepares them for burial; he keeps tallies of the deaths and inherits the clothing once they have passed, or at least, as we have remarked, stories of their clothing. He is the most exposed and yet also the most resistant *Oranais*.

Contrary to Tarrou (and contrary to Doctor Pascal), there is never a point when Rieux is outside of the story. Though not all of the words are his own (he integrates, for instance, part of Tarrou’s journals into the body of his account as well as the words of Grand, as we shall soon discuss), he appropriates them by ordering them, taking from them what is useful and discarding what is not. Early on we are given a job description of the narrator (who we later find out, in a foreshadowed revelation, to be Rieux). Like a historian, he uses his “documents” as he sees fit:

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<sup>17</sup> Toward the end of the text, the question of the vaccine is raised again when Rieux is trying to decide whether to send Tarrou into isolation once it has become clear that he has been infected. Rieux’s mother reminds him that she has had her own dose: “Tu sais bien que je viens d’être de nouveau vaccinée” (1450) and encourages him to allow Tarrou to stay with them. Rieux responds that he knows Tarrou has also received his shots, though he concedes he may have missed the last dose. At no time, is there discussion of whether Rieux has had his shots.

“Il se propose d’y puiser quand il le jugera bon et de les utiliser comme il lui plaira. Il se propose encore...” (1220). The text in our hands is the narrator’s *oeuvre*, a creation emerging as a meticulous and “objective” work that pierces through the frivolous “commentaires et les précautions de langage” (ibid.). Rieux is the Word. In this way, François Ouellet, in his perspicacious reading placing the struggle between Rieux (with his secular humanism) and the priest Paneloux (with his belief in God’s justice) at the structural center of the text, convinces the reader of the slippage between Rieux and Dieu: “Rieux ‘est persuadé qu’il peut écrire ici, au nom de tous, ce que lui-même a éprouvé alors, puisqu’il l’a éprouvé en même temps que beaucoup de [ses] concitoyens...’ Cela spécifie le type de dieu que Rieux sera : un dieu humanisé.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the “documents” upon which Rieux relies is Tarrou’s journal, a competing “chronical” of sorts, though one flawed by what Rieux calls its “parti pris d’insignifiance” (1234).<sup>19</sup> According to Rieux, Tarrou devotes himself to being a historian of “[ce] qui n’a pas d’histoire” (ibid.), observing quirky details in an unsystematic way and expressing them in “écarts de langage ou de pensée” (1236). Critics have dwelled on the hierarchy established between Rieux and Tarrou’s chronicle, but surprisingly few have examined one of the most

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<sup>18</sup> François Ouellet, “*La Peste sous le signe de midi*,” in *Albert Camus 17: toujours autour de ‘L’Étranger*, ed. Raymond Gay-Crosier (Paris: *Lettres Modernes*, 1996), 108. In his *Carnets*, Camus attests to the need to create a God in a world devoid of meaning to combat totalitarianism: “Il n’y a pas d’autre objection à l’attitude totalitaire que l’objection religieuse ou morale. Si ce monde n’a pas de sens, ils ont raison. Je n’accepte pas qu’ils aient raison. Donc...C’est à nous de créer Dieu. Ce n’est pas lui le créateur. Voilà toute l’histoire du Christianisme. Car nous n’avons qu’une façon de créer Dieu, qui est le devenir” (*Carnets*, II 127).

<sup>19</sup> In his *Carnets*, Camus aspires to make an “anthology of insignificance.” After taking the reader through several possible definitions and several examples, he concludes by linking insignificance to habit: “Pourquoi cette anthologie? On remarquera que pour finir, l’insignifiance s’identifie presque toujours avec l’aspect mécanique des choses et des êtres—avec l’habitude le plus souvent. C’est dire que tout finissant par devenir habituel, on est assuré que les plus grandes pensées et les plus grandes actions finissent pas devenir insignifiantes” (*Carnets*, II 86).

useful aspects of Tarrou's account: the exterior perspective it offers the reader of the good doctor:

...[O]n peut enfin reproduire le portrait du docteur Rieux par Tarrou. Autant que le narrateur puisse juger, il est assez fidèle: 'paraît trente-cinq ans. Taille moyenne. Les épaules fortes. Visage presque rectangulaire. Les yeux sombres et droits, mais les mâchoires saillantes. Le nez fort est régulier. Cheveux noirs coupés très courts. La bouche est arquée avec des lèvres pleines et presque toujours serrées. Il a un peu l'air d'un paysan sicilien avec sa peau cuite, son poil noir et ses vêtements de teintes toujours foncées, mais qui lui vont bien. Il marche vite. Il descend les trottoirs sans changer son allure, mais deux fois sur trois remonte sur le trottoir opposé en faisant un léger saut. Il est distrait au volant de son auto et laisse souvent ses flèches de direction levées, même après qu'il ait effectué son tournant. Toujours nu-tête. L'air renseigné. (1238)

Tarrou emphasizes Rieux's "solid," "strong," "rectangular" features that reflect his seriousness, reserve and determination. He wears dark, well-tailored clothes, an exterior in accord with his dark physique. He is tight lipped, controlled, and impassive. However, this self-control is somewhat tempered, as Tarrou's description progresses, by the small excesses in Rieux's habits: a slight jaunt in the step ("un léger saut"); and a tendency toward distraction, particularly when Rieux is behind the wheel where he has the propensity to continue marking his direction even after he has "made the turn." Both of these observations, aerating what is otherwise a uninspired and pat description, relate to Rieux's movement, his most distinctive characteristic throughout the novel: Rieux is a man on the move.

Fittingly, then, Rieux's car operates as his most identifiable accoutrement. The car serves several functions. First of all and most obviously, it is a mode of transportation that allows Rieux to get where he needs to go in expedience, to travel from one side of town where *la peste* has not yet appeared to the outer *quartiers* where the cemetery lies and the quarantine camps have been set up. Rieux circulates in his car, and he uses his car to circulate others. In this way,



the car also serves as an important *point de rencontre*. The small bubble fosters intimacy and conversation, as we saw in the above exchange between Rieux and Tarrou, particularly conversations about material or personal limits. At the outbreak of the epidemic, for example, Doctor Castel, the laboratory scientist, first discusses the shortage of serum with Rieux on the way to the prefecture (1254). Later, in a car ride from the hospital to Rieux's home, Rambert appraises Tarrou and Rieux of his decision to stay and "fight" with them instead of fleeing. During this conversation, the car figures as a secondary character interrupting the train of the discussion with its fits and starts. It threatens to run out of gas at the beginning of the conversation and then swerves at the end at a key moment, breaking up a weighty, philosophical discussion during which Rambert asks the two men whether they have decided to renounce happiness: "Pardonnez-moi, Rambert, dit [Rieux] mais je ne le sais pas. Restez avec nous puisque vous le désirez. *Une embardée de l'auto le fit taire*. Puis il reprit en regardant devant lui: - Rien au monde ne vaut qu'on se détourne de ce qu'on aime. Et pourtant je m'en détourne moi aussi, sans que je puisse savoir pourquoi" (1387). The car's sudden movement shakes Rieux just enough to bring him face to face with the limits of his own reasoning. Finally, the car provides a liminal space outside of *la peste*. It distances Rieux, allowing him to stop in front of scenes and observe without intervening. From his car, he watches his concierge, the first identifiable victim of *la peste*, already showing the first signs of infection—the characteristic disarticulation—as he wobbles down the street: "...[II] avançait péniblement, la tête penchée, bras et jambes écartés dans une attitude de pantin" (1228).

In a later, more enigmatic episode, Rieux is driving with Cottard when he stops in front of a group of kids playing hopscotch:

Quand Cottard le demanda, le docteur arrêta sa voiture devant un groupe d'enfants. Ils jouaient à la marelle en poussant des cris. Mais l'un d'eux, aux cheveux noirs collés, la raie parfaite et la figure sale, fixait Rieux de ses yeux clairs et intimidants. Le docteur détourna son regard... Le moteur ronflait déjà. Rieux avait la main sur son levier de vitesse. Mais il regardait à nouveau l'enfant qui n'avait pas cessé de le dévisager avec son air grave et tranquille. Et soudain, sans transition, l'enfant lui sourit de toutes ses dents. - Qu'est-ce donc qu'il nous faudrait? Demanda le docteur en souriant à l'enfant. Cottard agrippa soudain la portière et, avant de s'enfuir, cria d'une voix pleine de larmes et de fureur: - Un tremblement de terre. (1263-64)

Does Rieux see himself in this somber boy with his dark hair and accusing eyes? The encounter with the “intimidating” child prefigures Rieux’s unsuccessful attempt to save the life of the Judge Othon’s son using the new vaccine. Perhaps Rieux averts his gaze in this earlier scene because he already recognizes his inability to protect the child. As Rieux soon comes to realize, finally *habituating* himself to the new working conditions (at the onset of the epidemic, he had noted how unaccustomed he was to them: “C’était une lutte à laquelle il n’était pas encore habitué” [1264]), the responsibilities of his *métier* had changed under *La Peste*’s rule. His understanding of his role had moved far afield from Doctor Pascal’s optimistic credo of “Tout dire pour tout connaître, pour tout guérir.” Rieux recognizes he has no power to change the course of the illness, to banish it from the bodies it has claimed: “...[S]on rôle n’était plus de guérir. Son rôle était de diagnostiquer. Découvrir, voir, décrire, enregistrer, puis condamner, c’était sa tâche...il n’était pas là pour donner la vie, il était là pour ordonner l’isolement” (1373).

The child’s spontaneous toothsome smile marks the fickleness of the time (the time of *la peste*) just as it fosters a moment of communion and light in the midst of grimness. It joins a constellation of memorable smiles fixed and captured : the smile of Rieux’s wife, her most enduring (and endearing) feature (“à trente ans et malgré les marques de la maladie, ce visage était toujours celui de la jeunesse, à cause peut-être de ce sourire qui emportait tout le reste”

[1222]); Grand's toothless "shadow" smile ("S'il gardait encore la plupart de ses dents sur les gencives inférieures, il avait perdu en revanche celles de la mâchoire supérieure. Son sourire, qui relevait surtout la lèvre du haut, lui donnait ainsi une bouche d'ombre" [1251]); and, later, Tarrou's "tenacious" smile raised as a sign of resistance during his doomed combat ("Chaque fois que le docteur rencontrait ce regard, Tarrou souriait, dans un grand effort" [1452]). All of these smiles are ambivalent, as is the smile Rieux returns to the child while he is listening to Cottard's plea for an earthquake in response to the question of what was needed.<sup>20</sup>

Camus, through Rieux, does not linger within the body's interior space. As Quilliot, in his accompanying notes to the first Pléiade edition of Camus' fictional works reflects: "Camus ne semble tenté par l'analyse intérieure de la maladie: il a choisi cette fois une 'passion collective' et il s'y tient."<sup>21</sup> Toward the end of the first part of his account, however, the narrator offers a glimpse of the physical havoc wrecked by *La Peste*: "Il fallait ouvrir les abcès, c'était évident. Deux coups de bistouri en croix et les ganglions déversaient une purée mêlée de sang. Les malades saignaient, écartelés. Mais des taches apparaissaient au ventre et aux jambes, un ganglion cessait de suppurer, puis se regonflait. La plupart du temps, le malade mourrait, dans une odeur épouvantable" (1242-43). Margaret Gray astutely seizes on the metaphor of *écartèlement* as the bridge Camus makes between the individual and the collective social body: "...[T]he plague's histrionic 'écartèlement', or drawing-and-quartering, of the suffering body

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<sup>20</sup> Camus makes this glib comment about humanism: « L'humanisme ne m'ennuie pas: il me sourit même. Mais je le trouve court" (*Carnets, II* 102). Can we read "rieur" into Rieux? Such a suggestion would seem to contradict all we know about Rieux and his earnestness. And yet, the suggestion is strong enough to give the reader pause as she tries to situate his discourse in relation to Camus's larger project. "Toute mon œuvre est ironique," writes Camus in his *Carnets*.<sup>20</sup> Is there irony chez Rieux, a *deuxième degré* the reader doesn't readily catch amidst all of the matter-of-fact declarations and tallies?

<sup>21</sup> Roger Quilliot, "La Peste: Présentation," in Albert Camus, *Théâtre, Récits Nouvelles*, 1929.

becomes itself emblematic of a dislocated social order...”<sup>22</sup> The external disarticulation (as we saw, for example, with the description of the plague-infected concierge as a ‘pantin’ or, later, of Judge Othon’s son, who died on the bed in ‘une pose de crucifié grotesque’ [1392]) mirrors the ‘écartèlement intérieur’ happening simultaneously. Aside from one notable exception, the ins-and-outs of the internal struggle remain buttoned-in and buttoned-up.

This exception occurs toward the end of the chronicle, in the description of Tarrou’s dissolution into death. Finding his friend ailing in his house, Rieux injects him with the vaccination serum, hoping to jolt his blood—Tarrou’s “best defense”—into action: “Les épaules solides et la large poitrine de Tarrou n’étaient pas ses meilleures armes, mais plutôt ce sang que Rieux avait fait jaillir tout à l’heure sous son aiguille, et, dans ce sang, ce qui était plus intérieur que l’âme et qu’aucune science ne pouvait mettre à jour” (1451). The inner space of the body and the fluids animating it remain *insondable* and yet offer the most effective weapon against the formidable adversary. More specifically, Rieux agitates the blood to fend off the various “faces” of the plague. In contrast to the otherwise predictable and unnoteworthy patterns and habits of Oran, the “face” of the plague never ceases to spring up there where it is least expected: “...Rieux se trouvait devant un visage de la peste qui le déconcertait. Une fois de plus, elle s’appliquait à dérouter les stratégies dressées contre elle, elle apparaissait aux lieux où on ne l’attendait pas pour disparaître de ceux où elle semblait déjà installée. Une fois de plus, elle s’appliquait à étonner” (1452). As the battle slowly unfolds with the plague taking the upper hand, the face morphs into an “inert mask” while the plague pulls Tarrou into its undertow. “Rieux n’avait plus devant lui qu’un masque désormais inerte, où le sourire avait disparu. Cette

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<sup>22</sup> Margaret E. Gray, “Layers of Meaning in *La Peste*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*, ed. Edward J. Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2007), 169.

forme humaine qui lui avait été si proche...s’immergeait à ses yeux dans les eaux de la peste et il ne pouvait rien contre ce naufrage” (1455).

The pervasive liquid images in Tarrou’s death scene recall the fraternal swim that he and Rieux had taken days prior, the only moment during their long battle with *la peste* when they exercised their exclusive privileges, using their “laissez-passer” to breach the city limits. They get undressed and plunge into the thick, velvety waters (“épaisse comme du velours” [1426]). We are reminded of the “immunity” coat in the description of the water, with the simile of fabric and evocation of the “reflets huileux à la surface des eaux” (ibid.). While the *impermeable* was meant to protect doctors from contamination, the water acts as a purifying agent to the point of erasing lines of differentiation between men, rendering them the same and whole: “Pendant quelques minutes, ils avancèrent avec la même cadence et la même vigueur, solitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste...Habillés de nouveau, ils repartirent sans avoir prononcé un mot. Mais ils avaient le même cœur et le souvenir de cette nuit leur était doux. Quand ils aperçurent au loin la sentinelle de la peste, Rieux savait que Tarrou se disait comme lui, que la maladie venait de les oublier...” (1427). The men shed their clothing and with it, their sense of isolation; if only briefly, Rieux and Tarrou are one and the same: one man, one heart.<sup>23</sup>

Colin Davis convincingly reads into this passage a desire in the text to eradicate difference:

“When Rieux takes a night-time swim with Tarrou, they occupy for a moment a world entirely

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<sup>23</sup> Rieux merges with someone one other time in the novel. Attending to judge Othon’s son, the doctor accompanies the child into the depths of *la peste*, hoping Castel’s vaccine will bring him back. But, as he sees the child slipping away, he gives up hope and, as such, feels the jarring of incompatibility and separation: “Rieux qui, de temps en temps, lui prenait le pouls, sans nécessité d’ailleurs et plutôt pour sortir de l’immobilité impuissante où il était, sentait en fermant les yeux, cette agitation se mêler au tumulte de son propre sang. Il se confondait alors avec l’enfant supplicié et tentait de le soutenir de toute sa force encore intacte. Mais une minute réunies, les pulsations de leurs deux cœurs se désaccordaient, l’enfant lui échappait, et son effort sombrait dans le vide. Il lâchait alors le mince poignet et retournait à sa place” (1393).

cleansed of otherness...The hostility of the external world and the impenetrability of the other selves have been temporarily overcome. The repeated use of 'même' insists that there is no trace of difference or conflict here."<sup>24</sup> In this homosocial setting, Tarrou tethers Rieux—to his body, to his being; the earthly in-habit-ation no longer feels so straining, nor does it require language. This sameness and integrity is soon ruptured, casting Rieux again into solitary waters. What had, perhaps, been a momentary lapse of memory on the plague's part ("la maladie venait de les oublier") did not remain forgotten for long as the plague infiltrates and ultimately severs the connection: "à la fin, ce furent bien les larmes de l'impuissance qui empêchèrent Rieux de voir Tarrou se tourner brusquement contre le mur, et expirer dans une plainte creuse, comme si, quelque part en lui, une corde essentielle s'était rompue" (1455).<sup>25</sup>

Silence emanates from the broken cord, a silence "si compact...accord[é] si étroitement au silence des rues et de la ville libérée de la peste, que Rieux sentait bien qu'il s'agissait cette fois de la défaite définitive, celle qui termine les guerres et fait de la paix elle-même une souffrance sans guérison" (1456). Instead of culminating in a quiet and appeasing resolution, this silence rings of failure, of an utter lack of *entendement*. My recourse to Enlightenment language is not gratuitous; the image of Camus's "essential" cord strikes diderotian overtones, summoning lexical associations with the philosopher's theory of "les cordes vibrantes." In the

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<sup>24</sup> Colin Davis, "Camus's *La Peste*: Sanitation, Rats and Messy Ethics," *Modern Language Review*, 102(2007): 1012.

<sup>25</sup> The image of the dangling or broken cord occurs twice in the novel, once in this scene and toward the beginning of the novel. Rieux, responding to Grand's call of distress, walks into Cottard's apartment and sees the cord hanging from the ceiling: "La corde pendait de la suspension au-dessus d'une chaise renversée, la table poussée dans un coin. Mais elle pendait dans le vide. - Je l'ai décroché à temps, disait Grand qui semblait toujours chercher ses mots, bien qu'il parlât le langage le plus simple. Je sortais, justement, et j'ai entendu du bruit. Quand j'ai vu l'inscription, comment vous expliquer, j'ai cru à une farce. Mais il a poussé un gémissement drôle, et même sinistre, on peut le dire" (1229).

first dialogue of *Le rêve d'Alembert* (written in 1769, published in 1830), Diderot lays out the foundations of his materialist philosophy, speculating about ways understanding between entities passes through the body via these cords:

La corde vibrante, sensible, oscille, résonne longtemps encore après qu'on l'a pincée. C'est cette oscillation, cette espèce de résonance nécessaire, qui tient l'objet présent...Mais les cordes vibrantes ont encore une autre propriété, c'est d'en faire frémir d'autres...Si le phénomène s'observe entre des cordes sonores, inertes et séparées; comment n'aurait-il pas lieu entre des points vivants et liés; entre des fibres continues et sensibles?<sup>26</sup>

Camus's image of the broken cord sums up the lost propensity of Rieux to commune, to "vibrate" with life in relationship to others. After this moment, Rieux knows he will never again be able to find solace in the deafening silence: "il croyait savoir qu'il n'y aurait jamais plus de paix possible pour lui-même, pas plus qu'il n'y a d'armistice pour la mère amputée de son fils ou pour l'homme qui ensevelit son ami" (1456). Immediately after the death of Tarrou, Rieux receives a telegram apprising him of the death of his wife. As his mother inquires after him, he gazes distractedly out the window. While he had shed "les larmes de l'impuissance" as he watched his friend sink away, his eyes, here, are dry. He is unable to react except by saying that it was "quand même difficile" (1458), but not surprising. By that time, his "cords" had been plucked so repetitively and intensely, so many were either frayed or ruptured, that no vibration was possible apart from the dull drone of "la même douleur qui continuait" (ibid.).

Rieux gains awareness of his limits through Tarrou; his physical limits (the scene in the ocean emphasizes Tarrou's superior strength: "Tarrou avançait avec plus de puissance que lui et il dut précipiter son allure" [1427]; "Rieux s'arrêta le premier et ils revinrent lentement" [ibid.]

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<sup>26</sup> Denis Diderot, "La suite d'un entretien entre M. d'Alembert et M. Diderot," in *Le rêve de d'Alembert* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2002), 65-66.

and the limits of his principles (as well as of his writing). Tarrou pushes Rieux to act on his exceptive state. We saw this in the swimming scene, with the invocation of their privilege to breach the gates when no one else had the right to leave. We see this, too, in Tarrou's death scene. Normally, when the vaccine is administered, according to protocol the patient is then put into isolation. Here, Rieux decides to override this procedure: "Je crois bien que c'est le premier droit que je prendrais pour moi..." (1450).

Roberto Esposito, a contemporary Italian philosopher, has extensively theorized what he calls the "immunitary paradigm." He locates the principle of immunity, founded on the notion of defending the individuated self, at the heart of modernity's deep structural framework. According to Esposito, the paradigm reaches its paroxysm precisely during the time Camus was writing with Nazism and the "Final Solution" by which the life could only be preserved through the eradication of other life.<sup>27</sup> Timothy Campbell, in his introduction to Esposito's *Bios*, further explains that *munus*, the etymological root shared between immunity and community (and communication), within Esposito's theoretical apparatus, encompasses three definitional terms: *onus* (work), *officium* (office) and *donum* (gift): "Immune is he—and immunity is clearly gendered as masculine in the examples from classical Rome that Esposito cites—who is exonerated or has received a *dispensatio* from reciprocal gift giving. He who has been freed

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<sup>27</sup> Roberto Esposito explains what he sees as the culmination of the immunitary paradigm in Nazism in these terms: "Nazism negated philosophy not only generically, but in favor of biology, of which it considered itself to be the most accomplished realization...[T]he Nazi regime brought the biologization of politics to a point that had never been reached previously. Nazism treated the German people as an organic body that needed a radical cure, which consisted in the violent removal of a part that was already considered spiritually dead...Nazism is no longer inscribable in the self-preserving dynamic of both the early and later modernities; and certainly not because it is extraneous to immunitary logic. On the contrary, Nazism works within the logic in such a paroxysmal manner as to turn the protective apparatus against its own body, which is precisely what happens in autoimmune diseases...one can say that the Nazi experience represents the culmination of biopolitics, at least in that qualified expression of being absolutely indistinct from its reversal into thanatopolitics" (*Bios*, 10).



from communal obligations or who enjoys an originary autonomy or successive freeing from a previously contracted debt enjoys the condition of *immunitas*.”<sup>28</sup>

As Campbell notes, Esposito traces immunity back to the Roman Empire; through a historical excavation, Esposito locates a revelatory point of convergence between the juridical and the medical meanings of immunity, highlighting the exceptional status accorded to doctors in Imperial Rome. While doctors were responsible for caring for the population, they were also exempted from paying taxes and performing other “civic” duties. Through this strange example (why would doctors be “released” of full participation—and thus full investment—in the community for which they were caring?), Esposito draws light to the ambivalent valence of immunity; something that, from the outset, seems to constitute a singularizing privilege (a “special” freedom enjoyed by a particular person or group), can otherwise (and perhaps more truly) be framed negatively as a deprivation. He who is exempt forgoes the ability to partake in the community, to “pay his due,” and thus to benefit from the sense of full *appartenance*.

We could frame Rieux in light of this paradox: his immunity permits his survival, places him at the center of the action, but it also institutes in him a lingering sense of non-belonging and of culpability. As such, I agree with Ouellet’s reading of Rieux as “le coupable ultime” who writes to expiate as well as to join in: “...celui qui, en parlant pour tous, les rejoint dans leurs angoisses et ‘leur innocence’, et qui prend sur lui le sort des autres en témoignant pour eux.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Campbell, “*Bios*, Immunity, Life: The Thought of Roberto Esposito,” in Esposito, *Bios*, xi.

<sup>29</sup> Ouellet, “*La Peste sous le signe de midi*,” 109.

By writing about *la peste*, Rieux brings it into him in a way his body does not allow; it is the compromising mechanism by which he becomes one with his *concitoyens*.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Vicissitudes of Rats, Comets and Notepads in La ville camusienne**

We see forced cohabitation most explicitly in “le monde clos” of the city in both of Camus’s pestilent texts. As Barthes writes in his short and quite critical response to *La Peste*: “La ville est objet et fondement du récit; hors d’elle-même il n’y a ni réalité ni recours, et ce caractère définitif est souligné par la fable même: toute la chronique de *La Peste* tient dans la clôture matérielle d’Oran...un enfermement rigoureux qui *concentre* la cité à la façon d’une essence, d’un principe, d’un objet parfaitement fini...”<sup>31</sup> Mary Ann Frese offers another way of looking at this “concentration” of the city, referring to the narcissistic nature of Oran in the way it turns its back to the ocean, shutting in on itself.<sup>32</sup> The city hums along, unfettered by the

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<sup>30</sup> The immune body might be considered, then, the reverse figure of the *pharmakos* as it is developed by Derrida. Derrida explains: “La cérémonie du *pharmakos* se joue donc à la limite du dedans et du dehors qu’elle a pour fonction de tracer et retracer sans cesse. *Intra muros/extra muros*. Origine de la différence et du partage, le *pharmakos* représente le mal introjeté et projeté. Bienfaisant en tant qu’il guérit—et par là vénéré, entouré de soins—maléfaisant en tant qu’il incarne les puissances du mal—et par là redouté, entouré de précautions. Angoissant et apaisant. Sacré et maudit. La conjonction, la *coincidentia oppositorum* se défait sans cesse par le passage, la décision, la crise. L’expulsion du mal et de la folie restaure la *sophrosunè*” (Derrida, *La dissémination*, 166). Both the *pharmakos* and the immune are characterized by an unstable status, and both serve to “protect” the community in a certain fashion. However, the *pharmakos* comes to incarnate the impure and evil that must be expelled (thus “curing” the society through its expulsion) while the immune remains precisely within the borders to “absorb” the excesses brought about by the communal imperative, a status that ultimately leads to its liminal state between inclusion and exclusion (through exemption). Camus’s *oeuvre*, as it turns out, experiments with both terms. If Rieux represents the reluctant immune, a compelling argument could be made to frame Merseault in *L’Étranger* as the *pharmakon*, the presence that needs to be expunged to return a community to wholeness.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, “Annales d’une épidémie ou roman de la solitude?,” *Œuvres Complètes, I (1942-1961)*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002), 540.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann Frese Witt, *Existential Prisons: Captivity in Mid-Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 93.

knowledge that things might be different elsewhere; it doesn't care. What makes Oran unique, according to the narrator, is its lack of life and its predilection for habit-making: "Comment faire imaginer...une ville sans pigeons, sans arbres et sans jardins, où l'on ne rencontre ni battements d'ailes ni froissements de feuilles, un lieu neutre pour tout dire ?...[O]n s'y ennuie et...on s'y applique à prendre des habitudes" (1217). Oran is a city "apparemment...sans soupçons," which means, the narrator concludes, it is "une ville tout à fait moderne" (1218).

It comes as no surprise then that the announcement of *la peste* is met with disbelief. The apparition of the rats is taken at first as a farce or ruse. When Rieux goes to report the appearance of the dead rat on the front steps, the concierge insists that Rieux must be mistaken: "Il n'y avait pas de rats dans la maison, il fallait donc qu'on eût apporté celui-ci du dehors. Bref, il s'agissait d'une farce" (1221).<sup>33</sup> Quickly, though, as the number of dead rats increases, a general sense of invasion from a unlocatable outside—or, rather, inside—spreads to the surrounding areas and finally to the city, as a whole: "Nettoyée à l'aube de ses bêtes mortes, la ville les retrouvait peu à peu, de plus en plus nombreuses, pendant la journée. Sur les trottoirs, il arrivait aussi à plus d'un promeneur nocturne de sentir sous son pied la masse élastique d'un

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<sup>33</sup> The word "farce" is also used to characterize Grand's initial reaction to finding Cottard's suicide note scrawled on the door: "Quand j'ai vu l'inscription, comment vous expliquer, j'ai cru à une farce" (1229). Colin Davis establishes a connection between the rats and Cottard, seeing them both as signs of a underlying "messiness" (read "otherness"), a "residue" or trace of excess the text attempts to suppress. However, in his reading, Davis tends to conflate Rieux's writing project with that of Camus, bemoaning what he perceives as Camus's impulse to smooth over inconsistency and ambivalence: "Camus's notion of art as the correction of reality fails to appreciate that something of value may be lost when the world is made unified and coherent. *La Peste* seems both to know and not to know that order is not the only thing we want. The novel struggles against itself, wanting to clarify and to disambiguate, to call things by their proper name, but also stumbling at every stage, finding strangeness and ambiguity seeping into its fabric" (Davis, "Camus's *La Peste*, 1019). While I agree that Rieux aspires to reduce exposure to otherness, that fact that these "uncontained" elements figure in the text at all leads us to suppose that Camus is following a different agenda, one that hinges on showing the impossibility of creating an uncompromising and un-compromisable, "immune" language. Camus's shows awareness of the inherent contamination of language, a crucial point we will explore in the third part of this analysis.

cadavre encore frais” (1227). With these animals dying literally underfoot, the narrator speculates on their origin, looking not beyond but underneath the borders of the town: “On eût dit que la terre même où étaient plantées nos maisons se purgeait de son chargement d’humeurs, qu’elle laissait monter à la surface des furoncles et des sanies qui, jusqu’ici, la travaillaient intérieurement” (1227) The earth itself is transformed into a pestilent body, wrought by a process of humeral recalibration bubbling up and expelling its impurities in the city’s houses. While most of the descriptions of the body in the throes of *la peste* remain cleanly on the surface, as we discussed in the previous section, the reader is spared no details of the filth of the city’s imagined entrails. The bodily metaphor is extended to the city, as a whole, reinforcing the sense of communal consolidation into one collective *corps en révolte*: “Qu’on envisage seulement la stupéfaction de notre petite ville, si tranquille jusque-là, et bouleversée en quelques jours, comme un homme bien portant dont le sang épais se mettrait tout d’un coup en révolution” (ibid.).

An administrative system of containment is set into motion. Every morning the “de-ratting” service circulates, collecting all of the dead rats and bringing them to the town incinerator: “L’ordre fut donné au service de dératisation de collecter les rats morts, tous les matins à l’aube. La collecte finie, deux voitures du service devaient porter les bêtes à l’usine d’incinération des ordures, afin de les brûler” (ibid.). Once *la peste* begins ravaging the good citizens of Oran, out of necessity, a comparable system of mechanized “dehumanization” is launched:

On se décida d’abord à enterrer la nuit, ce qui, du coup, dispensa de prendre certains égards. On put entasser les corps de plus en plus nombreux dans les ambulances... Un peu plus tard cependant, on fut obligé de chercher ailleurs et de prendre encore du large. Un arrêté préfectoral expropria les occupants des concessions à perpétuités et l’on achemina vers le four crématoire tous les restes exhumés. Il fallut bientôt conduire les morts de la peste eux-mêmes à la

crémation. Mais on dut utiliser alors l'ancien four d'incinération qui se trouvait à l'est On reporta plus loin le piquet de garde et un employé de la mairie facilita beaucoup la tâche des autorités en conseillant d'utiliser les tramways qui, autrefois, desservaient la corniche maritime, et qui se trouvaient sans emploi. A cet effet, on aménagea l'intérieur des balladeuses et des motrices en enlevant les sièges, et on détourna la voie à hauteur du four, qui devint ainsi une tête de ligne des portes. (1361-62)

One of the recurrent phrases in *La Peste* is that things are not in their “place”: the “curious” events, which are “the subject of the chronicle,” are not “in their place” (1217); the first dead rat on Rieux’s doorstep is not “in its place” (1221); once the people realize *la peste* is not a “maladie comme les autres,” religion is no longer “in its place” (1316). The goal of the pestilent administrative system is to put everything and everyone back in its “proper” place, whether it be the dead, the quarantined or the ailing. Efficient movement is the key, and orderliness the goal. In *La Peste*, notions of administration and regulation retain more or less positive connotations. Protocols of containment and dispersion are presented as having been established with the good of the *habitants* in mind. These same concepts wear a much more sinister cloak in *L’État de siège*, as we shall now discuss.

While the harbinger of *malheur* in *La Peste* are the rats scurrying up from the viscera of the earth (or so it would seem), the presage announcing the plague’s arrival in *L’Etat de siège*’s maritime city of Cadix appears not from below but above, as a comet. In the stage directions of the prologue it is noted that the light from the comet outlines the fortified city walls and with them a number of silhouettes of immobile people, gazing upward with their backs turned to the audience. We are once again struck by the insular environment visually suggested. The first line of the play declares “la fin du monde!” followed by “non, homme.” The comet grows bigger and brighter as the people begin to hypothesize what meaning to take from this vision. Government

officials scramble to gain control and engage in the politics of disavowal: “Il est donc affirmé aux habitants de Cadix que rien ne s’est passé en ce jour...tout habitant qui parlera de comètes autrement que comme de phénomènes sidéraux passés ou à venir sera donc puni avec la rigueur de la loi” (194). With this proclamation and refusal of the present happenings (in contrast to the repetitive recounting of the unremittingly banal, eternal present in Oran), we are made aware of the governmental power at work.

Cadix is quickly defined as an administrative space that moves from a denial of spectacle to the absolute enforcement of visible signs. While administrative space in *La peste* is established to expedite the erasure of individuality and exception—indeed immunitary dispensation—to effect the quick disposal of amassing dead bodies, here administrative space restricts movement, at least in word. “En attendant,” the governor cries, “que rien ne bouge! Je suis le roi de l’immobilité” (205). Warning alarms sound in the background throughout the first part of the play until finally two strangers, a portly man and a secretarial woman, both in uniform, arrive onstage and demand to take the place and power of the governor. When these demands are not met and the strangers are threatened with incarceration; the visitors showcase their power, immediately establishing a space dictated by implacable order, arbitrary law and a complete lack of tolerance for all that is remotely “human”: “[L]orsque j’arrive,” pronounces the man, “le pathétique s’en va. Il est interdit, le pathétique avec quelques autres balançoires comme la ridicule angoisse du bonheur, le visage stupide des amoureux, la contemplation égoïste des paysages et la coupable ironie. A la place de tout cela, j’apporte l’organisation” (228). With a slight gesture of the hand at the behest of the man named *la peste*, the secretary, the incarnation of death, crosses out a name on her notepad. The dull thud of the warning bell rings and one of

the guards falls dead to the ground. The secretary remarks: “Tout est en ordre, Votre Honneur. Les trois marques sont là. Une marque, et vous êtes suspect. Deux, vous voilà contaminé. Trois, la radiation est prononcée. Rien n’est plus simple” (218). Here, illness manifests exclusively at the skin’s surface with marks appearing at the groin, the armpits and the lymphnodes: everything is exteriorized and codified. Each *habitant* is required to wear an *insigne* indicating either their acceptance (signified by the “étoile du bubon”) or their rejection of *la peste*. Rules are followed, signs are obeyed and worn. All citizens are also required to have a “certificate d’existence” (232), which, in turns, requires a “certificate de santé” (236), an absurd example of the circular logic of bureaucracy that renders all subject to unpredictable deportation or death.

Death organizes the plague’s bidding by writing down names in her notebook and then progressively scratching them off, “suppressing” them. With each erasure, the death knell tolls as the designated inhabitant falls. She explains her note taking system to Diego: “Chaque ville a son classeur. Voici celui de Cadix. Je vous assure que l’organisation est très bonne et que personne n’est oublié” (269). When Diego asks whether there are any exceptions, she concedes that some names are occasionally overlooked but that, in the end, those people always end up betraying themselves through their words: “Pourtant, il y a des exceptions. De loin en loin, on en oublie un. Mais ils finissent toujours par se trahir. Dès qu’ils ont dépassé cent ans d’âge, ils s’en vantent, les imbéciles. Alors, les journaux l’annoncent. Il suffit d’attendre. Le matin quand je dépouille la presse, je note leurs noms, je les collationne, comme nous disons. On ne les rate pas, bien entendu” (ibid.). *Les fiches des morts* in *La Peste* (1385) are superseded by Death’s *bloc-notes* (217); writing—and, more importantly, *ratures*—acquire a heightened life or death significance.

As we can deduce from the above observations, the critique of totalitarianism as a political regime is made much more explicit in the play. In contrast to the *La peste* in which the plague appeared as a protean figure assuming the face (albeit distorted and wrenched as we saw in Tarrou's death scene) of all the people it chooses to inhabit, in the play, the face is fixed; authority—and with it order—goes unquestioned. The language of authority, too, is progressively wiped of euphemism. *La peste* does not mince words and harnesses the power of grammar to absorb historically “hot” vocabulary, making his intentions crystal clear: “Oui, je l'ai déporté...Je les ai concentrés...Faites quelque chose! Occupez-vous!...Ils s'exécutent, ils s'occupent, ils se concentrent. La grammaire est une bonne chose et qui peut servir à tout!” (243).

At the end, Diego, the doctor who relinquishes his personal happiness (a life with the woman he loves) to assume the messianic role as *sauveur*, tries to convince the townspeople to conquer their fear and resist. However, it is not their manifestations that chase the plague from the city. Rather, the *peste* leaves in obedience to an “old rule” and only after having concluded a *marché* with Diego, his life in exchange for the collective freedom of the city (as *la peste* clarifies: “Si tu m'échappes, la ville m'échappe. C'est la règle. Une vieille règle dont je ne sais d'où elle vient...” [288]). This *marché* goes against immunitary logic. A bit earlier in the play, Diego beseeches an old boatman to take him across the water.<sup>34</sup> His request goes unfulfilled

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<sup>34</sup> In this case, Diego is reminiscent of Rambert in *La peste*, desiring to acquire an exceptional status—an immunitary privilege—and leave the closed city. Though we have discussed him only briefly, many critics consider Rambert the character with whom Camus most closely identified. (See Patrick Henry, “Albert Camus, Panelier, and *La Peste*,” *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics*, vol. 5, no.3 [2003], 393.) Rambert, who comes to Oran from Paris to research the working conditions of the Arabs, gets trapped in the city, once the gates are shut. He then spends a great deal of energy trying to figure out a way to circumvent the enforced lock-down. He approaches Rieux a number of times for a letter dispensating him, a request Rieux repeatedly refused, though not out of any moral principle. Through Cottard and his contrabanding activities,



when the secretary appears and prevents him from deserting. The first of the three marks appears, indicating the suspicion of illness which normally leads inexorably to the appearance of the other two marks; but Diego manages to erase the mark through his anger and revolt. The secretary, in admiration of his fury, encourages him in his resistance: “Vous le voyez. La marque disparaît. Continuez, vous êtes sur la bonne voie” (272). Diego responds: “Je suis guéri?,” to which the secretary explains: “Il y a une malfaçon, mon chéri. Du plus loin que je me souviens, il a toujours suffi qu’un homme surmonte sa peur et se révolte pour que leur machine commence à grincer. Je ne dis pas qu’elle s’arrête, il s’en faut. Mais enfin, elle grince et, quelquefois, elle finit vraiment par se gripper” (273). One would assume that Diego, because he has been struck by and overcome the plague, should, according to immune logic, now have immunity against it. However, this immunity is compromised through his negotiations with the plague when he gives up his life—and personal happiness with Victoria—to save his fellow townspeople.

Both Rieux and Diego, then, having been forced to do business with death on their turf but largely on death’s terms, relinquish claims to any benefit from personal immunity in the name of the collective. Employing the language of Roberto Esposito, they give up their dispensation to reconsolidate the boundaries of *communitas*. Rieux’s immunity is compromised textually by the forced assumption of the collective voice over his own. In the words of Quilliot, “...comme la mesure-étalon de tout ce monde que tourmente la peste: ‘...dans un sens, [Rieux] est tous les personnages’” (1934). As the voice of all, he loses his authorial claim to private,

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Rambert devises a plan to escape. The night he is planning to sneak through the gates, he has a change of heart and decides to stay to help Rieux and Tarrou’s sanitary brigade. Ironically, though a journalist by profession, Rambert is the only character whose writing is in no way incorporated into the body of Rieux’s account.

individual life. Diego, on the other hand, loses all claim to self-preservation in choosing Cadix's freedom; he becomes a victim *parmi les autres* of the peste's "visit."

As Michel Autrand smartly remarks, *L'État de siège* is above all a "mise en spectacle de la ville"; its innovation is derived from its ability to animate the city as a complex, multi-faceted "personnage collectif": "Ce texte appartient au chœur, à la collectivité. Il est la voix proférée et avidement écoutée de la Ville en gloire. De ce langage force, l'artifice certes est criant: c'est que dans l'au-delà du langage s'affirme l'au-delà du personnage et de toute situation individuelle."<sup>35</sup> The goal of the play is to draw the spectator—by whatever means necessary—into this chaos, so that she may participate in and experience it as "un acte de communion collective" (63).

However, what meaning is one to draw from the collective experience? Unlike in *La Peste*, there is no over-arching voice of reason and coherence, no clear moral message of solidarity since none of the individual characters are developed in such a way as to garner the deep identification of the spectator.<sup>36</sup> Diego offers himself in the end for the common good, but his sacrifice is not replete with meaning, simply because of the arbitrariness of the rules and the lack of conviction of his cries. Unlike Rieux, Diego's character is changeable. We see his instability when, out of fear, he flees to the judge's house (Victoria's father). The exchange escalates, and he ends up grabbing and threatening to harm the judge's son (whom we then learn, in a shocking revelation worthy of the most melodramatic soap opera, is a bastard) (253).

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Autrand, "L'État de siège ou le rêve de la Ville au théâtre," in *Camus et le théâtre: Actes du Colloque tenu à Amiens du 31 mai au 2 juin 1988*, sous la direction de Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Imec Éditions, 1992), 67.

<sup>36</sup> Even the main, named protagonists—Diego, Victoria and Nada (the counter-voice of negation that Autrand describes as "la force inverse du désir de vie qui anime la collectivité, il est sa force de mort")—fail to assert themselves as individuals and thus do not channel the emotional investment of the audience (Ibid., 68-69).

Diego's actions catalyze the conversation between all participants to spiral out of control. In this way, the spectator has difficulty reconciling the gratuitous gesture of violence with the portrayal of Diego as, if not a hero, than at least a laudable character by virtue of his commitment to his fellow men.

The play ends with Diego's body being carried off stage as Nada (the crippled village idiot who defected to become one of the *fonctionnaires de la peste*) yells a scathing soliloquy from atop Cadix's fortified walls:

Les voilà! Les anciens arrivent, ceux d'avant, ceux de toujours, les pétrifiés, les rassurants, les confortables, les culs-de-sacs, les bien léchés, la tradition enfin, assise, prospère, rasée de frais. Le soulagement est général, on va pouvoir recommencer. A zéro, naturellement. Voici *les petits tailleurs* du néant, vous allez être *habillés sur mesure*....Attention, ceux qui écrivent l'histoire reviennent. On va s'occuper des héros. On va les mettre au frais. Sous la dalle...Regardez donc, que croyez-vous qu'ils fassent déjà: *ils se décorent*. Les festins de la haine sont toujours ouverts, la terre épuisée se couvre du bois mort des potences, le sang de ceux que vous appelez les justes illumine encore les murs du monde, et que font-ils : *ils se décorent!* (299, my emphasis)

Nada is narrating the return of the old guard, those who had left the city in the hands of *la peste* as they fled to save themselves. He emphasizes the general relief about the prospect of starting over. From zero. As if nothing had happened. On stage, as Nada vituperates, the official death ceremony transpires silently. Nada uses imagery related to clothing to condemn the self-congratulating of these *revenants* who keep their gazes squarely focused on their own "decorations" so as to be sure to turn a blind eye to the still visible ruins of war. Tailors crawl out of the woodwork eager to outfit "sur mesure" those returning as well as those who have survived; a fresh change of clothes goes along well with the change in regime. The sartorial commentary here is not benign; clothes are powerful determinants of behavior, as *la peste* makes clear to Diego: "Mets à tes hommes libres l'habit de ma police et tu verras ce qu'ils deviennent"

(291). Disguises can alter the habits of the person wearing them. They can also trigger a myriad of reactions in those perceiving them.

The doctor's mask, for example, solicits two different reactions across the texts. *La Peste* portrays Rieux and the sanitary volunteers wearing a mask only once; in general, the "uniform" of the doctor is not emphasized. The scene takes place in the hospital where Rambert goes to find Rieux and Tarrou to tell them of his plans to stay. The text portrays the mediating role of the masks, the way in which they materially mark (and alienate) communication: "Chaque fois que l'un d'eux parlait, le masque de gaze se gonflait et s'humidifiait à l'endroit de la bouche. Cela faisait une conversation un peu irréaliste, comme un dialogue de statues" (1386). As it turns out, the masks are only a disguise for the others' benefit, meant to allay fears without really performing any function: "Le journaliste demanda si cela [le masque] servait à quelque chose et Tarrou répondit que non, mais que cela donnait confiance aux autres" (1385).

In *L'État de siège*, the young protagonist, Diego, like Rieux, is a doctor. Unlike Rieux's unwavering competence, however, Diego's medical savvy does not seem to extend beyond the physician's mask on his face. While the "masques de gaze hydrophile" are worn to inspire confidence in *La Peste*, the doctor's mask in *L'État de siège* draws fear. Diego's fiancée, Victoria, backs up in horror when she sees him wearing it: "...te voici avec ce masque de tourment et de maladie. Quitte-le, quitte-le, je t'en prie et prends-moi contre toi!" (212). Though he does remove it, the mask has seemingly altered him and his ability to recognize himself to the point where he doubts his own integrity: "Je ne me reconnais plus. Un homme ne m'a jamais fait peur, mais ceci me dépasse, l'honneur ne me sert de rien et je sens que je m'abandonne...Ne me touche pas. Peut-être le mal est-il en moi et je vais te le donner" (213).

In Nada's case, he refuses to wear the hat, so to speak, of *le bouc-émissaire*: "Ne comptez pas sur moi pour vous fournir le parfait coupable" (300). He runs to the jetée and jumps into the ocean, a sardonic *rappel* of Tarrou and Rieux's communal *bain de mer*. His soliloquy and suicide mark the extent to which the old stories (and histories), with their celebration of heroes and revilement of villains, have lost their novelty. Representation has grown tired, weary from repetition, the ceaseless retelling of the same story over and over again; with its defenses down, not even it is immune to contamination. *La peste* can creep in under the most well-worn costumes and co-opt a performance, as it does to the poor actor (whose traveling theater troupe has been blocked from leaving the city) who succumbs to the *écartèlement* on stage while playing Orpheus.<sup>37</sup> In its mercilessness, *la peste* even tires out death, causing her to give up her more "pleasing" disguise: "Déjà fatiguée, hein! *La secrétaire fait oui de la tête et dans le même moment elle change brusquement d'apparence. c'est une vieille femme au masque de mort*" (293). Contrary to what one might like to believe, "l'habit ne chasse pas la peste,"<sup>38</sup> and sometimes it might even invite it in.

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<sup>37</sup> "Il fallut le grand duo d'Orphée et d'Eurydice au troisième acte (c'était le moment où Eurydice échappait à son amant) pour qu'une certaine surprise courût dans la salle. Et comme si le chanteur n'avait attendu que ce mouvement du public, ou, plus certainement encore, comme si la rumeur venue du parterre l'avait confirmé dans ce qu'il ressentait, il choisit ce moment pour avancer vers la rampe d'une façon grotesque, bras et jambes écartés dans son costume à l'antique, et pour s'écrouler au milieu des bergeries du décor qui n'avaient jamais cessé d'être anachroniques mais qui, aux yeux des spectateurs le devinrent pour la première fois, et de terrible façon" (1380).

<sup>38</sup> "L'habit chassait la peste" (1379).

## Textual Traitors

“En période de révolution ce sont les meilleurs qui meurent. La loi du sacrifice fait que finalement ce sont toujours les lâches et les prudents qui ont la parole puisque les autres l’ont perdue en donnant le meilleur d’eux-mêmes. Parler suppose toujours qu’on a trahi.”<sup>39</sup> Camus is known for the purity of his language, for his ability to “tell it like it is” with depth and elegance, and, above all, for his writing as the unremitting champion of man in whom, as Rieux concludes at the end of *La Peste*: “...il y a...plus de choses à admirer que de choses à mépriser” (1471). As an active participant in the Resistance, he is also widely recognized for his courage. And yet he writes in his *Carnet* that the best men are those who die for their cause; words are what are left over for the cowardly, the prudent—*bref*, for the traitors. If we are to take Camus at his word here, we must ask: whom do the word-slingers betray? Why write at all, if words are simply proof of fecklessness? How should these “pusillanimous” utterings be received? And, finally, how might this notion of “speaking” treason come to bear on our two pestilent texts where immunity is in question?

Rieux, in *La peste*, offers this explanation of and justification for his writing project: “Ces faits paraîtront bien naturels à certains et, à d’autres, invraisemblables au contraire. Mais, après tout, un chroniqueur ne peut tenir compte de ces contradictions. Sa tâche est seulement de dire: ‘Ceci est arrivé’, lorsqu’il sait que ceci est, en effet, arrivé, que ceci a intéressé la vie de tout un peuple, et qu’il y a donc des milliers de témoins qui estimeront dans leur cœur la vérité de ce qu’il dit” (1219). Rieux’s “objective,” “measured,” and “unadorned” account of Oran’s “curious events” gives rise to various reactions amongst its readers. Many experience admiration for its

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<sup>39</sup> Camus, *Carnets*, II, 107.

display of sincerity, resilience and quiet heroism. They applaud Rieux's commitment to telling the story faithfully with the amount of gravity it deserves, his devotion to speaking on behalf "des pestiférés" to put "injustice" and "violence" on record (1471).

For others, the humble doctor's decision to hide under the omniscient invisibility of anonymous, third-person narration through all but the last 6 pages is met with suspicion and apprehension. Some perceive, in this strategy, a return to old-fashioned nineteenth century, "readerly" (*lisibles*) texts—to employ Barthesian vocabulary—whose meanings, though "multiple, discontinuous and piled up," are also "sandpapered [and] smoothed-over"—i.e. manipulated—neatly folded in "une armoire ménagère où les sens sont rangés, empilés, économisés..."<sup>40</sup> The narrative's perceived "tidiness" is kept thanks to the uniformity of perspective channeled through Rieux's seamless "voice," a characteristic Catherine Dana also observes: "[Rieux] va ôter pratiquement toute dissension, *son écriture est lisse*, il n'y a pas de place pour une multitude d'idées ou de points de vue. Ce qui reste de la peste, à partir de la chronique de Rieux, est un témoignage unique qui est présenté comme étant la vérité."<sup>41</sup>

Camus's writing is "slick," to return to the image with which I began of the immunity-imparting *impermeable*. It seemingly empties "*littérature pleine*" of its fullness; it undresses language to its bare-bones expression of "fact" while still retaining the realist novel's "natural

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<sup>40</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 190. Barthes, in an irreverent profusion of metaphors, somewhat incongruously sums up these texts—this "pleine littérature"—as "egg-texts" for which the neatly ordered armoire serves as only one possible illustration. In the passage, his associative links move from one metaphorical "container" to the next, from clothing (l'armoire), to reproduction (la mère), to nature (la mer).

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Dana, *Fictions pour mémoire: Camus, Perec, et l'écriture de la Shoah* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1998), 96.

movement in its phrases.”<sup>42</sup> Barthes praises Camus for his (re)tenue in *L’Etranger* (1942), his success in producing an “*écriture blanche*,” “*neutre*,” even “*innocente*” that strips modern discourse—with its unseemly “cries,” “judgments,” and “ideologies”—of its hideouts in rhetoric’s folds: “Cette parole transparente...accomplit un style de l’absence qui est presque une absence idéale du style...[L]a pensée garde ainsi toute sa responsabilité, sans se recouvrir d’un engagement accessoire de la forme dans une Histoire qui ne lui appartient pas.”<sup>43</sup> In this case, Camus’ writing retains its elegance precisely through its timelessness; excessive historical baubles would weigh it down and make it gaudy.

*La Peste*, however, does not receive the same approbation. While *L’Etranger*’s reserve and detachment was an asset contributing to its narrative force, Barthes takes *La Peste* to task precisely *because* of its perceived lack of temporal “adornment.” To return to our sartorial metaphor, for Barthes, while *L’Etranger* is meticulously cut, sporting clean lines, *La Peste* is drowning in a shapeless, outdated (because not dated) form; it loses its relevance once deprived of the historical darting, pleating and accessorizing it needs to give it—and the deeper story lurking under the lining—more of an affective “pop”: “*La Peste* est encore chronique dans la mesure où Oran, soumise à l’épidémie, accomplit un monde ‘sans causes et sans suites’ selon la définition de Littré, c’est-à-dire un monde privé d’Histoire...Le propre de l’Histoire, c’est d’organiser le dévoilement progressif des faits en fonction d’un épice centre extérieur à la crise elle-même, c’est de substituer à l’idée de temps, celle de structure. Ici, rien de tel...”<sup>44</sup> In short,

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<sup>42</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 190.

<sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 60.

<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes, “‘La Peste’: Annales d’une épidémie ou roman de la solitude?,” *Œuvres complètes*, t.1 (1942-1961), (Paris : Editions du seuil, 2002), 540-41.



Barthes calls Camus out for what he sees as his wishy-washy approach lacking structural backbone.

Barthes emphasizes how Camus effects a paradoxical feeling of no escape and no entry as he strives to maintain objectivity and neutrality.<sup>45</sup> As we see through the revisions of the novel, the writer actively sought to erase—or at least to keep at a minimum—signs of the particular, reducing all characters to the status of “concitoyens” equally afflicted by the plague’s fickle agenda, either as victims or as long-suffering exiles for whom “il n’y avait plus....que des instants” (1367), past and future having collapsed into a seemingly unending present. Barthes argues that the text fails to make an impact because its historical minimalism places it in the awkward position of straddling genres, with one foot in the neutral plane of an omniscient third person narration dedicated to reporting “reality,” and the other in the clunky domain of allegory, a textual production that purposefully cloaks the referent with the aspiration toward a generic (i.e. widely interpretable) universality. Barthes rebuffs any claims the text might make toward such greater symbolic or allegorical meaning; for him, the underlying meanings do not line up, and this precisely because History—as His story, as man’s story, *l’élément proprement humain*—is not taken sufficiently into account in a narrative about a *Mal* originating of “natural” (not “man-made”) causes:

Il est certain que tous les épisodes du livre peuvent être traduits en termes d’Occupation et de Résistance...Ce symbole constant, l’effet de généralisation qu’il produit, les souvenirs personnels qu’il ébranle, la familiarité même du mal

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<sup>45</sup> In reflecting back on his writing from this period, Camus reproaches himself for having retreated into “objectivity” instead of having the courage to call a spade a spade: “L’un de mes regrets est d’avoir trop sacrifié à l’objectivité. L’objectivité, parfois, est une complaisance. Aujourd’hui les choses sont claires et il faut appeler concentrationnaire ce qui est concentrationnaire, même le socialisme. Dans un sens, je ne serai plus jamais poli.’ Je me suis efforcé à l’objectivité, contraire à ma nature. C’est que je me méfiais de la liberté.” (*Carnets, II*, 267)

qu'il décrit, tout cela rend le livre encore plus déchirant. Et pourtant, c'est dans cet approfondissement historique de la Peste que prend naissance le malentendu...L'Histoire ne propose pas que des fléaux inhumains, mais aussi des maux très humains (des guerres, des oppressions) et pourtant tout aussi meurtriers sinon plus...Que feraient les combattants de la peste devant le visage trop humain, dont elle doit être le symbole général et indifférencié. (544)<sup>46</sup>

And yet, while Camus does not explicitly pin his récit to *les événements de la guerre et l'Occupation*, as such (though, to wit, the *récit* does begin with a suggestive temporal marker: “Les curieux événements qui font le sujet de cette chronique se sont produits en 194.,...”), in reading the text and experiencing its numbing, veiled effect, a the reader is hard pressed not to feel the heavy tarp of history weighing down upon her. Shoshana Felman draws attention to the narrative's evocative power, identifying its lack of personalization—the fact it does not have a human face<sup>47</sup>—as one of its most compelling attributes: “...[T]he horror of the epidemic constantly suggests that of the war through the Plague's potential for a massive killing. What the Plague, above all, means is a *mass murder* of such scope that it deprives the loss of life of any tragic impact, reducing death itself to an anonymous, depersonalized experience, a statistical *abstraction*.”<sup>48</sup> According to Felman, Camus' text offers a singularly poignant reading of witness and testimony of the war and the atrocities committed in its name *by virtue of its*

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<sup>46</sup> In his reply to Barthes, Camus compellingly retorts that even if he did not explicitly identify the referential circumstances serving as backdrop to his *chronique*, the allusions did not pass by *inaperçues* or *incomprises* by the reader: “*La Peste*, dont j'ai voulu qu'elle se lise sur plusieurs portées, a cependant comme contenu évident la lutte de la résistance européenne contre le nazisme. La prevue en est que cet ennemi que n'est pas nommé, tout le monde l'a reconnu, et dans tous les pays d'Europe” (“Lettre à Roland Barthes,” *Théâtre, Récits, Nouvelles*, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> Or, perhaps, that it has too many. In his letter to Barthes, Camus again uses the metaphor of the “face(s)” of tyranny: “Ce que ces combatants, dont j'ai traduit un peu de l'expérience, ont fait, ils l'on fait justement contre des hommes, et à un prix que vous connaissez. Ils le referont sans doute, devant toute terreur et *quel que soit son visage*, car la terreur en a plusieurs, ce qui justifie encore que je n'en aie nommé précisément aucun, pour pouvoir mieux les frapper tous” (ibid., 1966, my emphasis).

<sup>48</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 97-98.

ambiguous generic positioning: it is a narration anchored in the hum drum minutia of tallies and tolls paid without reference to a larger context all while it aspires toward larger ideals of solidarity and brotherhood. The slippage in referent works to its advantage, keeping the history alive in a way a more historically “committed” text might not.

Catherine Dana expounds on Felman’s work, also focusing on the elements in Camus’s text that come together to make it a gripping account of the Shoah despite the fact that not a single Jew or Nazi is explicitly represented in its pages. She approaches *La Peste* from the figurative angle, elaborating on Camus’s “take” on allegory, which she frames as being anchored in the real but not held hostage to it. Allegory<sup>49</sup> in *La Peste*, she argues, functions according to a logic of slippage that holds as its premise the fact that *les figures* must remain *in absentia*. She justifies this lack of verbal “presence” by drawing on the argument (proposed by Felman) that, in “reality,” the events to which the figures are pointing (the genocide of the Jews by the Nazis) surpass imaginability (which is why questions of their representability continue to plague us today, pardon the pun); it is impossible to imagine what it means to exterminate six million people: what is entailed for those doing the killing, what is experienced by the victims, what is attributable, in terms of responsibility, to those who are implicated by “association” (either active or passive “collaboration”). Representation of the unimaginable can only pass, according to Dana, through a linguistic absence of representation: “Qu’elle soit métaphore ou allégorie, la

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<sup>49</sup> Dana defines allegory as “un récit...de caractère symbolique ou allusif, mettant en scène des personnages dont les attributs, faits et gestes ont valeur de signes, et qui se meuvent dans un lieu et dans un temps qui sont eux-même des symboles” (46). As she points out, in the case of *La Peste*, the precise meaning of the symbols remains up for debate (this symbolic ambiguity is one of the many elements of the text that drew criticism). Dana, in her argument, focuses on the effect of this ambiguity, the way it ropes the reader into its work of commemoration precisely by **not** identifying that about which it is speaking: “Si le sens de l’allégorie n’est pas explicite, le nom de l’objet qu’elle cache devient bien vite une obsession” (ibid.).

figure *in absentia* ne se trouve pas sur l'axe syntagmatique du langage—l'axe des combinaisons—mais sur son axe paradigmatique—l'axe des substitutions, des virtualités.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, the unimaginable gets bumped from the plane of non-representation—non-presence—into the plane of non-verbalization. The “events” or “objects” or whatever it is for which the allegorical symbols are functioning as placeholders, then, get sneakily re-presented in the interstices, the gaps of language where they haunt the text without being named by it. This strategy makes it the reader's responsibility to extract the ghostly presence from the text and give it shape: “La figuralité *in absentia* provoque une tension par lacune qui permet d'élaborer ‘une fiction du réel’. Le génocide, figure *in absentia*, provoque une attente, un déséquilibre par rapport à l'attente, ce qui contraint le lecteur à une activité créatrice, à coopérer à l'élaboration d'une représentation ou d'un énoncé” (35).

Dana demonstrates that this absence of representation is accompanied, in Camus's version of allegory, by an explicit imperative to perform a *travail de commémoration* by which remembrance crosses from the personal to the collective realm. In so doing, it creates a temporal loophole by which the past remains alive and acutely relevant in the present. As Dana explains: “Le temps de la commémoration forme un temps en suspens. De son côté, bien qu'elle soit située dans un temps historique reconnaissable, l'œuvre littéraire, au moment de la lecture, est gérée par ce même temps suspendu. D'autre part, ce temps en suspens permet au lecteur d'entrer dans le texte, d'être pris dans sa temporalité et de faire le travail de refiguration réclamée par le texte configuré” (41). The ability to hold both past and present together—thus allowing the reader to travel through time—also paves the way for space travel; *la peste* refuses

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<sup>50</sup> Dana, *Fictions pour mémoire*, 34.

to stay still, in one place. The narrative, as it marches linearly along, either makes a seamless leap from one space to the next or slides one spatial frame on top of another, superimposing them. Patrick Henry examines this spatial slipperiness in detail, analyzing the way the walls of Oran morph into the swooping border of Vichy France; how the camp Tarrou describes, “installé sur le stade municipal” (1412), inflates the Parisian Vélodrome in the mind; how, as the narrative progresses, the camps gain ever more distance in the imagination as they acquire mortal intensity, beginning as internment camps in the South of France and ending up as the death camps in Eastern Europe (as evoked by the “four crématoires”).<sup>51</sup>

In short, all of this slipping and sliding makes it impossible to pin the text down. It floats above the historical circumstances, conjuring them without explicitly referencing them. It burdens the reader, evoking the heavy circumstances of history without claiming them as its own. The text absents itself from any real spatial or temporal anchoring. It gets lost in the numbing cyclicity and repetition that comes from circulation within closed walls as it dares the reader’s mind to wander past the gates at its peril. In his journal, Camus speculates about the consequences of repetition/reproduction: “Répéter ce monde c’est peut-être le trahir plus sûrement qu’en le transfigurant. La meilleure des photographies est déjà une trahison.”<sup>52</sup>

Camus’s allegorical language—allegorical because exiled from any present/ce, and thus incapable of bridging the signifying gap forged between signified and signifier—eludes such a betrayal; we know from the book’s inscription that the text does not mean what it says; it does

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<sup>51</sup> Henry, “Albert Camus, Panelier, and *La Peste*,” 390.

<sup>52</sup> Camus, *Cahiers, II*, 108.

not repeat or represent anything because it has the potential to represent everything.<sup>53</sup> In this way, Camus's allegorical language is an immune language: it is exempted from having to perform the "normal" functions of words, i.e. contaminating a given signifier with a fixed meaning or content.

Rieux, the immune allegory speaker, also gets uncomfortably lost in the chasm, caught somewhere between the "je," the "il," and the "on." He is the most immune character because the most solitary, separated both from *la peste* (while being entirely absorbed in it) and from himself. Jacqueling Machabéïs sums up this existential position succinctly: "L'homme séparé dans *La Peste*,...c'est ce narrateur-personnage qui ne dit pas 'je' et prétend se placer à l'extérieur de ce qu'il décrit, alors qu'il est en fait à l'intérieur."<sup>54</sup> He is a ghost writer to the extent that we never "catch him in the act"; he doesn't leave any tracks of his scribbles; he scrubs every last sign of ink off his fingers. The materiality of Rieux's textual production is invisible: we never *see* him with the words. He is the man who *speaks* but not the man who *writes*. And this is perhaps why we cannot fully attach ourselves to Rieux, why he, too, remains slippery—and ultimately guilty of betrayal in the sense Camus attributes to that word. Rieux hesitantly designates Grand as the "héros insignifiant et effacé" (1329). While I will not embrace the notion of heroism to describe Grand, I do see Grand as a sticking point, precisely in the way he gets stuck on/in language.

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<sup>53</sup> Camus introduces the text using a quote from Defoe hinging on the logic of replacement: "Il est aussi raisonnable de représenter une espèce d'emprisonnement par une autre que de représenter n'importe quelle chose qui existe réellement par quelque chose qui n'existe pas" (1213).

<sup>54</sup> Jacqueline Machabéïs, "L'homme séparé ou l'expérience du réel dans *La Peste* de Camus," *French Studies in Southern Africa*, no.33 (2004): 47.

A *fonctionnaire* who keeps records of *la peste* by day, at night Grand engages in his *activité secrète*, an occupation exercised completely outside of the dull banality of life under *la peste*. It is easy to dismiss Grand, as would Barthes, as simply a caricature of the Balzacian writer, wiling away his hours in a futile search for *le mot juste* to capture the most trivial of details. However, the inclusion of Grand's struggle with language, at first received as a simple and somewhat amusing side note to the main "action," a welcome diversion of sorts, in fact succeeds—through its failure—in challenging Rieux's semantic mastery and the seamlessness of the allegory. Grand, unlike Rieux, is always "looking for his words" ("*chercher ses mots*" [1229; 1252]). In an effort to acquire a deeper, more complete understanding, he decides to study Latin, methodically charting all of the internal grammatical movement. Grand explains his method, the ways he uses the chalkboard and different colored chalk—blue and red—to chart the fixity (in red) and the changes (in blue) in language's structure: "Il recopiait à la craie bleue la partie des mots qui changeait suivant les déclinaisons et les conjugaisons, et, à la craie rouge, celle qui ne changeait jamais" (1241). Here, Camus draws the reader's attention to word production as well as to linguistic structure, the nuts and bolts of language.<sup>55</sup> These colors later get metonymically tied to life and death when Cottard scribbles his suicide note on the door: "Au deuxième et dernier étage, sur la porte de gauche, Rieux lut, tracé à la craie rouge: 'entrez, je suis pendu'" (1229). Red is also the color of "the angel of the plague," as it is portrayed in Paneloux's sermon: "Voyez- le, cet ange de la peste, beau comme Lucifer et brillant comme le

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<sup>55</sup> There is an interesting resonance in this passage with a reflection Camus makes about the need to determine fixity and change so as to be able to "move past" German philosophy, which he blame for the present chaos: "La philosophie allemande a mis un mouvement dans les choses de la raison et de l'Univers-alors que les anciens y mettaient une fixité. On ne dépassera la philosophie allemande—et l'on ne sauvera l'homme—qu'en définissant ce qui est fixe et ce qui est mobile (et ce dont on ignore s'il est fixe ou mobile)" (Camus, *Carnets, II*, 200).

mal lui-même, dressé au-dessus de vos toits, la main droite portant l'épieu rouge à hauteur de sa tête" (1295).<sup>56</sup> Grand steps in to save Cottard, thus foiling death, and, as I will argue, in his own way—with his words—he also trumps *La peste* (as character and as text).

We are most aware of language's malleability and limits when considering Grand's endless manipulation of his sentence. The reader first "hears" Grand's *chef d'oeuvre* when the tall, bumbling man reads his text to Rieux:

Dans la salle à manger, Grand l'invita à s'asseoir devant une table pleine de papiers couverts de ratures sur une écriture microscopique...Ne regardez pas, dit Grand. C'est ma première phrase. Elle me donne du mal, beaucoup de mal. Lui aussi contemplait toutes ces feuilles et sa main parut invinciblement attirée par l'une d'elle qu'il éleva en transparence devant l'ampoule électrique sans abat-jour. La feuille tremblait dans sa main. Rieux remarqua que le front de l'employé était moite. Asseyez-vous, dit-il, et lisez-la-moi. L'autre le regarda et sourit avec une sorte de gratitude. Oui, dit-il, je crois que j'en ai envie. Il attendit un peu, regardant toujours la feuille, puis s'assit. Rieux écoutait en même temps une sorte de bourdonnement confus qui, dans la ville, semblait répondre aux sifflements du fléau. Il avait, à ce moment précis, une perception extraordinairement aiguë de cette ville qui s'étendait à ses pieds, du monde clos qu'elle formait et des terribles hurlements qu'elle étouffait dans la nuit. La voix de Grand s'éleva sourdement: 'par une belle matinée du mois de mai, une élégante amazone parcourait, sur une superbe jument alezane, les allées fleuries du Bois de Boulogne.' Le silence revint et, avec lui, l'indistincte rumeur de la ville en souffrance. Grand avait posé la feuille et continuait à la contempler. Au bout d'un moment, il releva les yeux: - 'Qu'en pensez-vous?' (1301-1302)

For once, Rieux is not doing the talking. Moreover, Grand drowns out the murmur of the festering city and the whistling of *la peste*; for a brief moment he steps in as a competing voice—an "outside" of *la peste* that transgresses the absoluteness of *le monde clos*. Many critics are

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<sup>56</sup> Red is also the color of Tarrou father's robe when he condemns the man to death: "Transformé par sa robe *rouge*, ni bonhomme ni affectueux, sa bouche grouillait de phrases immenses, qui, sans arrêt, en sortaient comme des serpents. Et je compris qu'il demandait la mort de cet homme au nom de la société et qu'il demandait même qu'on lui coupât le cou. Il disait seulement, il est vrai: 'cette tête doit tomber.' Mais, à la fin, la différence n'était pas grande. Et cela revint au même, en effet, puisqu'il obtint cette tête" (1420). After seeing this scene, Tarrou vows his life to never participating in killing another man.



tempted to equate Grand's elegant Amazone with *La peste*, and his writing project, in general, as another form of *la peste*. Jacqueline Machabéïs makes this very assertion: "L'image de l'amazone est la forme allégorique de la peste racontée, qui est inscrite dans l'espace de la page d'histoire; le mouvement mécanique qui la meut, c'est la forme allégorique de la peste vécue, qui est inscrite dans le temps."<sup>57</sup> She ultimately comes to see Grand as "la figure allégorique du Résistant," underlining the division between his daytime and nighttime occupations: "[s]on activité secrète a le caractère anodin des métiers de façade des résistants silencieux dans les villages au temps de l'Occupation. Son activité secrète, l'hermétisme des messages codés de la France libre...[L]e résistant de l'ombre détient aussi le secret du code qui pourrait enrayer la mécanique diabolique de la peste" (56). Jacques Cardinal observes something more ambivalent in Grand's behavior, locating death—"une mortifière régression" within his search for *le mot juste*: "...[L]a quête de Joseph Grand est à sa manière une peste, si l'on considère que le désir de cette phrase parfaitement motivée est la première des violences, celle qui nie l'ordre symbolique ou la loi...Déchet d'encre, de papiers et de mots, ce manuscrit est à lui seul une peste, si l'on considère que cette phrase impossible est justement le contraire de la vie, et qu'un sujet se dépense à mort dans ce vain projet."<sup>58</sup>

My reading of Grand more closely aligns with that of Machabéïs. I do not, however, endow Grand with the intentionality of the resistant. He is more a Forrest Gump character, a witness who happily participates in the events, who is on the "right side" of history, as it were, though without great consciousness about the import of his actions or decisions. Importantly, for

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<sup>57</sup> Machabéïs, "L'homme séparé ou l'expérience du réel dans *La Peste* de Camus," 55.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Cardinal, "Papiers d'épidémie : Ecriture et purification dans *La Peste* de Camus," *Poétique*, no.126 (avril 2001), 232-33.

my reading, Grand is the only main character to gain immunity “the hard way”: he *acquires it*, taking *la peste* into his body, fighting with it and learning to overcome it.<sup>59</sup> Though not willfully, Grand confronts *la peste* head on, and, unlike Rieux, he does not dedicate himself entirely to it--a part of him remains untouchable and untouched. His writing can be viewed as a writing of resistance in the way it does not allow the story to take its course. One possible interpretation of his sentence is to see in his Amazon atop the mare a reversal of the image of one of the four harbingers of the apocalypse who, once released by God’s scroll, ride in on their different colored horses. Here, the image is not frightening, but bucolic; the teeming scourge has been tamed. Metonymically, Grand’s “superbe jument,” gallops freely in the Bois de Boulogne just outside of the Parisian city walls, a stark contrast, for example, with Rieux’s closed-in car and its repetitive circulations through the walled-in streets of Oran. Grand finishes by stripping down his sentence, purifying it by removing all of the adjectives. Machabéïs convincingly sees in this action “la clé de la separation,”<sup>60</sup> framing the adjective as the part of speech used to set something apart: “c’est le mot par lequel on se sépare de la réalité des autres” (ibid.). Indeed, the communicated affect of Grand’s sentence becomes less and less *orné*, or, as we might be tempted to assert, *oranaïs*, and, thus more and more *grand* in the sense that it upends the “official” *récit* and, in so doing, forces the reader to take account of the relationship between witness responsibility, self positioning and language

Grand, the “artist” of the text, understands the weight of beginning ever again, the weight of words as he understands the power they contain within their sounds and rhythm. He opines:

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<sup>59</sup> In fact, his “cure” comes through the sacrifice of his “manuscript”: immolation by fire. It is only through this starting over that his writing becomes “cleansed.” Here, we observe a faint echo of *Le Docteur Pascal* when Félicité attempts to purge the family of all traces of the “plague” that had marred her family name for years by burning Pascal’s life work. Just as in *Le Docteur Pascal*, here, too, there are remains.

<sup>60</sup> Machabéïs, “L’homme séparé ou l’expérience du réel dans *La Peste* de Camus,” 56.

“Quand je serai arrivé à rendre parfaitement le tableau que j’ai dans l’imagination, quand ma phrase aura l’allure même de cette promenade au trot, une-deux-trois, une-deux-trois, alors le reste sera plus facile...” (1302). Again, Grand points us to the concrete materiality of language, the way language not only transports our imagination but enters our bodies and makes us move. His presence opens the text—offers the small, rough “tear” in the slippery material—to allow the reader entry and exit: entry to be exposed, exit to take the words and begin tugging at them. His understanding of the difficulty of representation founds the dignity of this character and puts him on par—though apart—from Rieux. While Rieux speaks “reality,” Grand writes “allegory,” making “reality” transcend the binding historical circumstances enclosing it.

### **Communicating Tolerance**

Peste. On ne peut pas jouir du cri des oiseaux dans la fraîcheur du soir—du monde tel qu’il est. Car il est recouvert maintenant *d’une couche épaisse* d’histoire que son langage doit traverser pour nous atteindre. Il en est déformé. Rien de lui n’est senti pour lui-même parce qu’à chaque moment du monde s’attache toute une série d’images de mort ou de désespoir. Il n’y a plus de matin sans agonies, plus de soirs sans prisons et plus de midi sans carnages épouvantables.<sup>61</sup>

Camus mourns the irrevocable loss of *correspondances* in a world covered by *la peste*—whether *noire*, *brune* or *grise*.<sup>62</sup> All interaction—between nature and man, between man and man, between man and himself—has become mediated by the deforming “thick layer” of history with its agonies, prisons and bloodshed. The crisis of intelligence, of which Camus speaks so eloquently, is deep and alienating; it renders even simple connection impossible, giving the

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<sup>61</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets*, II, 118.

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Henry illuminates Camus’s choice of scourges, explaining that Nazism was known as “la peste brune” and Vichy “la peste grise” (“Albert Camus, Panelier, and *La Peste*,” 400).

impression that something vital has been excised, leaving a *manque* and a *vide* at the center: “On a amputé le monde d’une partie de sa vérité, de ce qui fait sa permanence et son équilibre...”<sup>63</sup>

This world is written in the mutable blue of Grand’s chalk. Symbols of permanence give way to the provisional; continuity has been cut, and difference reigns.

The existential emptiness soon inflects possibilities of communication. As I previously discussed, the word *communication*, from the Latin root *communicare* meaning “to share, impart, or make common” emerges from the same etymological root—*munus*—as *community* and *immunity*. In the world of *la peste*, habitual modes of communication become sites of contagion: letters, potential “vehicles of infections,” are replaced by clipped telegrams, which entail no direct contact. Words are hollowed out, drained of emotion and meaning once subjected to the mechanization of the electrical signal, a medium that drastically reduces the space and time of expression:

Des êtres que liaient l'intelligence, le cœur et la chair, en furent réduits à chercher les signes de cette communion ancienne dans les majuscules d'une dépêche de dix mots. Et comme, en fait, les formules qu'on peut utiliser dans un télégramme sont vite épuisées, de longues vies communes ou des passions douloureuses se résumèrent rapidement dans un échange périodique de formules toutes faites comme: "vais bien. Pense à toi. Tendresse." Certains d'entre nous, cependant, s'obstinaient à écrire et imaginaient sans trêve, pour correspondre avec l'extérieur, des combinaisons qui finissaient toujours par s'avérer illusoires...Pendant des semaines, nous fûmes réduits alors à recommencer sans cesse la même lettre, à recopier les mêmes appels, si bien qu'au bout d'un certain temps, les mots qui d'abord étaient sortis tout saignants de notre cœur se vidaient de leur sens. Nous les recopiions alors machinalement, essayant de donner au moyen de ces phrases mortes des signes de notre vie difficile. Et pour finir, à ce monologue stérile et entêté, à cette conversation aride avec un mur, l'appel conventionnel du télégramme nous paraissait préférable. (1272-73)

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<sup>63</sup> Camus, *Carnets, II*, 160.

All those under *la peste*'s reign, though sharing in a common plight, progressively seal themselves off from each other; the immune no longer *commune* out of fear for their survival. The doctor's mask becomes emblematic of this economy of exchange, marking where breath and words should pass without actually allowing them passage, resulting in a "dialogue between statues." The reader gains awareness of—and takes on—the weight and the utter desolation that characterizes this moment in history where voices are muffled, sounds are distorted and words no longer channel life or the capacity to bridge people. Sisyphus, Prometheus, Atlas—all of these men, as examples, bear an unsharable burden.

Like "immunity," the word "tolerance" appears very infrequently in Camus's writing, and, on the few occasions when it does, it is framed negatively as an indulgence or a weakened state. In his notebooks, for example, on a passage regarding the proper usage of freedom, Camus writes enigmatically: "Tolérance issue de l'usure des valeurs."<sup>64</sup> The tension in much of Camus's *oeuvre* emanates out of situations of forced tolerance, where incompatible elements—self and other, to break it down into the most simplistic of terms—are made to cohabit a space until one of the elements is purged, either forcibly or by the hazards of fate. Camus tends toward a lack of compromise, an absoluteness summed up by Rieux's call from Rambert for the possibility of "total condemnation" (1224). Certainly, atrocities committed on the scale of those perpetrated by the Nazis demand such an absolute judgment. But, I think Camus's lack of a discourse of tolerance extends beyond this just condemnation and limits the possibilities envisionable for forging a new dialogue. In his approach to tolerance, Camus is very much a man of his time.

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<sup>64</sup> Camus, *Carnets, II*, 209.

Camus's writing draws light to the costs of the hermetically sealed-off self, without truly offering a competing paradigm. He evocatively depicts the extent to which existence under such conditions is intolerable, but he fails to offer a counter-model of sustainable coexistence and, if not harmony, then at least cohabitation. The thrust of his writing tends toward univocity, despite the existence of small "betrayals" or contestations of that voice (Grand, for example). Man is alone, and *la peste* is always lurking within, waiting for propitious conditions out of which to materialize again.

Roberto Esposito describes the Nazi atrocities as the horrific apex of the immunitary paradigm, the moment when the logic of protection of the social body necessitated the unequivocal extermination of the other. In the bio-medical realm, shortly after the war, immunology emerged out of its "purgatory." It was galvanized by questions revolving around the notion of tolerance, defined as a lack of response on the part of the immune system to a "foreign" entity (what may otherwise be framed as a "pathogenic" other), and autoimmunity. It is perhaps no coincidence that the large-scale display of an absolute lack of tolerance would lead to an increased interest in bodily phenomena of coexistence or internal dissonance that, up until that point, had received scant attention. Camus's pestilent writings were not influenced by the cutting edge science (the scientific elements of his portrayals were drawn from testimonies and medical treatises from the turn of the century), but we wonder what they might have looked like—or sounded like—if they had been.

## Chapter 5: Re(ad)ressing the Obscene Body: HIV and the Logic of Contagion in the Work of Hervé Guibert

...[T]he fear is that the effect of AIDS will be the destruction of the work as a text. If the reader has too close a contact with the AIDS-infected writer, the reader may miss the signifiers. The risk of the AIDS-infected text is the *loss of the textual space*, the loss of the text itself in favor of a *sympathy that blinds* the reader to what he or she is reading. 'AIDS' risks being the only readable signifier in such a way that *it becomes not a transcendental signifier but a transcendental signified*, a four-letter word that means what it says. Everything is AIDS.<sup>1</sup>

### Resisting Textual Collapse

Larry Schehr was alerting the reader to the totalizing effects of AIDS literature in 1995, a time when being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS amounted to an immediate *arrêt de mort*.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the landscape (and text-scape) has changed. Do the immuno-capacities of the "AIDS-infected text" withstand the reduction of textual space to something that only reads AIDS, AIDS, AIDS (read: "he died of AIDS")? What about the writing issuing from and surrounding the notoriously slippery acronym: can perceived interpretable relevance be maintained now that the crisis has calmed, AIDS having become only one of many chronic illnesses to manage?

In what follows, I would like to reopen the question of textual collapse or resistance in works by Hervé Guibert, considered by many as the "founding father" of AIDS literature in France, precisely inquiring how the "AIDS narrative" should be, can be, need be received. Guibert's reknown is frequently attributed to his ability to capitalize on the extremities of

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Schehr, *Alcibiades at the Door: Gay Discourses in French Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 162 (my emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Hill chillingly crystallizes this sense of instant death: "...se donner à la mort future, et donc déjà en quelque sorte se donner la mort dans cet instant même." Leslie Hill, "Ecrire—La Maladie," *Nottingham French Studies*, 34.1 (Spring 1995): 90-91.

circumstance; his writing is dismissed as opportunistic, successful only because it bears testimony to a man who knew himself to be in the throes of a very protracted demise. Over twenty years after the publication of *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* and having entered into a period in which AIDS is no longer necessarily synonymous with death (especially for the many people living with AIDS [PLA] with access to drugs from the Western World), has Guibert's work been able to transcend the collapse of signification, to insert enough of a wedge between the signifier and the signified to give the reader space for interpretable meaning and thus ensuring the text a legacy beyond AIDS? Schehr fears the signifying power of AIDS to undermine the author and his (or her) work, eradicating the distance between self-same subject and other through a numbing affective process on the reader (evoking "a sympathy that blinds"). I will argue that Guibert's work refuses to be completely subsumed under the virus, collapsed into it. Instead of provoking "blinding" sympathy in his readers, Guibert's fast and loose play with the signifier results in an uneasy "passage" of the text into the reader, one that threatens integrity on both sides of the page. Doing so, it paradoxically ensures the text's—and the signifier's—survival as the reader "takes it in" and "takes it over." Guibert mimes the virus, not to fold the other into self, thus eradicating boundaries, but rather to extend the possibilities of self definition through calculated shape-shifting and dis-integration.

### *The Aftermath of AIDS*

First though, in light of Schehr's cautionary words, it might be worth considering for a moment the stakes of survival. An evaluation of the developed, Western world's current associations with the virus will help us gauge why a return to texts from the earliest period of the



“AIDS canon” might fruitfully help us to consider the relationship between the virus and the self, as well as the relationship between the writer, the “AIDS” text and the reader. Schehr issued his warning just before the advent of antiretroviral therapy in 1996 that allowed those with money and access to live virtually symptom free for years, even decades. These combination therapy “drug cocktails” ushered in a new era, our current moment.<sup>3</sup> In an article in the Nov 10, 1996 edition of the *New York Times Magazine*, Andrew Sullivan declared the “End of AIDS,”<sup>4</sup> a statement for which he was harshly criticized by many AIDS activists. One need not emphasize the absurdity of this statement for much of the world’s population nor the danger of complacency that its sentiment risks triggering (and has to a large degree). Sullivan acknowledges these difficulties and explores the ambivalence of survival for those who will now continue on when before they were looking death squarely in the face. Sullivan writes: “A difference between the end of AIDS and the end of many other plagues: for the first time in history, a large proportion of the survivors will not simply be those who escaped infection, or were immune to the virus, but those who contracted the illness, contemplated their own deaths and still survived. If for some, this leads to bitterness, for others it suggests something else entirely. It is not so much survivor guilt as *survivor responsibility*” (ibid., my emphasis).

Later, he relates this burden of survival to his personal response upon hearing that his own “viral load,” the amount of virus measurable in his bodily fluids, was now “undetectable”:

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<sup>3</sup> Very recent developments have taken the promises of treatment—and even prevention—one step further. Tri-therapy drugs have now been determined effective as a prophylactic measure to prevent (and not just treat) the spread of the virus, and new studies on the role of proteins in inhibiting the replication of HIV are showing very hopeful initial results. Additionally, a Bay-area man who received a bone marrow stem-cell transplant in Berlin from a donor who was naturally resistant to the virus in 2007 as been deemed the first “cured” case of AIDS. Andrew Pollack, “New Hope for a Cure of H.I.V.,” *The New York Times* (Nov 29, 2011). [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/29/health/new-hope-of-a-cure-for-hiv.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/29/health/new-hope-of-a-cure-for-hiv.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Sullivan, “When Plagues End,” *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov 10, 1996). <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/11/10/magazine/when-plagues-end.html?pagewanted=1>

“When you have spent several years girding yourself for the possibility of death, it is not so easy to gird yourself instead for the possibility of life...The intensity with which you had learned to approach each day turns into a banality, a banality that refuses to understand or even appreciate the experience you have just gone through” (ibid.). The slippage from heightened awareness of risk and imminent mortality into disavowing banality marks the collective experience of AIDS. As the viral loads in seropositive blood retreated into “undetectability,” so, too, did the urgency experienced towards the disease: for the White Western World, AIDS slipped into the background and backwaters (Africa and the underdeveloped “elsewhere”), out of sight, out of mind.

This quiet—and somewhat willful—loss of consciousness could be understood as part of the cycle that, according to Ross Chambers, characterizes “aftermath society”: “The kind of society in which innocence is lost and regained regularly...one regulated by a culture in which collectively traumatic events are denied, and if necessary denied again...Denial ensures a perpetually renewable state of cultural innocence, but it does so at the cost of inevitably betraying some knowledge of the injustice, the guilt, or the pain that the act of denial fails (or refuses) to acknowledge, and of which it is...a symptom.”<sup>5</sup> We see this denial at work in what might be considered “second generation” AIDS writing, texts that promote sexual practices liberated from any weighty moral imperatives or attention to psychological ramifications, an

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<sup>5</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, & the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), xxi. A recent example of this cultural denial is the way in which we have “recovered” from the Financial Crisis in 2008, changing virtually nothing in the system to prevent its repetition, governmentally restoring blind faith in the markets and the financial institutions as we close our eyes to the very real possibility that it will all happen again.

“everything goes” mentality unburdened by consequence.<sup>6</sup> Guillaume Dustan offers the most elaborate example (though, as Schehr notes, kept in good company by many other writers of similar ilk).<sup>7</sup> While the virus has become a (if not *the*) defining characteristic of contemporary Parisian gay culture,<sup>8</sup> mentions of *le sida* all but disappear in “the McDonaldization of gay sex,”<sup>9</sup> a hybrid world littered with slang, anglicisms, porn and nods to a fast cosmopolitan celebrity culture in which white, male homosexuality figures as the cultural universal. It is only in fleeting moments that we are able to glimpse denial as symptom. “Jamais je ne vieillerais,”<sup>10</sup> declares the narrator in one of Dustan’s novels, nodding darkly to the reality of a lifestyle that celebrates eternal youthfulness: the fact that, even with antiretroviral therapy, AIDS cuts life short.

Without a cure, these young men know on some level that their days are numbered. Faced with this knowledge, however easily disavowed, it is best to live fast and hard (figuratively and literally), and resist succumbing to thoughts of what lurks beneath the skin. Glimpses of interiority, insight or understanding—terms strongly associated with a now defunct literary tradition once imbued with the myth of full subjectivity—disappear. Depth is exchanged

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<sup>6</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, author of *American Psycho*, is mentioned as a literary inspiration in Dustan’s *Nicolas Pages*, admired by the narrator for his minimalism and the lack of access he gives his readers to the characters’ interior life: “Bret Easton Ellis m’avait montré la voie avec son minimalisme stylistique et son absence de ‘psychologie’ au sens traditionnel du terme (l’intériorité des personnages n’est montrée qu’à travers le récit de leur action), pour son esthétique filmique, et bien sûr pour le trash-gore inédit.” Guillaume Dustan, *Nicolas Pages* (Paris: J’ai Lu, 2003), 395.

<sup>7</sup> Emerging “third generation” AIDS writing attempts to historicize the conflict between the first generation subjective interiority and second generation denial/liberation from the weight of individual responsibility (as embodied, for examples, by the characters of Dominique and Willie in Tristan Garcin’s recent novel, *La meilleure part des hommes*, awarded Le Prix de Flore in 2008).

<sup>8</sup> “The defining moment of male homosexuality is no longer same-sex desire but rather bareback sex, bug-chasers, gift givers, pitchers and catchers, and the HIV virus itself.” Lawrence Schehr, *Parts of Andrology: On Representations of Men’s Bodies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 196.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Schehr, “Writing Bareback,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 6, no.1 (2002): 182.

<sup>10</sup> Guillaume Dustan, *Je sors ce soir* (Paris: P.O.L., 1997), 60.

for surface as discourse slides, virtually unimpeded, from one body to the next. HIV positive interiors all look the same and, therefore, no longer matter. From this perspective, *uncompromised* immunity paradoxically becomes a compromising mechanism, the thing that prevents easy slippage and makes words—and bodies—"stick" uncomfortably. Externalized and signaled by the condom, HIV negative status marks difference, preventing the possibility of elision, or evasion, and potentially leading to exclusion. If one's goal is to fit in, it is far easier to throw caution—and condoms—to the wind.

### ***Guibert's Obscene Body***

One reason, then, to return to earlier writing is that such a move permits us to penetrate a *corp(u)s* that has virtually closed over. Hervé Guibert, prolific journalist, photographer and writer, was born in 1955 and died in 1991. With over 20 works of varying genres (written, photographic, cinematic, theatrical) attributed to his name, nearly half of them written during the time he knew himself to be HIV positive (roughly between 1987 and 1991), Guibert offers an unparalleled example of "first wave" AIDS writing.<sup>11</sup> His work warrants our attention by virtue of its breadth, its indebtedness to a literary and philosophical tradition that foregrounds while

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<sup>11</sup> Paula Treichler borrows the "wave" metaphor from feminist discourse to categorize AIDS writing, linking the "first wave" to gay white men and the "second wave" to heterosexuals. She remarks that "drug users at high risk for AIDS remain silent and invisible." Paula Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 39. It must also be noted that, until fairly recently, AIDS narratives from other parts of the world—particularly from Africa—have remained scarce. Doumbi-Fakoly, himself the author of *Certificat de contrôle anti-Sida*, one of the first francophone novels to tackle AIDS as a main theme, attempts to understand this silence: "...[D]espite the African writer's consistently close alignment with the concerns and desires of the people, they have curiously been absent in the general mobilization against AIDS. Two important questions emerge here: do they perceive themselves as powerless against the fate imposed by this pandemic? Or do they find it degrading to respond to the absurd Western campaign aimed at conferring African birthright on AIDS?" Doumbi-Fakoly, "African Literature: Witness to its Time," in *Leap in the Dark: AIDS, Art & Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Allan Klusacek and Ken Morrison (Montreal, CA: Véhicule Press, 1993), 225.

interrogating the notion of self,<sup>12</sup> and its dedication to writing not simply the body but the body's *interior* manifestations. Many critics identify three of Guibert's books as constitutive of his AIDS texts, all characterized as auto-fictional novels: *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* (1990); *Le Protocole compassionnel* (1991); and *L'homme au chapeau rouge* (1992). To understand Guibert's complicated relationship with AIDS and following in the footsteps of Marie Darrieusecq, literary critic turned fiction writer who argues for expanding Guibert's "AIDS canon" to include one his earlier fictional texts, I propose further widening the survey lens, using his more fanciful, "purely" fictional texts to explore how Guibert stubbornly pried and kept open the symbolic plane. I do this not with the intention of putting everything under the "AIDS umbrella" but instead hoping to show how Guibert engages in a strategy of immune resistance precisely by textually adopting AIDS as a paradigm to be mimicked and appropriated, a paradoxical way of ensuring his own textual legacy. Looking at the texts written during the era of AIDS while hopefully resisting the textual lens through which "[e]verything is AIDS," I will consider how Guibert's literary project withstands the textual collapse of which Schehr warns. Guibert's writing beats the virus' powers of reducibility by constantly displacing, diverting—indeed, defiling—the signifier (defile both in the etymological sense of "defouling"—"to destroy the purity, cleanliness or clearness of," but also in the metaphorical sense given of "defile"—as in "défilé": to move in a straight line, demonstrating a rigorous conditioning). Guibert paradoxically maintains the signifying space first by appropriating the signifier for his purposes and then corrupting and disciplining it in an effort to keep it viable.

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<sup>12</sup> Emily Apter traces the literary heritage, naming the forefathers of Guibert's writing: "[Guibert's] writings stand as terrifying yet curiously understated *sida* testimonies, steeped in the French intellectual legacy of Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault." Emily Apter, "Fantom Images: Hervé Guibert and the Writing of 'sida' in France," eds. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier, *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 83-84.

One key example of this strategy of defilement is the way in which Guibert reimagines the family, resulting in the use and abuse of the child, “l’enfant.” The child is a privileged figure in Guibert’s work that has solicited surprisingly little extended analysis. The child appears in some of his earliest as well as his later writings as both threatening and seductive, a sight at which to marvel and ultimately a body to be “dressed” (*dressé*)—tamed, disciplined, formed. In *Voyage avec deux enfants* (1982), an early hybrid text that skirts the genres of *journal de bord*, of fiction and of autofiction, Guibert evokes the child’s body as “obscene [with/in its] perfection.” He writes (in quotes in the original text): “Mon corps est une plaie, mais pour rien au monde je ne l’échangerai contre ton petit corps de poupée, *obscène de perfection*.”<sup>13</sup>

Ross Chambers offers a few tools to help tease out the stakes involved in this particular kind of obscenity. He theorizes the obscene as the “cultural offstage,” that which remains at the periphery of the culture in the realm of the “*unmentionable, unspeakable, even unnatural*.”<sup>14</sup> Chambers then shows how the obscene fundamentally defines the culture by assuming an unacknowledged central position precisely because of its unspeakability. In what follows, using Chambers’ theorization, I will argue that Guibert displaces the obscenity of the virus with the obscenity of the child, the culturally pure, untouchable—immune—body, performing a *dressage* of it on his terms. Guibert is able to perform this displacement because, as we shall see, he is released from the symbolic imperative of his textual father, Foucault, with whom he maintains a complicated relationship of obedience, protection and exposure. This emancipation allows him to engage in textual *catachresis*, a *mise-en-question* of genres and norms through a calculated

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<sup>13</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Voyage avec deux enfants* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1983), 95 (my emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 33.

misuse of language. As such, Guibert forces the reader to interrogate assumptions of innocence and futurity in our present moment of reprieve and aftermath, re(ad)dressing the reader through retroviral writing (textual genetics) to establish an alternative line of kinship. Guibert paradoxically leaves his heritage through these tainted communicative channels to secure his survival—and the survival of the text—within and beyond the always already corrupted words. The reader is left not with “blind sympathy” that leads to an open-and- shut case of signification with no interpretable beyond but rather with a sense of lingering “contamination”—in the etymological sense from the Latin “to touch (tangere) together (com)” —through repeated and prolonged exposure with the now un(w)holy words. She experiences an excessive remainder that implicates as it sticks, lasting beyond any possibility of dismissive, sentimental textual foreclosure, keeping relevance of the text and the necessity of its transmission alive.

### **Mixed Metaphors and Reverse Transcriptions**

Before examining Guibert’s creative handling of the virus, we first need to understand how the virus is thought to function by analyzing the language surrounding and defining it. In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag warns of the dangers of metaphorizing illness, of endowing it with a meaning beyond its “pure” physiological manifestations. She focuses her argument on the ways tuberculosis and cancer were both framed as “festering” diseases resulting from unexpressed affect/intentions/desires. Understanding the disease in these terms, as being caused by an “inward” turn, ends up perniciously foisting blame on the patient, making it somehow the

patient's "fault" that he or she became ill. She later updates her statement, extending her analysis to AIDS and its amazing powers of stigmatization.<sup>15</sup>

Since its early days, discourse about HIV/AIDS has deployed a host of powerful metaphors. This recourse to figurative language can in part be explained by how long it took and has taken the scientific community to gather information about the workings of this novel “invader.” The first cases of what later became labeled as HIV/AIDS<sup>16</sup> were identified in America in 1981 and a year later in France in 1982. It wasn’t until 1983 when the agent responsible for triggering the immune collapse of thousands was successfully isolated and identified as a retrovirus.

HIV interacts with the body at the cellular level. As a virus—and more precisely a retrovirus—skirting the edges between living and nonliving, it is dependent upon the host body’s cells to “live” and replicate. The HIV virus particularly targets immune cells to “infiltrate” and “colonize,” progressively destroying them and disrupting the “communication” between like

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<sup>15</sup> See Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> AIDS, the acronym for “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome,” is the final expression or stage of the HIV virus. While HIV is the virus and AIDS is the syndrome or the associated signs and symptoms of a disease, the two are often used interchangeably. Jamie Feldman clarifies, “[t]he name ‘acquired immunodeficiency syndrome’ is purely descriptive, indicating no etiology, no prognosis. It simply defines a particular set of clinical symptoms, a syndrome, as a biomedical entity. This name was consciously decided upon by a committee, rather than arising out of idiosyncratic, informal usage as did most of the prior names. It constructs three things about the nature of the disease: that it occurs after birth, that it involves deficits in the immune systems, and that it is not limited to any single group of people.” Jamie L. Feldman, *Plague Doctors: Responding to the AIDS Epidemic in France and America* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 56. Moreover, Lee Edelman reminds us of the political and ideological stakes involved in the conflation of the virus and the disease with a signifier so lacking in precision. Highlighting the absurdity that the 14-page definition of AIDS offered by the CDC in 1991 was deemed insufficient to contain the disease, Edelman writes: “To this acknowledgement... we must add the more widespread conflation...of ‘AIDS’ and HIV seropositivity—a conflation that rhetorically identifies the effect with the medical indicator of the putative cause as if such referential violence could, paradoxically, reinforce the coherence of ‘AIDS’ by achieving its totalization and its ideological compaction.” Lee Edelman, “The Mirror and the Tank” in *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, ed. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12.



cells and other cells that form part of the immune system. As we can see by the use of quotations, a great deal of imaginary work goes into describing these cellular relationships. Canguilhem reminds us that cells, only visible to the microscopic eye, easily lend themselves to such imaginative work and are in fact deeply conceived as a reflection of our affective understanding of how individual bodies interact within society: "...[L]a cellule est une notion à la fois anatomique et fonctionnelle, la notion d'un matériau élémentaire et d'un travail individuel, partiel et subordonné. Ce qui est certain c'est que des valeurs affectives et sociales de coopération et d'association planent de près ou de loin sur le développement de la théorie cellulaire."<sup>17</sup>

### ***T-Cells Held Hostage***

Many theorists and critics have noted that the primary metaphor used to discuss the relationship between the AIDS virus and the body's cells has been the military metaphor. A description found in one of the early mainstream texts about AIDS offers a particularly vivid elaboration of this metaphor, breaking the hypothesized evolution of the "battle" into three sections. First the authors describe the way the immune system "handles" a run-of-the-mill microbe:

In the bloodstream of healthy individuals, there are white blood cells to seek out, locate, and destroy hostile invading germs. There exist various types of white blood cells, each of which has a specific and necessary role to play in a functioning immune system. One type, *dendritic macrophages* (radar) perform reconnaissance and early warning functions... These reconnaissance cells are

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<sup>17</sup> Georges Canguilhem, "La théorie cellulaire," in *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Vrin, [1965] 2003), 60-61.

located in the liver and spleen and aggressively search for foreign germs. When they locate an invading microbe, they send out a chemical signal that acts as the first sign of trouble.

This signal is understood by the *T-helper cells*, the ‘field generals’ making up the ‘field command structure’ of the body’s defense system. They sound a general alarm, launching a full-scale alert, mobilization and attack. The T-helper cells send out the signal to the various units of the body’s defense. Upon receiving this signal, the body’s immune system begins to deploy *T-killer cells* (commandos) to locate the invaders and cause B-attack cells to manufacture and fire weapons (tanks, machine guns, planes, missiles) necessary to destroy the foreign germs. *Phagocytic cells* (infantry) are sent to devour and mop up the enemy...<sup>18</sup>

As discussed in the second chapter, acquired immunity, as opposed to innate immunity (the macrophages and phagocytes—the “reconnaissance” or “radar” in the description---the immune capacities with which one is born), develops over time as the body comes into contact with various antigens (“a substance that produces one or more antibodies”) linked to particular germs, bacteria or viruses. It is considered a “higher” or “more advanced” form of immunity, strategically “combating” a particular antigen with an antibody formed precisely to “neutralize” its molecular specificities. The ideal scenario, then, in the case of a virus, is that the T-helper cells, with the assistances of the initial “scopers” (dendritic cells) are readily able to identify the “intruding” virus and eradicate it. I have italicized the key actors in this war. To offer this recap, when the immune system is working properly, the dendritic macrophages perform early reconnaissance; the T-helper cells send out the SOS when an intruder is detected; the T-killer cells bring in the heavy artillery, the B-attack cells, and attack. Once the battle is over and the immune system has triumphed, the phagocytic cells are called in to tidy up the mess, engulfing and digesting the gruesome remains. T and B cells, both lymphocytes (a.k.a. white blood cells), are connected to acquired or adaptive immunity.

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<sup>18</sup> James I. Slaff and John K. Brubaker, *The AIDS Epidemic: How You Can Protect Yourself and Your Family—Why You Must*. (New York: Warner Books, 1985), 13-17.

HIV/AIDS, however, jams both the reconnaissance and communicative apparatuses. The second part of Slaff and Brubaker sets the scene for the *drôle de guerre* that occurs each time this enemy combatant trespasses:

As soon as an AIDS virus enters a new bloodstream, it locates a specific T-helper cell. *The virus has a method of incorporating itself within the genetic structure of a T-helper cell...* This process does not kill a T-helper cell, but renders it unable to perform its function as ‘field general’ of the immune system. A T-helper cell that has been invaded by the AIDS virus cannot sound the alarm to the rest of the body’s immune system. One useful way of picturing this is that the ‘field general’ has been ‘taken hostage’ but not killed.

The invasion and ‘hostage-taking’ of one T-helper cell does not, by itself, render a person’s immune system unable to function. There are millions of other functioning T-helper cells which can do the job. The sinister effect this has, though, is that it *makes the presence of the AIDS virus covert and unrecognizable...* Incredibly, the AIDS virus seems impervious to the antibodies that the body produces to combat it. The AIDS virus seems to be a killer with armor-plated protections against which the immune system’s ‘bullets’ have no effect. The AIDS virus has sheltered itself within the genetic structure of a T-helper cell and cannot be killed. It lurks in that form apparently indefinitely. There it remains, threatening to explode into an active phase of replication and to attack more T-helper cells. The AIDS virus in a period of dormancy is holding one of the immune system’s generals hostage with one hand on the throat and another with a gun held to the head. The general is not dead but is unable to perform traditional organizational functions. (16-17)

The above speculation (we note the repeated use of provisional words--“seems” “appears,” etc.) portrays a terrorist, guerrilla attack. HIV/AIDS has captured the general,<sup>19</sup> rendering “him” ineffective and silent, pushing him into a position of utter inefficacy. This condition is what the

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<sup>19</sup> The image of the T4 cell as general is also prevalent in French media. “Le VIH a une affinité pour les lymphocytes T4, qui sont en quelque sorte, les ‘généraux’ de l’armée du système immunitaire.” This article, written nearly 10 years after the bulk of the articles, develops a more nuanced understanding of HIV. But the idea of a hand-to-hand combat remains: “En fait, ce qui s’est passé pendant la prétendue période de latence, c’est un véritable bras de fer entre le système immunitaire et le virus... Les cellules infectées produisent une énorme quantité de particules virales, que le système immunitaire détruit au fur et à mesure. Cette bataille se déroule principalement au niveau des ganglions. C’est une bataille sans fin, car le virus a une telle capacité de variation que le système immunitaire ne réussit jamais à l’éradiquer totalement. A la longue, le ganglion s’épuise et finit par ne plus remplir ses fonctions, notamment la régénération des T4. Michel de Pracontal, “Sida: Les nouvelles armes,” *Nouvel observateur*, 21 au 27 sept 1995, 46.

authors identify as the “period of dormancy”: the time when HIV has infiltrated the body but has yet to unleash its destructive powers fully. During this time, the T-helper cells that have been “penetrated” by the virus are unable to sound the call of distress, coerced into acting as if nothing has happened. Moreover, the virus has taken hold of the panel controlling replication. It has inserted itself into the biological makeup of the T-helper cell, the “genetic structure.”

During the third phase, the trigger goes off:

This period of dormancy ends when the ‘gun is fired.’...When the AIDS virus explodes out of dormancy, it turns the host cell into a replicative factory. The AIDS virus uses the material of the invaded T-helper cell to manufacture millions of copies of itself during the six hours prior to the host cell’s death. These newly created AIDS viruses can then swim freely in the bloodstream to locate other healthy T-helper cells to invade and destroy.

The formulaic plot of an action movie unfolds before our eyes. AIDS, the duplicitous, evil, and monolithic other, in short, “enters,” “locates,” “incorporates,” “explodes,” “replicates,” and “destroys” the cells. Endowed with perverse agency, it quickly trumps the immune system’s military hierarchy, breaking into the ranks and holding hostage the most important squad member. Slaff and Brubaker neglect to explain, however, *how* the virus enters the cell, only stating obliquely that it “has a method” (I have italicized this in the second part of the quote). The examination of the how, the virus’ methodology, leads to another string of loaded metaphors.

### ***Viral Hanky Panky***

The “T” cells—named after their point of origin in the thymus—are divided into “helper” or “killer” cells. A construction metaphor (the wall) blurs into either the sartorial metaphor of

the “coat” or the postal metaphor of the “envelope,” the key to what is elided in Slaff and Brubaker’s description. According to the scientific consensus at the time (and largely still), the T4 cells have a special coating of the molecule CD4, an outer layer that attracts the HIV virion. Catherine Waldby quotes one of several scientific textbooks on the virus to highlight the framing of this dance of “attraction”: “A critical structural feature of HIV appears to be the outer envelope. It has been well documented that the glycoprotein portion, gp120, interacts *avidly* and *specifically* with the CD4 molecule, which is expressed predominantly on the T’ cells and acts as a *high-affinity* receptor for HIV” (quoted in Waldby 68, my emphasis). The CD4 coating of the T cell gloms on to the outer “envelope” of the HIV virus, allowing it to shed its skin (or at least its coat) and slyly slip into the normally impervious cell.

In *A l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie*, Guibert’s narrator seizes upon the virus’ “method” and teases out the duplicitous trickery involved:

Bill m’a expliqué que le virus est si diabolique parce qu’il se divise pour mettre en jeu un processus de leurre, qui épuise le corps et ses capacités immunitaires. *C’est l’enveloppe du virus qui fait office de leurre* : dès que l’organisme *décrypte* sa présence, il envoie ses T4 à la rescousse, qui massés sur l’enveloppe et comme *aveuglés par elle*, ne détectent pas le noyau du virus, qui traverse incognito la mêlée pour aller infecter les cellules.<sup>20</sup>

Guibert’s suggestion of *décrypt[age]* introduces another metaphorical layer that often cohabits the textual space with the military language: the metaphor of code. When the T-cell detects a foreign presence,<sup>21</sup> it releases a chemical stored in its cytoplasm called an “interleukin,”

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<sup>20</sup> Hervé Guibert, *A l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 276-77 ( my emphasis). All future references will be abbreviated as *AL* and cited in the body of the text.

<sup>21</sup> John Dwyer highlights the importance of the T-cells ability to properly “see” self from non-self, likening it to a specular experience: “To enable self to be recognized, a collection of almost unique proteins is displayed by every cell in our own unique body. This display of ‘self’ provides the cells of the immune system with a biological

a substance that allows messages to pass from one white blood cell to another. Indeed, as we discussed in the second chapter, the idea of a network of communication is a complementary or a sometimes competing metaphor to describe the workings of the immune system. In the case of HIV, both metaphors—the military and the network—reinforce each other. Imaginatively endowing the helper T-cells with the ability to recognize and communicate suggests that these cells possess a higher level of consciousness and even demonstrate subjectivity. They are educated cells, able to learn and to remember.

Catherine Waldby goes one step further. She explicitly states what is only implied in the military account. According to her, T-cells—the “generals,” the “killers,”—are not only educated, strategic, teachable—they are also gendered masculine, “heroically masculine.”<sup>22</sup> She refers to the infiltration of a cell by a virus as the “primal scene of immunology,” sending us into the lexicon of psychoanalysis and sex. Sexual penetration does seem to be the primary metaphor at work to describe a virus’ maneuvering. In a humorous description quoted by Emily Martin, the T cell, when faced with a “normal,” feminized virus-infected cell (not a T-cell), is compared to a jealous husband who maintains the upper hand:

In order to slip inside a cell, a virus has to remove its protein coat, which it leaves outside on the cell membrane. The viral coat hanging outside signals the passing T cell that viral hanky panky is going on inside. Like the jealous husband who spots a strange jacket in the hall closet and *knows* what’s going on in the upstairs bedroom, the T cell takes swift action. It bumps against the body cell with the virus inside and perforates it.<sup>23</sup>

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mirror into which they can look to simultaneously compare ‘self’ with foreignness.” John Dwyer, *The Body at War: The Story of Our Immune System* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Michaud and Feinstein quoted in Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 59.

HIV is no common heterosexual virus, though. Unlike the easily recognizable viral coats carelessly cast aside by other viruses, HIV both targets the “masculine” T-cells and leaves its “coat” not to signal its presence but to confuse any other helper T-cells that might pass by. I am emphasizing the image of the coat because, as we have already seen and will discuss further, Guibert is mystified by the distracting potential of masks or other seductive outer layers. In *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*, he appropriates the image of the coat and transforms it into something much more brilliant and sinister.

In the accounts above, the “sexuality” of the virus is called into question, particularly in descriptions regarding the way it “alters” the host DNA. Linguistic metaphors of coding, decoding and deciphering<sup>24</sup> have dominated the conceptual framework of molecular genetics since the 1950s when DNA’s double-helix was first theorized.<sup>25</sup> Evelyne Fox Keller, a physicist by training who has become one of the leading feminist historians of science, elucidates the “central dogma” of the “flow of information” in molecular genetics. As Keller explains, for

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<sup>24</sup> Nikolas Rose has recently shown the inadequacy of these “informational” metaphors to account for the complexity of the DNA replication process and its relationship to the expression of genes. “A genetic style of thought is giving way to a postgenomic emphasis on complexities, interactions, developmental sequences, and cascades of regulation interacting back and forth at various points in the metabolic pathways that lead to the synthesis of enzymes and proteins. And in the process informational epistemologies seem to have reached their limit; they can no longer capture what researchers do as they represent and intervene in the vital complexities that constitute life at a molecular level” (*Life Itself*, 47).

<sup>25</sup> Steven Kruger highlights the extent to which the exchange between DNA and RNA is likened first to a translating and reading process where RNA functions as the linguistic mediator between DNA and the protein. The RNA must first make a “transcript” of what the DNA has to “say”; then it must translate in order to replicate it in the form of protein: “The formation of [messenger]RNA from the DNA template is described as ‘transcription,’ understood as the ‘copying’ of ‘information’ from DNA into a complementary form in the nucleotides of RNA; the subsequent production of proteins from the mRNA ‘transcript’ is known as ‘translation’ and is presented quite explicitly and elaborately as a process of ‘reading’...Biochemical processes like ‘translation’ are even described as involving ‘editing steps’ to assure their ‘accuracy.’ ‘Proofreading’ is understood to occur at at least two separate points during ‘translation’...Similarly, a ‘proofreading capability’ has been identified in the ‘DNA polymerases,’ those enzymes responsible for DNA self-replication.” Steven Kruger, *AIDS Narratives: Gender and Sexuality, Fiction and Science* (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 8.

DNA to become a protein (the “building block” of life), it must be mediated through RNA. In this “sequential and unidirectional ‘flow of genetic information’” RNA is never the “source” or “origin” of information but rather the messenger. To this end, RNA engages in two processes of “textual transformation”: ‘transcription’ and ‘translation.’”<sup>26</sup> HIV (and other retroviruses) disrupts this process through an enzyme called “reverse transcriptase,” (transcriptase...) effectively *reversing* the flow of information by reversing the “transcription” process. Through reverse transcriptase, the RNA of the retrovirus initiates information and uses the DNA of the host to replicate it, thus altering the “host's” structural design. It does this through a process of splicing enabled by another viral enzyme called “integrase.” Steven Kruger, drawing on Paula Treichler and Evelyne Fox Keller's analyses of the gendered discourse used to depict cellular processes, reminds the reader that both DNA and retroviruses (which undermine and override the “central dogma”) are gendered male. He then makes the logical leap, asserting this “interaction” is thus “homosocial” in nature: “Given the ‘maleness’ of both cellular DNA and the ‘invading’ retrovirus, the contest for control of the cell nucleus—and hence, as the ‘central dogma’ would emphasize, for ultimate control of all the cell's ‘expressive’ functions—is imagined in terms of male homosociality, with two differently ‘armed’ male opponents battling for dominance” (37). Cellular DNA is the “proper,” normative genetic director, whereas the retrovirus is the improper, abnormal hacker, entering “through the backdoor.” Kruger performs an against-the-grain reading of a popular textbook description depicting the interaction between DNA and a retrovirus. Highlighting what he calls the “active perversity,” he writes:

Researchers studying the complex interplay between a bacterial cell and its parasitic virus, the phage, have discovered that the [HIV] virus gets into the host

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<sup>26</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene*, 53.



chromosomes by exploiting the bacterium's own DNA *bending* proteins, generating *crimps* in the DNA and then sneakily cutting and pasting its genetic information into the *curled-over* sequence.

Biologists believe that many human viruses, notably the one that causes AIDS, adopt a similar ruse, bending the DNA and then integrating permanently into the chromosomes. They suggest that by understanding normal DNA bending they may devise novel strategies to foil viruses before the deadly kinking and splicing occurs.<sup>27</sup>

We are struck by the morphological transpositions evoked in this passage. The bending, crimping, curling-over, kinking, and splicing pull the images into a three-dimensional plane. Kruger provocatively argues that this play with shapes suggests anal sex. The retrovirus works by "buggering" the DNA in "a kind of homosexual rape" (ibid.). Since this description is part of a textbook meant to instruct future scientists, he concludes that the Kruger concludes that the scientific discourse crystallizes the fraught association between HIV and homosexuality and perpetuates the homophobic notion that somehow AIDS was always, already gay.

### **Sanguine Revelations**

Hervé Guibert began probing, baring and documenting the workings of his body's innermost recesses, incorporating them into his artistic enterprise, long before the specter of AIDS would come to haunt and ultimately inhabit him and his texts. In the introductory paragraphs of "La Mort propagande," one of the stories collected in his first book published under the same title in 1977, Guibert, then 19, fleshes out the material of his creative project. He writes:

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Kruger, *AIDS Narratives*, 38-39.

“Dès qu’une déformation survient, dès que mon corps s’hystérise, mettre en marche un mécanisme de retranscription :...Laisser parler ce corps convulsé, haché, hurlant. Placer un micro à *l’intérieur* de ma bouche...Placer un autre micro à *l’intérieur* de mon cul...Faire se répondre les deux bruits, les mixer...Partitions sur tissus de chair, de folie, de douleur. Observer comment il fonctionne, recueillir ses prestations.”<sup>28</sup>

Guibert was always already proposing a radical project of corporal witnessing, recording what went in and out of his various orifices, understanding what they reveal, transcribing what they ‘say’ and mixing them into an artistic “musical” work. In the continuation of the passage from above, we find eerie premonitions of his fate as well as an imagined trajectory of his role as the “interpreter”—both the actor, the partner and the translator—of death: “A l’issue de cette série d’expressions, l’ultime travestissement, l’ultime maquillage, la mort...Ce sera ma seule partenaire, je serai son interprète...Me donner la mort sur une scène, devant des caméras. Donner ce spectacle extrême, excessif de mon corps, dans ma mort” (84). Guibert, wearing the “ultimate disguise,” frames this spectacle as the full realization of his body’s potential of expression, a performance that culminates in the absolute breakdown of all limits.

Guibert’s aspirations stand in stark contrast to one of the most famous proclamations about the use of masks to issue out of the Western Canon. René Descartes, revealing his intended methodology for embarking on his philosophical endeavors, embraces the mask not as a way of becoming other but as the most effective means of preserving the self: “Les comédiens appelés sur la scène, pour ne pas laisser voir la rougeur sur leur front, mettent un masque. Comme eux, au moment de monter sur ce théâtre du monde où jusqu’ici je n’ai été que spectateur, je m’avance masqué.”<sup>29</sup> A. David Napier sees in this declaration one of the first

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<sup>28</sup> Hervé Guibert, *La Mort propagande et autres textes de jeunesse* (Paris : Régine Deforges, 1991), pp.183-84 (my emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> René Descartes, *Le Théorème du Perroquet*, ed. Denis Guedj (Paris: Points, Septembre 2000), 434-35.

formulations of our current understanding of immunity, the mechanism by which self incorporates other so as better to eradicate it. Following the logic of this reading, Napier makes a harsh critique of the imperative to “know oneself,” “self-consciousness” constituting, in his eyes, one of the primary and most insidious characteristics of modernity. Napier observes: “...Descartes’s sole objective in imitating ‘nonself’ was to deconstruct (even to destroy) it. Self-consciousness, in this line of thinking, becomes not a mode of transformation, a creation of something new, but a device for inducing stasis, a surface modification that, as it were, ‘cheats’ change by attacking difference.”<sup>30</sup> Here, masking functions not as a transformative mechanism for the wearer but rather as a stabilizing—even solidifying device. According to the principles of self-consciousness, we “wear” masks so as better to fix our “essential” core; a mask allows us to retreat into and consolidate ourselves. Napier goes one step further, using the metaphor of the virus to describe the dynamics involved in this stabilization. Like a virus, the self, in relationship to the mask, absolutely refuses to incorporate difference as a trigger for change and reveals, instead, an equal commitment to denaturing the other: “Instead of effecting his own transformation, Descartes became—in the language of microbiology—‘another’s virus.’ For this is what viruses do: they put on masks, enter another’s world, and engage in reverse engineering. Or, to be more accurate, they *are* the masks—genetic codes or templates that come to life when they are, as it were, ‘worn’ by a cell...” (2). In Guibert’s writing project, the dynamics between self and mask are inverted: Guibert wears the mask so as better to exceed his limits, embody alterity, accede to a state beyond selfhood. Death’s mask radically exposes him and allows him, in the final stage, to transcend his own boundaries and merge with the only absolute “other.”

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<sup>30</sup> A. David Napier, *The Age of Immunology: Conceiving a Future in an Alienating World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-2.

This imagined project becomes fully realizable once HIV/AIDS integrates into his bodily narrative.

Over ten years following the publication of *La Mort propaganda*, and after his diagnosis, Guibert's language grows to accommodate the evolution and experience with HIV; his "retranscriptions" gain increasing precision as he seeks to master the biomedical language defining him and his condition. But his writing project—and the *corpus* issuing out of it—remains more or less the same in form, true to the initial vision articulated in *La Mort propagande*: challenging genres, skirting the lines between fact and fiction, committed only to exploring the esthetic possibilities of his body *dans tous ses états* and to documenting the experience of extreme alterity.<sup>31</sup> He affirms the ways in which the body inserts itself into the text, becomes text, becomes producer of text, in an interview with Chris Donner conducted after the publication of his second "AIDS" autofiction, *Le protocole compassionnel*:

J'ai eu l'impression, par la force des choses, d'être mon propre personnage, mais d'être aussi un corps mis en jeu dans des narrations, dans des situations, dans des rapports [...] c'est l'histoire d'un corps, effectivement d'un corps qui vieillit, d'un corps qui est malade, d'un corps qui est abîmé, d'un corps ceci, d'un corps cela, d'un corps qui renaît un peu [...] mais d'un corps monstrueux aussi, d'un corps difforme, j'ai l'impression que c'est l'histoire de ce corps.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Some critics writing on Guibert have emphasized a sense of rupture between his pre-and post-AIDS work. Manuela Bertone, for example, who reads Guibert's early work as aspiring toward panopticonian order, argues that the diagnosis of AIDS and the biological consequences associated with the illness as recounted in *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* subvert Guibert's project of control: "lorsque le corps de l'écrivain est contaminé, menacé de destruction en raison de l'affaiblissement de ses barrages immunitaires, le *corpus* de l'écriture apparaît à son tour mué, investi comme il est par le péril de la destruction du centre d'observation privilégié qui lui avait auparavant permis de fonctionner comme lieu d'ordre et de contrôle." Manuela Bertone, "La mort en soi: l'écriture du sida d'Hervé Guibert," *Franco-Italica* 6 (1994): 94-95. While Bertone identifies this moment with the birth of writing as "lieu de vérité" (101), I see Guibert's work on a more unified continuum along which, on the contrary, he continually tests the boundaries of truth-telling, opting always for a *léger—or not so léger—détournement*.

<sup>32</sup> Christophe Donner, interview with Hervé Guibert, "Pour répondre aux quelques questions qui se posent...", *La Règle du jeu*, 3.7 (mai 1992): 65.

AIDS, as death's agent, pushes Guibert and his narrator to ever more intimate forms of avowal while it performs—and indeed perpetuates itself through—an on-going process of masquerade, evading the body's powers of reconnaissance. In this way, the death triggered by AIDS perfectly corresponds to death as “the ultimate disguise” imagined by the young Guibert.

### *Faire parler le sang*

For Guibert, *le sida* sets up a curious dialectic between revelation and concealment.

Drawing on Baudelaire's *Le cœur mis à nu*, the narrator explains how, even before learning he was HIV positive, the virus had uncovered him from the inside out, leaving him ‘undressed’:

"Bien avant la certitude de ma maladie sanctionné par les analyses, j'ai senti mon sang, tout à coup, découvert, mis à nu, comme si un vêtement ou un capuchon l'avaient toujours protégé... Il me fallait vivre, désormais, avec ce sang dénudé et exposé, comme le corps dévêtu qui doit traverser le cauchemar..." (AL 14). The virus simultaneously strips the narrator as it, itself, “uncoats” to penetrate Guibert's cells. Unveiled blood functions as a definitional signifier for Guibert's writing, taking his project to a level that far surpasses other traditional, confessional texts precisely because it hinges on a symbolic economy circulating beneath the skin. As he explains in an interview after the publication of *A l'ami*: “Raconter le processus de détérioration de son sang va au-delà de parler de son corps intime, c'est parler de l'intérieur de son corps.”<sup>33</sup>

AIDS lodges itself in the body's liquids—sperm, saliva, blood—inserting itself as the new marker of identity. In his description of the frequent blood tests he and fellow *séropositifs*

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<sup>33</sup> Antoine Gaudemar, interview with Hervé Guibert, “La vie sida,” *Libération*, March 1, 1990, 21.

must undergo, what might otherwise have been considered an invasive and potentially humiliating experience is reframed as an affirmation of *appartenance*, a *ritual* in the sense that Napier gives to this term: "...not the locus of mere repetition, but a way of creatively establishing a new and vital language, a common ground."<sup>34</sup> *Les prises de sang* take on the role of identity-conferring ritual that serves both to confirm singularity and irreplaceability<sup>35</sup> but also to enact a new communal cohesion reaffirmed by what Guibert evokes as "ceremonies" of puncture and extraction: "...dans les services qui s'occupent des maladies du Sida on fait les prises de sang en commun, alors que pour moi la prise de sang c'est l'intérieur du corps qui sort et qui est visible, visible par une couleur, c'est vraiment de l'ordre de l'intimité...à la limite c'est peut-être très bien que ça soit en commun parce qu'on est tous dans le même bain..."<sup>36</sup>

Boundaries between interior and exterior are undone—that which at once had been *intime*, private, suddenly acts as visual marker to unite those floating "dans le même bain," those who are initiated and reinitiated into the "tribe" each time they offer up their veins.<sup>37</sup> This exteriorization and new acknowledgment of blood reconfigures the role it has traditionally played as a biological purveyor of category and order.

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<sup>34</sup> Napier, *The Age of Immunology*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> The narrator in *A l'ami* recounts, at one point, a mix-up in which tubes with his name on them had already been filled with someone else's blood, a certain "Margherita." "On imagine quels malentendus aurait pu entraîner l'inversion" (257).

<sup>36</sup> Donner, "Pour répondre aux quelques questions qui se posent...", 140.

<sup>37</sup> The image of being "dans le même bain," is particularly apt, since one of the metaphors circulating at the time to describe the immune system of an HIV+ person was that of a bath with a hole in the bottom: "...le système immunitaire d'un homme atteint du sida, c'est comme une baignoire au fond de laquelle se trouve un trou de dix centimètres de diamètre : vous aurez beau ouvrir les robinets à fond, la baignoire sera toujours vide." Gérard Petitjean, "Sida: 'Bon sang, mais c'est bien sûr'" *Nouvel observateur*, 8 au 14 novembre 1985, 53.

The first volume of *L'Histoire de la sexualité* serves as a background lens through which to read Guibert's sanguine reconfigurations. Here, Foucault discusses the myriad functions blood has traditionally served in Occidental bourgeois culture, notably its role of assuring the purity of the hereditary line and of establishing a potent corporeal symbolic economy:

...[L]e sang constitue une des valeurs essentielles; son prix tient à la fois à son rôle instrumental (pouvoir verser le sang), à son fonctionnement dans l'ordre des signes (avoir un certain sang, être du même sang, accepter de risquer son sang), à sa précarité aussi (facile à répandre, sujet à se tarir, trop prompt à se mêler, vite susceptible de se corrompre). Société de sang—j'allais dire de 'sanguinité'...*le pouvoir parler* à travers le sang ; celui-ci est une réalité à fonction symbolique.<sup>38</sup>

AIDS forces the reimagining of this "*société de sang*" and, along with it, the language that it speaks. The counter society formed by the virus' powers of displacement—its putting people "in the same bath"—is one that Guibert claims as his own and participates in creating. In this burgeoning society, the relationship between sex and blood is reconfigured by the virus, democratizing, to a certain extent, the lines of kinship. Blood is wrested from its previous hereditary channels and redirected, challenging the established norms. Guibert, in an interview, speaks of his obsession to appropriate the practice of blood-taking, reframing its revelatory power. In this imagined usurpation, he both reclaims the act from the dehumanizing medical apparatus, esthetically revalorizing it, and also inserts himself as an active witness to the promises of what the blood might reveal: "...se faire piquer, ça a fait naître une obsession...j'ai eu envie de faire des prises de sang, j'ai eu envie de piquer ces bras, de mettre une seringue dans

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<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté du savoir* (Paris:Gallimard, 1976), 194 (my emphasis).

ces veines, dans ces bras que je trouvais très beaux, dans ces veines que je trouvais très belles, pour faire ce qui devait être fait.”<sup>39</sup>

The desire to participate in these rituals is mirrored by a desire to master blood’s “power to speak,” a language forged by the medical institution employed to describe the narrator and his body: “...j’aimerais manier parfaitement le jargon des médecins, c’est comme un truc codé, ça me donne l’illusion vis-à-vis d’eux de ne pas être le gosse devant lequel on parle anglais pour les histoires de cul. J’aime le langage fluide, presque parlé, et j’aime maintenant porter mon sang alors qu’auparavant je serai tombé dans les pommes.”<sup>40</sup> Larry Schehr, in an analysis of the homoerotic gaze, cleverly employs the metaphor of an inverse telescope to show how Guibert’s use of medical discourse effects a displacement of the medical gaze, refiguring the otherwise identity-effacing, objectifying language: “The medical glance, ironically enough, comes to stand in the locus of the original observer, the one involved in a reciprocal relationship with the object...It is as if in reverse, through a mirror, through the wrong end of the telescope, the photographic negative of a former objectivity.”<sup>41</sup> We experience this sense of inversion and shadowing in Guibert’s analogy where “les histoires de cul” and “le jargon des médecins” are on the same, coded plane. In fact, the medical jargon is doubly shadowed, a derivative consequence of the veiled—and, in this context, dangerous—“histoires de cul.” Guibert refuses the ignorance of the child, positioning himself as “le gosse” who speaks the language, a star pupil who figuratively carries the teacher’s apple instead of falling into them (*tombé dans les pommes*).

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<sup>39</sup> Donner, “Pour répondre aux quelques questions qui se posent...,” 140.

<sup>40</sup> Guibert, *Protocol Compassionnel*, 123. All future references will be abbreviated as *PC* and cited in the body of the text.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence R. Schehr, *Parts of an Andrology*, 204.



Guibert's acceptance of his undressed blood ultimately pushes him to redress his words and acknowledge his illness. He both embraces and refuses this act of confession. While he confesses at length, sparing the reader none of the most gory details of his disease (and the disease of others, an indiscretion for which he is strongly criticized), through the play of the "I" and the resistance to fully align himself with his narrators, he repudiates the power of knowledge that would normally accompany such confessional details. Again, Guibert seems to reinterpret Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité*, reframing the narrative Foucault lays out which plots the progressive marriage of confession to sexual practices and orientation as a practice that produces truth. Foucault shows not only how avowal secures the subject by guaranteeing the status, identity and value of a person by another,<sup>42</sup> but how it ultimately comes to be seen, in its truth-producing powers, as a "cure": "Le vrai, s'il est dit à temps, à qui il faut, et par celui qui en est à la fois le détenteur et le responsable, guérit" (90). For Guibert, in the context of AIDS, the functioning of avowal is entirely subverted, giving value—and thus strength—to the forces at work to destroy—not heal—the subject: "L'aveu comprenait quelque chose d'atroce : dire qu'on était malade ne faisait qu'accréditer la maladie, elle devenait réelle tout à coup, sans appel, et semblait tirer sa puissance et ses forces destructrices du crédit qu'on lui accordait" (AL 175).

Confessional words add to the virus's credit both as faith, assurance, and certainty but also figuratively as loan or advance. The virus' growing capital comes at the cost of "bankrupting" the blood, so to speak, the first image offered to the reader in *A l'ami*: "...le test qui s'était avéré positif en témoignait, ainsi que des analyses qui avaient démontré que mon sang amorçait un processus de faillite" (9). Recourse to metaphors of money come up time and again

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<sup>42</sup> Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, 78.

in the novel and throughout Guibert's later work. These monetary metaphors link the medical establishment, the hospitals and doctors, and most importantly the pharmaceutical companies to this inverse relationship, singling out those who stand to benefit from the virus' increasing accreditation.

### ***Friendly Betrayals***

Several of the virus' profiteers are identified in Guibert's "AIDS autofiction." The most notable example is Bill, the presumed treasonous addressee of *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*. Bill manages an American pharmaceutical company and perpetrates *la plus grosse deception* by promising the narrator a cure through vaccine. He presents the Mockney<sup>43</sup> vaccine as the double foil to the virus, meant both to unmask the virus and to teach the body how to recognize and decode the nucleus' corrupting software (*AL 276-277*). Bill betrays the narrator by allowing enough time to pass so that his T-cell levels drop below the mark at which they need to be to receive the vaccine. Guibert links this betrayal to the secret functioning of the virus, the way it controls the marionette strings from a blinded position (the body fails to see it). The narrator, speaking in a past-future model, an indication of the way the retrovirus perversely bends time along with DNA, ultimately concludes that AIDS, in fact, was destined to become a shared example between the two men: "De même que le sida...aura été pour moi un paradigme dans mon projet du dévoilement de soi et de l'énoncé de l'indicible, le sida aura été pour Bill le

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<sup>43</sup> In 1988, Dr. Jonas Salks, the scientist who developed of the "killed-virus" polio vaccine, had begun administering human trials for his AIDS vaccine. He undoubtedly served as the model for Guibert's Melville Mockney, a name that inspires little confidence. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,982431-2,00.html>

parangon du secret de toute sa vie. Le sida lui a permis de prendre le rôle de maître du jeu..." (AL 264). Guibert ends *A l'ami* with this chilling imperative: "La mise en abîme de mon livre se referme sur moi. Je suis dans la merde. Jusqu'où souhaitez-tu me voir sombrer ? Pends-toi Bill!"

Another example of a traitor is Doctor Nacier. Nacier, a former actor and drama seeker, was responsible for deferring the narrator's HIV test for years. Nacier justified his negligence, using the excuse of not wanting to push the narrator to despair:

[Il m'a] refusé à faire le test jusqu'alors, accumulant dans des tiroirs depuis des années ses différentes ordonnances prescrites à mon nom ou à des noms d'emprunt pour me soumettre au test du dépistage du sida, dénommé LAV puis HIV, prétextant que c'était *acculer* au suicide un bonhomme inquiet comme moi, persuadé de connaître le résultat du test sans avoir besoin de le faire, ou bien lucide ou bien leurré...(18-19, my emphasis)

The accumulation of prescriptions shoved into the back of a drawer offers a striking contrast to the image of bankrupt blood quickly losing its vital purchasing power. At the same time, the circulation of names on the prescriptions—some real, some borrowed—parallels the hesitation that marked the naming of the virus, itself.<sup>44</sup> Paradoxically, in this case, it is the doctor who refuses admission, not wanting to "corner" the overly sensitive patient who, whether right or

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<sup>44</sup> Known initially as the "gay pneumonia" or "gay cancer," then as "GRID" ("Gay-Related Immunodeficiency"), the virus, in 1986, had no fewer than six names in use based upon the locations where the virus (or its mutations) had been identified: LAV (lymphadenopathy-associated virus—1983 by Montagnier at l'Institut Pasteur), HTLV-III (human T-cell lymphotropic virus type III—1984 by Gallo at the National Cancer Institute), IDAV (immunodeficiency-associated virus), ARV (AIDS-associated retrovirus—1984 by Levy at the University of California Berkeley), HTLV-III/LAV (and vice versa—a compound name that functioned as an olive branch between Montagnier and Gallo), and finally, the AIDS virus, used by the popular press. HIV came about as a political compromise in 1987 to stop the feuding between Luc Montagnier and Robert Gallo who both claimed rights to the virus as their own, having been the first to discover it. In 1987, France and the United States claimed joint paternity for the virus newly baptized as HIV, Human Immunodeficiency Viruses. "The multiple names of 'the AIDS virus' point toward a succession of identities and offer a fragmented sense indeed of what this virus, or family of viruses, 'really' is. The new name, in contrast, promises to unify the political fragmentations of the scientific establishment and certify the health of the single-agent hypothesis" (Paula Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 30).

wrong, already anticipates the results. The verb, “*acculer*,” perfectly communicates the dangers of Nacier’s practices, *le cul* having become the very real “dead end” of the body in this context. As such, the drawer gains in symbolic importance, blocking access to potentially fatal knowledge that can only be divined through the “prescribed word.”

Nacier’s drawer is also metonymically linked to the proverbial closet. Owen Heathcote astutely remarks that Guibert’s “coming out” did not register in the way that it did for other writers, since, to a certain degree, every member of his family engages in “closeting.” They all share the pathological habit of shoving things into the *fin fond* of drawers in the hopes of forgetting about them. Heathcote reads this habit symptomatically, the closet marking a site of intense anxiety in Guibert’s texts: “From the outset, then, the family is and has its closets and these closets are invariably associated with violence.”<sup>45</sup> As such, Doctor Nacier’s way of tossing the names into the drawer to relieve himself of the burden of such violent knowledge is very much a repetition of well-known and repressive familial patterns.

While filling drawers with unfilled prescriptions, Nacier, we are told, also cannot reconcile himself to the banal and un lucrative business of geriatric treatment. As a cure to both his money problems and his boredom, he hatches a plan to create other, more profitable and glamorous “escape routes” for his patients: “...un mouroir design...qui...substituerait aux longues agonies nauséabondes les transits expéditifs et féériques d’un voyage pour la lune en première classe, non remboursé par la sécu” (*AL* 24). Nacier goes in search of a big-name “moral authority” to lend credence to his project so as to get the financial backing that he needs:

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<sup>45</sup> Owen Heathcote, “Coming out of the Family? Julien Green’s *Jeunesse* (1974), *Mes Parents* (1986) and Christophe Honoré’s *L’infamille* (1997),” *Affaires de famille: The Family in Contemporary French Culture and Theory*, ed. Marie-Claire Barnet and Edward Welch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 113.

“Pour obtenir l’aval des banques, le docteur Nacier devait dénicher l’autorité morale qui empêcherait qu’on trouve ambigu un tel dessein. *Muzil était ce parrain idea*” (ibid., my emphasis). With the evocation of Muzil in this instance, Nacier’s greedy endeavor points the reader to what many consider to be the most outrageous example of selfish use of the disease, this time carried out by none other than Guibert, himself.

### **Symbolic Paternal Failings**

Muzil, a play (an S/Zing?) on the Australian author, Robert Musil, is widely recognized as a portrait of Michel Foucault. Guibert gained notoriety because of what people considered an immodest depiction of Foucault and his death in *A l’ami*. Some have even accused Guibert of being disloyal to Foucault and their friendship, promoting his writing agenda by exploiting Foucault’s experience with the virus, taking pleasure in revealing the details that Foucault, himself, kept so private. Brad Epps, for example, underlines the difference in approaches espoused by the two writers, subtly rebuking Guibert’s lack of solidarity with his friend’s intentions:

Le spectre du *Schadenfreude*—c’est-à-dire le plaisir que l’on prend au Malheur des autres—hante le texte de Guibert comme un autre risqué de la nomination. Mais Guibert assume la notion du risque (signe problématique d’identité lorsqu’il s’agit du sida) comme partie intégrante de son projet ‘d’aller au bout d’un dévoilement.’...Foucault, en revanche, présente son projet comme une déprise de soi et *un effacement du nom*, comme une résistance à la célébrité et aux confessions essentialistes d’identité. Guibert parle, il est vrai, du désir de Foucault d’effacer son nom, d’écrire un livre infini et de se façonner une

existence libre de l'apparat du sujet. Toutefois, la façon dont il le fait, trahit ce désir tout en le respectant.<sup>46</sup>

According to Epps, Guibert walks a dangerous line between betraying and obeying Foucault's wishes. While Guibert directly grapples with the question of whether his revelations constitute disloyalty, ultimately he casts off these doubts, finding full license to write in what he claims as a "premonition," a glimpse of his future through his friend's story: "Je ressentis alors...une sorte de vision, ou de vertige, qui m'en donnait les pleins pouvoirs, qui me déléguait à ces transcriptions ignobles et qui les légitimait en m'annonçant, c'était donc ce qu'on appelle une prémonition...car ce n'était pas tant l'agonie de mon ami qui m'attendait, et qui serait identique, c'était désormais une certitude qu'en plus de l'amitié *nous étions liés par un sort thanatologique commun*" (AL, 106-07, my emphasis). It is not so much the question of betrayal that interests me in Guibert's appropriation and recounting, but that of shared fate—indeed, of shared legacy—in the face of something Epps mentions quickly in passing: *le désir d'effacer son nom*. The enactment of the desire to "erase one's name" gets expressed explicitly in Guibert's portrayal of Foucault/Musil. But, as we shall see, his writing strategy also effects this erasure as "reality" (i.e. autobiography) slips uncomfortably into fiction and vice-versa. Just as the space between Guibert and the narrator remains in constant tension, so, too, does his portrayal of Foucault as both friend and character. And this, perhaps, because of their shared fate as fellow beings irrevocably altered, alienated from themselves by the virus working against them.

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<sup>46</sup> Brad Epps, "Le corps 'techno-ascétique': Guibert, le sida et l'art de la maîtrise de soi," *La Revue des Lettres Modernes: au jour le siècle 2: Le Corps textuel d'Hervé Guibert*, (1997): 49.

“[U]n nom...exsangue de son histoire...”

In the reference to Nacier’s moon ventures, Guibert explicitly uses the term *parrain* to describe Muzil, which etymologically means “he who is meant to impart a name.” But in fact, in many ways, Foucault is the anti-father, or, in Žizek’s terminology the “anal” father: instead of bequeathing names, he seeks to erase them. At many points, Muzil expresses a desire to distance himself from his own identity: "Son nom était devenu une hantise pour Muzil. Il voulait l’effacer" (26). And along with his name, his face: "...il visait à faire disparaître son visage, pourtant si particulièrement reconnaissable" (28).

In response to Nacier’s request for his moral approbation, Muzil, while refusing to give credit through the use of his name, gleefully offers a counter proposal that perfectly illustrates the desire for name—and identity--erasure:

Ce projet, auquel [Muzil] n’accordait en même temps, raisonnablement, aucun crédit, l’excitait comme une puce...Une fois que le docteur Nacier fut parti, il me dit : ‘C’est ce que je lui ai conseillé, à ton petit copain, son truc ça ne devrait pas être une institution où l’on vient mourir, mais où l’on vient faire semblant de mourir. Tout y serait splendide, en effet, avec des peintures somptueuses et des musiques suaves, mais seulement pour mieux dissimuler le pot aux roses, car il y aurait une petite porte dérobée tout au fond de cette clinique, peut-être derrière un de ces tableaux propres à faire rêver...on se glisserait en douce derrière le tableau, et hop, on disparaîtrait sans témoin de l’autre côté du mur, dans l’arrière-cour, sans bagage, sans rien dans les mains, *sans nom*, devant inventer sa nouvelle identité. (24-25)

Foucault offers us the perfect framework through which to analyze the rest-home. According to Foucault’s spatial categorizations, *le mouiroir* is an example of a *hétérotopie*, a place of “contestation à la fois mythique et réelle de l’espace où nous vivons,”<sup>47</sup> in this case a space that contests the founding principle of subjecthood, the name. Muzil’s imagined *mouiroir*

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," in *Dits et Ecrits II, 1976-1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1575.

is reminiscent of 18<sup>th</sup> century libertine bedrooms, luxuriously decorated to appeal to the senses and lined with concealed entries to allow passage to clandestine lovers. As such, it also represents the antithesis of a medical establishment founded on Enlightenment principles enacted most tenaciously by the will to name through diagnosis. However, instead of giving access to secret chambers, *le mouroir* in fact permits passage to another world, the other side of the tableau, a *utopie*, a space whose primary characteristic is its unreality: “Les utopies sont les emplacements sans lieu réel...C’est la société elle-même perfectionnée ou c’est l’envers de la société, mais, de toute façon, ces utopies sont des espaces qui sont fondamentalement essentiellement irréels” (1574). Foucault does a reading of the mirror as a space that functions as both a *hétérotopie* and a *utopie*. Discussing the utopian aspect of the mirror, Foucault writes: “... Le miroir, après tout, c’est une utopie, puisque c’est un lieu sans lieu. Dans le miroir, je me vois là où je ne suis pas, dans un espace irréel qui s’ouvre virtuellement derrière la surface, *je suis là-bas, là où je ne suis pas*, une sorte d’ombre qui me donne à moi-même ma propre visibilité, qui me permet de me regarder là où je suis absent” (1575, my emphasis). To return to Foucault’s fantasy not of the *miroir* but of the *mouroir*, it is not so much the space that is *irréel*, shadowed, but rather the “je” that loses its *propre* and becomes unhinged as it passes through to the other side, inflecting the “je suis là-bas, là où je ne suis pas” of Foucault’s utopia in a more intimately ontological way.

To a certain degree then, as mentioned above, this *utopie* is Foucault’s imagined inverse space of the medical establishment. The horrors depicted by Guibert of Muzil’s experience with doctors, hospitals and medicines have been widely commented on, particularly by Emily Apter who convincingly suggests that Guibert’s excessive writing on Foucault—framed as spoken



expression<sup>48</sup>--is meant to compensate for Foucault's own silence about his condition, an "aphasia" she attributes to the repeated "oral rape" performed by the medical establishment.<sup>49</sup> But, paradoxically, the medical establishment also abets Muzil in his desire to become "nameless." "Muzil...me raconta à quel point le corps, il l'avait oublié, lancé dans les circuits médicaux, perd toute identité, ne reste plus qu'un paquet de chair involontaire, brinquebalé par-ci par-là, à peine un matricule, un nom passé dans la moulinette administrative, *exsangue de son histoire et de sa dignité*" (AL 32, my emphasis). The body has bled its identity, its name, its history: there is nothing to leave behind, no words left to claim possession of an identity or to demonstrate how one might go about making those claims.

### *Casting Nets and Throwing Stones*

Throughout his writing, Guibert alludes to the invisible, strong ties—*les fils*—that he shares with Foucault. In 2001, ten years after Guibert's death, *La Mausolée des amants*, a compilation of the journal Guibert kept from 1976 to 1991, was published. In a haunting passage, he sees Foucault (to whom he refers in this text as "Michel") hovering above him. Instead of picturing him pressing firmly on—forcing—his hand as would an authority or teacher, Michel blows on him, stoking his creative fire almost as the holy spirit would, imparting

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<sup>48</sup> Guibert repressumes ats how he aspires to write "le langage fluide, presque parlé" (PC 123).

<sup>49</sup> "By a kind of unwritten law of psychological compensation, Muzil's aphasia, his stubborn retention of the word, will be matched by the narrator's readiness to say too much, to divulge precisely what Foucault refused to let posterity know. The ambivalent meaning of Muzil's reticence might be more fully understood in relation to the oral violation of the subject induced by medical probes and interventions. The exploratory tube thrust into Muzil's throat and lungs, miming the former pleasures of fellatio, emerges as inextricably linked to what Muzil describes as the loss of his identity in the medical maze..." (Apter, "Fantom Images: Hervé Guibert and the Writing of 'sida' in France," 86).

inspiration through breath: “Comment ce matin, tout à fait secrètement, bien heureusement, Michel m’accompagne dans mon travail, non pas en appuyant sur ma main mais en soufflant dessus.”<sup>50</sup> While Guibert does refer to Foucault as a “master,” in this case, the “mastering” is very “light-handed”—reduced to a mere exhalation of air.<sup>51</sup> The relationship between master and pupil is not a stable hierarchy. Later, the tables turn when Guibert, usually in the filial position, assumes a more protective role. He envisions saving Michel from suicide by hanging “invisible nets” underneath his window to prevent him from falling. Guibert writes this journal entry as a dedication: “A Michel: Et moi je suis un peu ton gardien...quand tes fenêtres sont noires je veille sur ton sommeil, et je te protégerai bien de la mort, je tendrai *d’invisibles filets* sous ton balcon” (AL 141). We hear these dedicatory words echoed in *A l’ami* where Guibert doubly couches his life-saving promise to Foucault, writing first “To my neighbor” in anticipation of a second installment “To my dead friend”—both dedications standing in stark contrast to the actual title of the book in which this sentence appears. To Foucault, Guibert promises *NOT* to be “the friend who didn’t save [his] life” : ”...c’est ainsi que discrètement j’avais dédié un livre à Muzil, ‘A mon voisin’, avant de devoir dédier le prochain ‘A l’ami mort’, je craignais qu’il ne se jette de ce balcon, je tendais *d’invisibles filets* de ma fenêtre jusqu’à la sienne pour le secourir...” (22). The image of throwing ropes through the air appears just as

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<sup>50</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Le mausolée des amants: Journal 1976-1991* (Paris : Gallimard, 2001), 356.

<sup>51</sup> In an interview with Didier Eribon published after *A l’ami*, Guibert refers to Michel Foucault as his “master”: “...je suis entré dans la zone primordial de l’amitié de Micheal Foucault...[Il] a été davantage un maître.” This particular term does have sadomasochistic overtones. One of Guibert’s text, *Les chiens*, which Guibert himself qualifies as “une plaquette pornographique,” is a *mise en scène* of a sadomasochistic relationship. In the interview with Eribon, Guibert makes mention of this text and his desire to solicit Foucault’s reaction *voire* approbation, a desire that went unmet: “J’ai écrit ‘les Chiens’, un récit sadomasochiste, dans l’espoir de lui plaire, mais je crois que ça ne lui a pas plu. Il ne m’en a jamais parlé. Je pense qu’il a trouvé ce livre en deça de sa propre force sadomasochiste.” Didier Eribon, interview with Hervé Guibert, “Hervé Guibert et son double,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 18 au 24 juillet 1991, 75.

tenuous as the image of “Michel” hovering above.<sup>52</sup> Foucault oscillates between life and death, and yet, for Guibert, he is a person meant to be saved *à tout prix*.<sup>53</sup>

It is largely because of Foucault’s *refusal* to acknowledge AIDS and speak of it that Guibert finds liberty to appropriate Foucault’s story as his own. Guibert’s commitment to saving Foucault is punctuated by a tacit explanation for why Michel might be inclined to jump:

“...j’ignorais quel était son mal...je sus par la suite qu’il ne l’avoua à personne sauf à moi” (*AL*, 22). Questions of avowal and disavowal circulate around Foucault’s vital flickers. The use of *le passé simple* suggests the factuality of the confession; we are set up to believe that Muzil has admitted to the narrator that he is sick. However, we later learn that even his supposed avowal (“...il ne l’avoua à personne sauf à moi..”) was not an admission of “having” AIDS. Rather, he confesses to *being* the disease of his partner, Stéphane, an ontological identification: “...[Muzil] me dit ce jour-là: ‘Stéphane est malade de moi, j’ai enfin compris que je suis la maladie de Stéphane et que je le resterai toute sa vie quoi que je fasse, sauf si je disparaissais; l’unique moyen de le délivrer de sa maladie, j’en suis sûr, serait de me supprimer” (ibid.). Here the “je” is *la maladie*, incurable except through a self-suppression that leaves nothing—and certainly no word—behind. Under and in acceptance of this silence, the implacable “*loi du sang*” is invoked, limiting access and controlling “*le pouvoir parler*”: “[Le jeune médecin] refusa la permission de revoir Muzil vivant, il invoqua la loi du sang qui privilégiait les membres de la famille par

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<sup>52</sup> Foucault, in the way he hesitates between paternal presence and absence, between life and death, corresponds to Žižek’s term “the anal father,” a father who is “living dead, the reverse of the Name-of-the-Father.” Žižek explains: “He is the subject’s double who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is ‘in the subject more than subject himself.’” Slavoj Žižek, “Grimaces of the Real: Or When the Phallus Appears,” *October*.58 (Autumn, 1991): 54.

<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the recurrent character Vincent who gets repeatedly killed off in Guibert’s texts (at the very beginning of *Fou de Vincent*, he falls out of a window and dies. At the beginning of *Paradis*, as we will discuss, Jayne—a character modeled after Vincent—is eviscerated by a coral reef.) Vincent’s death repeatedly serves as a generator of text.

rapport aux amis...” (111). The narrator only finds out that Muzil died of AIDS the day after his death, from Stéphane who had read on the register "Cause du décès :sida," an indication that is later entirely erased by order of Muzil's sister, a "blood relative."

Foucault never "owned up" to having AIDS; he never gave the disease this credit.<sup>54</sup>

Muzil's silence effects a *remise en cause* of his heritage—of what is passed on. Materially, we learn that Muzil's will had not been signed and secured before his passing. In fact, it had not even been written in his hand: "...le testament existait, et en [la faveur de Stéphane] bien sûr, mais ce n'était qu'un brouillon établi par le notaire à la suite de sa conversation avec Muzil, qui n'était jamais revenue signer sa mise au propre, et parce que de surcroît ce testament n'était pas de sa main il n'avait aucune valeur juridique" (AL 116). Stéphane ends up having to negotiate with the family, ultimately giving up "les droits d'auteur"—the words, so to speak. In the same vein, figuratively, Muzil did not pass on how to speak about AIDS, and, in fact, "having AIDS" appears, between Muzil and the narrator, as an unmentionable, something that stops discourse dead in its tracks.<sup>55</sup> "A la toute fin 83, parce que Muzil retoussait de plus belle, ayant cessé de

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<sup>54</sup> Guibert writes that it is uncertain whether "Muzil" knew the nature of his illness: "On ignorait encore si Muzil avait été conscient ou inconscient de la nature de la maladie qui l'avait tué" (AL, 31). And, at this time, as remarked above the "identity"—indeed the name—of the illness was still in flux. Apter quotes Didier Eribon who alleges that Foucault admitted in an interview: "I know I have *sida* but my hysteria allows me to forget it." (Apter, "Fantom Images: Hervé Guibert and the Writing of 'sida' in France," 86).

<sup>55</sup> Larry Schehr notes, however, that there is, in fact, a reverse inheritance that happens. At one point, the narrator makes mention of a conversation with Muzil about a text by Marcus Aurelius composed of a series of dedications to his elders, to members of his family, to his mentors, those dead and alive, to thank them for what they had contributed to his life. "Muzil, qui allait mourir quelques mois plus tard, me dit alors qu'il comptait prochainement rédiger, dans ce sens, un éloge qui me serait consacré, à moi qui sans doute n'avais rien pu lui apprendre" (AL, 79). Schehr offers a reading of the consequences of this for Guibert: "The truth of Muzil/Foucault is that he teaches someone how to die...all the while ignoring the Stoic truth of death. AIDS denies death its dignity, and in doing so it makes the literature of death an impossible discourse that can no longer find anything to praise...Retransformed into an *énoncé* in a novel, this statement echoes in a different way: what he can teach 'Muzil' is how to write about AIDS; what he can write is the last volume of *The History of Sexuality*" (Schehr, *Alcibiades at the door*, 187).

prendre ces antibiotiques dont les doses, lui avait assuré un pharmacien de quartier, étaient capables justement de faire crever un cheval, je lui dis : ‘En fait tu espères avoir le sida.’ Il me lança un regard noir et sans appel” (AL 42).

Guibert’s writing emerges out of this stony silence. And perhaps the stone is an appropriate metaphor as we consider for a moment the implications of this unmentionability, this lack of discourse around AIDS and having AIDS and what it means for Guibert’s writing that his symbolic father did not pass on the words to speak about it.

### ***Zones of Uninhabitability***

In *Les quatre concepts de la psychanalyse*, Jacques Lacan discusses the notoriously difficult concept of the real, one of the three categories determining the self’s psychic relationship to “the world.” Though Lacan’s ideas about the real evolve in his work, one early characterization of the real is that of a “*noyau*,” a hard, solid core that lies outside of the Symbolic, something remaining beyond language’s grasp and towards which language is repeatedly striving.<sup>56</sup> Judith Butler seizes upon this understanding of the real and unpacks the implied consequences:

This solidity [*le noyau dur*] figures the Lacanian real, the outside to discourse construed as symbolization...The rock thus figures the unfigurable, and so emerges *not only as a catachresis* but as one that is supposed to secure the

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<sup>56</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Tuché et automaton,” *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1973), 63-75.

borders between... symbolization...on the one hand and the 'real', on the other, where the latter is designated as *that for which no symbolization is possible*.<sup>57</sup>

Butler employs the word “catachresis,” etymologically derived from Greek meaning “the misuse of a word,” to designate the way in which the defiant, impenetrable solidity of the real breaks the symbolic chain. It resists discourse while paradoxically reaffirming discursive boundaries. It does so precisely by occupying the space of what cannot be said.

Butler’s elaboration of the real closely parallels Ross Chambers’ articulation of the obscene evoked above, the “cultural offstage”—the “*unmentionable, unspeakable, even unnatural*”—that underpins any definition of culture.<sup>58</sup> Chambers, too, employs the word *catachresis* to designate the expressive practice that renders visible the obscene, a “purposeful infringement” of conventions that disrupts discourse just enough to keep alive and to the fore the space of uncomfortability delimiting that which cannot be said. “Catachresis,” Chambers explains, “...[is the] name given to a kind of lexical error or making do, a form of bricolage whereby in the absence of a ‘proper’ term another term is inappropriately, but necessarily ...*détourné*, turned away from its dedicated function, and pressed into alternative service” (29).

Putting the lenses of the real and the obscene kaleidoscopically to use, I argue that AIDS between Muzil and the narrator, between Foucault and Guibert (though, we must recall that the equivalence is not so sure or simple) figures productively in Guibert’s writing as the discursively unmentionable. Butler, in a continuation of her argument, highlights the primordial importance of the paternal link in the “fixing” of names: “Fixing thus never takes place without the paternal

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<sup>57</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 198 (my emphasis).

<sup>58</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 33.

authority to fix, which means that the referent remains secure only to the extent that the patrilineal line of authority is there to secure it” (215). Foucault, the symbolic father responsible for passing along—“fixing”—the name, for furthering the symbolic chain, fails in his duties where AIDS is concerned, never laying down the laws of “proper usage.”<sup>59</sup> Guibert creates his irreverent narrative out of this broken patrilineal line.

Furthermore, not only does Guibert pave a discursive path to speak about AIDS, but he enlarges the space of utterance, pushing beyond the circumscribed limits of that which cannot be said; Guibert “inhabits” more space by daring to bring into habit unorthodox symbolic usage. In a very rare dated entry, writing on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1988, three months after his diagnosis, Guibert discusses the uncertainty of the future—his future and the future of his book: “...j’en ignore le déroulement de bout en bout, je peux en imaginer plusieurs fins, qui sont toutes pour l’instant du ressort de la prémonition ou du vœu, mais l’ensemble de sa vérité m’est encore caché; je me dis que ce livre n’a sa raison d’être que dans *cette frange d’incertitude* qui est commune à tous les malades du monde” (AL 11). The image of this uncertain “fringe”—the unknown space that unites one sick person to the next—leaks out of comfortable zones of habit and pours into what Butler, further in her argument, calls the “zone of uninhabitability.”<sup>60</sup>

Guibert’s catachresis allows him to trespass into this zone, to inhabit what is uninhabitable, to

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<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting that Guibert kills off his biological father in *Mes Parents*, his most autobiographical text, by setting him adrift at the very end to die alone at sea. Hervé Guibert, *Mes Parents* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), (169). Again in *Le Paradis*, Guibert’s last novel, the narrator’s father is killed in a car accident. The grief over his father’s death contributes to the narrator’s sense of disorientation. It is noted in Guibert’s journal, published posthumously, that his father expressed relief at his textual death: ““Le père dit: ‘En tout cas je te remercie de m’avoir fait mourir à la fin de ton livre, c’est un soulagement.’” (*La mausolée des amants*, 380).

<sup>60</sup> “This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute the site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, *the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection*, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 3).

reclaim the obscene, the abjected as a recognized—uttered—instance of self released from paternal injunction.

As we discussed above, the HIV retrovirus performs a duplicitous unraveling of the immune system by violating the “central dogma” of modern genetics, spinning DNA out of the virus’s corrupted (and corrupting) RNA. Guibert, through his catachretic writing, effects a similar gesture. He violates the laws of the Symbolic by destabilizing signifiers and blurring generic boundaries; he betrays his “father’s” resistance to avowal and contaminates the paternal story with his own words. As such, he throws into question “The Law of the Father,” the “central dogma” according to psychoanalysis; he unflinchingly kills the paternal figure to gain inhabitable textual space and unabashedly lay claim to new habits of discourse. The license Guibert takes in exceeding the boundaries of his own story to reveal another’s—his “father’s”—is simply one instance of catachresis “authorized” by this lack of paternal symbolic disciplining. In the next section, we will explore other illustrations of Guibert’s lack of deference to governing norms and forms of canonized expression, notably his fast and loose play with truth and his “retroversion” of one of the most classical literary forms: allegory. Ultimately, Guibert engages in this word play—what Marie Darrieusecq cleverly dubs “*guibertinage*”<sup>61</sup>—to cast a new line of symbolization, to accomplish what Foucault was not able to do: ensure a written heritage, secure a legacy of a shared experience uttered from the fringes between life and death, between words and silence.

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<sup>61</sup> Marie Darrieusecq, “La notion de leurre chez Hervé Guibert : Décryptage d’un roman-leurre, *L’Incognito*,” *Nottingham French Studies*, vol.34, no.1 (Spring 1995): 88.



## Cures and Lures

To face the unmentionability of the virus, “novel strategies,” so to speak, are needed. The virus itself serves as a model to Guibert precisely in its capacity to keep masking itself. Paula Treichler remarks that the metaphor used to describe the AIDS virus changed in the late 1980s. While the privileged imagery used in the early days of the virus, as discussed above, was that of guerilla warfare, Treichler shows how the virus gradually assumed another identity: “No ground troops here, no combat, not even generals: what we see instead is the evolution of a conception of the AIDS virus as a topflight secret agent—a James Bond of secret agents, armed with ‘a range of strategies’ and licensed to kill.”<sup>62</sup> At this time, Guibert engaged in writing a series of purely fictional books in the vein of a *roman policier* chock full of gangsters, spies, secret agents and turncoats. In these stories, he emulates the virus’ mischief and duplicity, engaging in what Marie Darrieusecq has labeled “guibertinage”—“ce jeu de masques entre vérité et fiction, ronde amoureuse en costumes et trompe-l’oeil pour mieux défier, peut-être, la mort.”<sup>63</sup> Guibert’s texts communicate amongst themselves: characters disappear and reappear from one text to the next, under different names, sometimes as a different sex. Like an architect, he builds an elaborate edifice, a labyrinth of discursive space: “Et j’écris mon livre dans le vide, je le bâtis, le rééquilibre, pense à son rythme général et aux brisures de ses articulations, à ses ruptures et à ses continuités, à l’entremêlement de ses trames, à sa vivacité...” (*PC* 174).

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<sup>62</sup> Paula Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> Marie Darrieusecq, “La notion de leurre chez Hervé Guibert: Décryptage d’un roman-leurre, *L’Incognito*,” *Nottingham French Studies*, vol.34, no.1 (Spring 1995): 88.

### *Passing "Incognito"*

While many critics speak about Guibert's AIDS writing as a trilogy,<sup>64</sup> Marie Darrieussecq convincingly argues for a fourth AIDS novel. Her analysis forms a basis for my own reinterpretation of several of his other fictional texts that are assumed to lie outside of the "AIDS canon." In 1988, Guibert was writing a *roman policier* when he received his diagnosis. Narrated by a writer, Hector Lenoir<sup>65</sup>, who has been given a grant to work on "l'histoire de [s]a vie" at the Spanish Academy in Rome, the text proves difficult to read, filled with carnivalesque characters, an impossible chronology and an unsolved murder mystery. The text is entitled *L'Incognito*, which the reader learns is the name of a bar for transvestites and the scene of the murder. Disguises and masks proliferate. In one particular scene, the reader is offered a striking description of a double-faced man, a frightening and fleeting chimera caught (arrêté) between man and lamb: "...l'homme se retourna pour me dévoiler un double visage, coupé en deux, c'est ce que j'ai cru entrevoir car lui qui avait honte s'est détourné très vite de mon regard qui buvait ses deux profils couturés par l'arête du nez, où la narine d'homme se soudait avec un mufle d'agneau."<sup>66</sup> In a world where "...les crimes et les suicides...se font par échanges de fluides," the threat of contagion abounds (156). While most critics dismiss the interpretable value of

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<sup>64</sup> The trilogy is generally composed of: *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*; *Le protocole compassionnel*; et *L'homme au chapeau rouge*. Though Guibert wrote other texts before his death in 1991, these texts are generally grouped together because they share the genre of *autofiction*. I have chosen to go into the question of genre only tangentially in this paper, as another example of catachresis. The subject has been treated at length by other critics. See Jean-Pierre Boulé, *Hervé Guibert, A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie and Other Writings* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> We learn in *La mort propagande* that Hector Lenoir was the name that the young Guibert had chosen for himself.

<sup>66</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Incognito* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987), 88. All future references will be abbreviated as *I* and cited in the body of the text.

these fanciful and non-linear texts, Darrieussecq underscores their power in Guibert's imaginary. She sharply points out that, in the chaos of *Incognito*, AIDS furtively slips onto the scene, positioning itself as *le vrai assassin*. She writes: "C'est en démêlant l'écheveau des allusions et des indices, en suivant la piste piégée des images et des métaphores, que l'on parvient à la conclusion que *L'Incognito* est une vaste entreprise de leurre qui ne dit le sida que sous le manteau et dans la peau des autres."<sup>67</sup>

Darrieussecq's analysis brings us back to the idea of masquerade, of infiltration through vestimentary disguise, of the viral coat; like the AIDS virus, Guibert manages to slip the *noyau de vérité* past his readers who are fixated on the many different "coats" worn. Darrieussecq sees this lure as the keystone to understanding and appreciating Guibert's writing. As such, the scattered clues come together to form at least an alluring *doublure*, if not a coat of their own: "C'est dans toute son œuvre que Guibert sème ainsi de multiples indices, qui poussent à ouvrir l'œil sur ce qu'il écrit. ...Les indices du leurre décalent en permanence le sujet des livres et leur vérité, pour les vêtir de ce manteau hétéroclite...où les noms, les histoires, les propos, se mêlent sans cesse, tout en gardant une unité structurelle" (ibid.).

Though the bullfight does not appear explicitly in *L'incognito*, Darrieussecq identifies it as the privileged form of a lure in Guibert's texts.<sup>68</sup> Guibert, in *A l'ami*, explicitly employs this metaphor to describe the way HIV exhausts the body: "Le virus HIV, quand il se déclenche, joue

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<sup>67</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, "La notion de leurre chez Hervé Guibert," 88.

<sup>68</sup> "Le leurre dans le texte est un objet mis pour un autre par une opération de déplacement qui fait de toute l'œuvre de Guibert un protocole métonymique, une corrida, les taureaux de combat ont un angle mort entre les yeux, qui permet au toréador de se placer en dehors de leur champ de vision, et d'agiter la cape rouge comme un leurre pour détourner leur attention. *La corrida est le motif privilégié du leurre dans les livres de Guibert...*[L]a corrida...est le symbole de la danse macabre menée autour du narrateur par des 'sauveurs' possibles, plus ou moins adroits, plus ou moins cruels, jouant de façon plus ou moins perverse avec la cape rouge de leur promesse de vie" (82).

à l'intérieur du corps à une corrida, où la cape rouge serait l'enveloppe, l'épée de mort le noyau, et la bête épuisée l'homme" (*AL* 276). Taking license from Darrieussecq's approach, I propose to grab the bull by the horns, so to speak, and read the lure—and the coat/cape—seriously in a text that ups the stakes of the *corrida*, replacing the bulls with young boys pitted one against the other.

### *Staging the Obscene*

*Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*, a text published in 1987, a year before Guibert would receive his diagnosis, is a dark, violent, erotic text—an obscene text, I will argue—involving the capture, *dressage* and murder of young boys by a gang of bandits who have been hired to “train” them to fight against “Infanteros”—the child slayers. The text has received relatively little critical attention compared to Guibert's other works. Claire Orban, without going into a deep analysis, identifies it as pivotal for Guibert, one that is “both before and after ‘sida.’”<sup>69</sup> Most critics who have treated this text approach it in comparison to works by Sade, from whom the title was taken.<sup>70</sup> Owen Heathcote, for example, interrogates the moral and ethical stakes of the novel, wondering whether Guibert's “rapture and murder of children,” like

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<sup>69</sup> Clara Orban, *Body [in] Parts: Bodies and Identity in Sade and Guibert* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2008), 119.

<sup>70</sup> The title comes from a letter that Sade wrote to his wife while in prison written. With what Simone de Beauvoir characterizes as “une rage joyeuse,” he writes: “Vous avez imaginé faire merveille, je le parierais, en me réduisant à une abstinence atroce sur le péché de la chair. Eh bien! Vous vous êtes trompés...vous m'avez fait former des fantômes qu'il faudra que je réalise.” Quoted in Simone de Beauvoir, *Faut-il brûler Sade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 46.

Sade's libertinage, "...est avant tout '*un fait de langage*'"<sup>71</sup> or whether it is something more tangible. In the end he concludes that unlike Sade, who manages to keep himself—and the reader—at an ironical distance from *les fantômes*, Guibert does not allow any such detachment precisely because the violence itself is never *mise en question* or recognized as violence. "La vraie violence de *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*," concludes Heathcote, "est qu'elle se raconte sans pouvoir se nommer. La violence se propage sans être dépassée. La violence se joue sans jamais être déjouée. Et la seule manière de ne pas participer aux jeux des infanteros est de refuser de participer au 'protocole compassionnel' qui régit tout acte de lecture" (208).

Reading and finishing the book amounts to the inevitable participation of the reader with the horror and the confusing feeling of being forced to identify with unsavory characters who repeatedly commit what most any society would deem to be morally reprehensible acts. This situation is rendered even more intolerable by the fact that the text offers no insight as to what motivates the characters, how they come to be as they are, nor does it offer an escape or an imaginary outside, a sense of reprieve. The reader is presented with this world, with all of its disturbing rules and games, without any sense of causation: where did this society, whose favorite pastime is ceremoniously killing children, originate? How does it continue to justify its actions and deal with the fact that by killing children, it is symbolically dooming itself to the possibility of having no—or at least a limited--future? Is there anything redeemable or useful that can be gleaned from it, or does it simply constitute, as Leslie Hill suggests in a brief commentary noting the continuity between this text with Guibert's more "autofictional" works, a

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<sup>71</sup> Owen Heathcote, "L'érotisme, la violence et le jeu dans *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*," *La Revue des Lettres Moderne: au jour le siècle 2: Le Corps textuel d'Hervé Guibert* (1997), 191.

byproduct of Guibert's "perverse" taste "pour tout ce qui est crime, trahison, violence, haine..."<sup>72</sup>

In fact, Guibert's staging of the ritual killing of boys may not be as gratuitous as it seems. In fact, it indirectly brings us back to immunity—and particularly to compromised immunity—via the etymological root *munus*. In the introduction, we discussed the connotations of *munus* as *onus* (obligation, burden, duty); *officium* (service, office, employment); and *donum* (gift). But, in Ancient Rome, *munus* also meant a spectacle. *Munera* were spectacles that involved the public display of human killing as a duty or offering to the spirit of the dead as part of a funeral rite.<sup>73</sup> Guibert's *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes* is a *mise en scène* of precisely this form of *munera*. No one in the text is immune—all are subject to the brutal laws of the game and are punished should they transgress these laws. And, most importantly, the "God" the gory games are meant to please is none other than the shadow man (H/ombre), in other words a stand-in for any one of us, which means that the reader is also stripped of any claim to immunity from participation.

The obscenity of the text ("obscene" understood in its most generally accepted terms as that which is "indecent," "lewd," "offensive," or "repulsive to the senses")—what Hill calls "the details that certain people would have preferred Guibert pass by silently or keep to himself"—derives from the feelings of discomfort people experience not just with unabashed and remorseless violence, but particularly with violence (physical and sexual) perpetrated against

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<sup>72</sup> Leslie Hill, "Ecrire—La Mort," 89.

<sup>73</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40. The gladiatorial battles, for example, fell under this category of spectacle. Contrary to many Christian accounts that portray the Romans as gratuitously blood hungry, *munera*, Donald Kyle argues, were performed as part of a ritual. In the late first century B.C., the gladiatorial games were inscribed on the official festival calendar, but when they first appeared (around 264 B.C.), they were designed as "sacro-legal" executions, a way to get rid of the unruly elements in society while still pleasing the gods. Here we see an overlap of law and life that poses as the opposite of immunity.

children. Grossly stated, the child represents the immune body, *par excellence*, the incarnation of imagined purity and innocence, of untarnished hope. If any body is off limits, it is the child's body; and anybody who would dare violate these boundaries incurs the strongest societal vilification. "Child loving," as James Kincaid labels pedophilia, constitutes the obscene of the obscene: no crime is more reviled.

James Kincaid, taking a Foucauldian stance, analyzes "child loving" ("pedophilia" being etymologically derived from the Greek meaning "the person who loves the child") not at the abjected periphery but rather at the core of our collective imagination. According to Kincaid, it expresses our deepest, most troubling desires, those we refuse to recognize, and against which we define ourselves. Kincaid asserts:

Pedophilia...is located at the cultural center, since it describes the response to the child we have made necessary. If the child is desirable, then to desire it can hardly be freakish. To maintain otherwise is to put into operation pretty hefty engines of denial and self-deception. And that is what we have done. By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism. More than that, by attributing to the child the central features of desirability in our culture—purity innocence, emptiness, Otherness—we have made absolutely essential figures who would enact this desire...<sup>74</sup>

Kincaid's understanding of pedophilia allows us to move into a more nuanced exploration of the obscenity of Guibert's text in which the "obscene," when used in the terms Ross Chambers lays out and that we explore above, pushes the limits of acceptable discourse while reemphasizing the lines of cultural self-definition.<sup>75</sup> The subject matter alone in Guibert's text is sufficient to effect

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<sup>74</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4-5.

<sup>75</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 24.

this *remise en cause*. But there is also something about the text's genre—coupled with the subject matter—that causes anxiety in the reader. *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes* is a provocation that places the question of denial—or, in other terms, the possibility of witnessing—right at the very heart of the text. While Jean-Pierre Boulé has examined the dialectic between seeing and not seeing in the text, I propose to go a step further to investigate the status of speech, exploring what can or cannot be said and how it can be said. This text appears released from all moral injunctions while it paradoxically places strict limits on behavior, both on the kidnapped children, the bandits, the budding infantero—and on the reader herself. This strategy permits Guibert indefinitely to keep open an interpretable space between signified and signifier all while it seems to foreclose it in a text with no available “outside.”

### **Mouthing “Pure” Fiction**

*Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes* is the only of Guibert's works not to verge, in some form, toward the autofictional, remaining a “pure,” uninterrupted fictional fantasy in which the narrative “I” remains silent. The text is split into three parts, each using a different epigraph as a title, and each relating in some way to the education of children. The first part, “Beaucoup de jeux de nuit,” is an inscription taken from Rousseau's *Emile*. In an ironical stance, this section sets the very kind of sinister scene that haunts Rousseau's text, painting an elaborate picture of the way in which a band of brigands abducts, trains and traffics young boys as bait for the Infanteros. I will be focusing mostly on this segment of the text in my analysis. The second part, “S'abandonner au jeu des garçons, c'est, comme un loup, se coucher sur un lit de fleurs mourantes” (an old Japanese adage) follows the picaresque adventures of Mickey, an aspiring



infantero, who encounters mythical beasts and fellow wanderers (Bobo le châtreur, Furtif le gitan qui fait danser l'ours, Momie, Homard, Baleine, among others) in his search for the "habit de lumière" (the costume that absolutely mesmerizes the child about to be killed) worn by the greatest infantero.<sup>76</sup> The third part, "Le jeu finit lorsque tous les animaux ont été pris par le diable et sont devenus ses chiens," a title of a 19<sup>th</sup> century manual for adolescents, offers a very short history and reflection on child sacrifice from the Aztecs to the present day, ending on an injunction to bring down those who are responsible for stealing and trafficking the children.

"Beaucoup de jeux de nuit" thrusts the reader into a world where children are kidnapped from various kid-friendly places—playgrounds, schoolyards, zoos—and are immediately plunged into an environment marked by a brutal deprivation of the senses. The young boys are bound and blindfolded; they are branded on the forehead with a number then thrown into a jute sack hanging from a tree. There the boys remain, only to be released for feedings or other related "training" activities, or for the occasional cleaning in a Turkish bath. The bandits, who sport whimsical names like Pirate, Lune, Loup, Bébé, Persil or Plume, live in a cave in the woods. Their hideout is ironically located on the outskirts of a town where a prison, long since demolished, once stood. The lair serves as a dark shadow of the law enforcement institution it has replaced, a locale that abides by its own rules (without fear of retribution) and inflicts its own penalties. The bandits take turns snatching new children when there is a "vacancy" (places "open

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<sup>76</sup> Guibert was reading Don Quixote at the time he was writing *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*. While "Beaucoup de jeux de nuit" is unrelenting in its dark violence, this second segment assumes a much lighter tone. Guibert writes about his picaresque hero, Mickey, in his journal: "C'est un héros ridicule. On nous met très vite la puce à l'oreille en disant que c'est un fantôme. Ce que raconte le début est très beau, très moderne, comme une fondation à l'envers de toute la littérature à venir. C'est que don Quichotte voit double : il vit doublement chaque action par le filtre, le spectre et l'éclairage de la littérature. Les livres l'ont drogué. Alors il s'évertue à pourfendre le minable du réel par l'élan grandiose de la fiction" (*Mausolée* 382).

up” when a boy has either died in the “games” or through the training, or, more rarely, when a boy escapes). All of the bandits perform different tasks in the training process, their names roughly indicating their role or character.

Much of the action of this first part unfolds through descriptions of what should and should not go into and out of mouths. Early in the text, for example, the means of making the boys meat-hungry prey is described in detail. The boys are compared to famished animals in a zoo: “Ils les gardaient un an et plus pour les muscler à point, pour en faire de fameux carnassiers. Ils avaient adopté ce système de nutrition, observé au zoo, qui consistait à une heure dite à ouvrir les sacs les uns après les autres, au plus vite pour qu’aucun ne puisse s’échapper ou assaillir son père—c’est ainsi que chaque enfant considérait son ravisseur— en y jetant une tranche de barbaque, et des déchets de salade comme on donne aux tortues.”<sup>77</sup> This system is meant to awaken the beast within, all the while keeping it *bien domptée*.<sup>78</sup>

A heightened version of the Stockholm syndrome, where the children have not only developed bonds of attachment to their captors but actually begun seeing them as replacement parents (a connection concretized by a cord linking the boys to their respective “father” when

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<sup>77</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 14. All future references will be abbreviated as *VM* and cited in the body of the text.

<sup>78</sup> We are reminded here of Guibert’s description of AIDS as that which unleashes “la bête en soi” : “Je l’ai compris comme ça, et je l’ai dit au docteur Chandi dès qu’il a suivi l’évolution du virus dans mon corps, le sida n’est pas vraiment une maladie, ça simplifie les choses de dire que c’en est une, c’est un état de faiblesse et d’abandon qui ouvre la cage de la bête qu’on avait en soi, à qui je suis contraint de donner pleins pouvoirs pour qu’elle me dévore, à qui je laisse faire sur mon corps vivant ce qu’elle s’apprêtait à faire sur mon cadavre pour le désintégrer. Les champignons de la pneumocystose qui sont pour les poumons et pour le souffle des boas constricteurs... sont présents à l’intérieur de chaque homme, simplement l’équilibre de son système immunitaire les empêche d’avoir droit de cité, alors que le sida leur donne le feu vert, ouvre les vannes de la destruction. Muzil, ignorant la teneur de ce qui le rongerait, l’avait dit sur son lit d’hôpital, avant que les savants le découvrent : ‘C’est un machin qui doit nous venir d’Afrique.’ Le sida, qui a transité par le sang des singes verts, est une maladie de sorciers, d’envoûteurs” (*AL* 17).

they are released), is the secondary effect of this practice. This attachment prevents the children from seeking refuge in each other's company, from forming a fraternal community: "Jamais l'enfant n'essayait de rejoindre un des siens : il l'aurait pu au bruit car ils se connaissaient, et ils avaient établi des codes pour s'interpeller, ils avaient nourri de nombreux plans d'évasion... Les enfants avaient inventé des prières qu'ils n'entonnaient que dans la solitude" (16). Plans nourished in the dark go unrealized, codes and prayers are left unsaid as the children dance the fine line between showing their vigor with a proper flight response (we are told that those children who, once released, return immediately to their captor, will be sacrificed) while not running too far afield.

Throughout all three parts of *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*, an accent is placed on preserving sexual purity. We learn, in the later sections of the second section, that Mickey, to become an *Infantero*, must remain a virgin. In the first segment that primarily concerns us, the bandits are strictly forbidden from sexually abusing the boys. This injunction against sexual defilement registers oddly in an environment where abuse of every other kind is not only tolerated but strictly put into practice. Ultimately, the plot of "Beaucoup de jeux"—if we can speak of a plot—advances through two parallel stories of "inappropriate" attachment, training gone awry between "father" and "son," and between fellow thugs. One of the captors, Lune, by the light of the moon, repeatedly molests his "son" 2, performing fellatio on him. One night, he invites another of the brigands, Loup (the hunter in the pack), to join him. Their joint "tastings" ultimately lead to 2's escape. Loup tells the others of Lune's taboo habits—and does so without incriminating himself. Lune is punished by death, enclosed in a sack and leaded with weight to drown at the bottom of the lake.

Murray Pratt, one of the few critics to offer an extended analysis of the text, contends that Loup's immunity from punishment is largely due to his more heteronormative proclivities. Unlike Lune, Loup adamantly proclaims that little boys are not "son truc," and he only enjoys the sexual "games" by imagining that he is having sex with prostitutes or by drinking himself to the point of hallucination. According to Murray, Loup stands in for the reader as a figure of judgment: "Ainsi Loup, représentant textuel des lecteurs du livre, bien qu'ayant participé aux aventures sexuelles, se déclare du côté des législateurs et se soustrait donc à la punition que reçoivent Lune et Pirate, dont l'homosexualité doit être proscrite pour que les relations violentes entre les autres soient légitimées."<sup>79</sup> Loup's indemnity forces the reader to consider his or her critical stance. The reader yearns for punishment for the brigands while joining in on the action, hypocritically condemning the system while refusing to avert the gaze.

Lune's story is repeated and escalated when Pirate, the leader of the brigands (and snatcher of "booty," as we shall see), develops inappropriate affection for the set of twins he abducts (from the zoo) to replace 2 and subsequently fails to follow through with his "fatherly" duties. His infractions first appear as a sign of leniency toward the twins: "Le lendemain les brigands constatèrent que l'existence des jumeaux était devenue la préoccupation principale de Pirate, mais qu'il ne faisait rien pour la manifester, et négligeait le dressage malgré l'échéance qui aurait dû le presser" (*VM* 61). Pirate allows the twins to eat at his table with him; he spares them from the branding, opting instead simply to attach pieces of felt with the numbers 2 and 5 respectively (child number 5 had been sacrificed as part of Lune's punishment, symbolically

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<sup>79</sup> Murray Pratt, "De la désidentification à l'incognito: A la recherche d'une autobiographique homosexuelle," *Nottingham French Studies*, vol.134 (1: Spring 1995), 78-79.

standing in for the escaped 2) to their foreheads and lips. Instead of covering their eyes, he draws on a blindfold (63).

A fatal link is suggested between Lune and Pirate who both, in their nauseous states, viscerally experience awareness of and disgust at their actions (is an extreme version of Sartrean nausea). First, both are overcome with nausea—a liminal state between acceptance and rejection by the body—at several points in the text. Indeed, nausea is the only textual indication of uneasiness. Lune was the first to be stricken after he had been tasked with finding a “replacement” for 2. (“Mais quand il voulut sortir de la camionette garée loin de la crèche, [Lune] fut saisi d’une nausée inexplicable, suffoquante” [47]). Then, Pirate’s wavering will manifests as nausea when he is forced to shave the heads of the twins: “...les ciseaux se ramollirent dans la paume de Pirate qui fut envahi d’une nausée inconnue” (64) Pirate is struck again before the twins enter into the arena to fight for their lives. (“...[E]t il avait eu la nausée quand [l’enfant] s’était répandu en vomissure, il ne se savait pas si sensible” [89]).

This connection grows progressively stronger as the story unfolds. After the twins perish in battle, Pirate steals the bodies from the *dépouiloir* and, for the first time, begins touching them. As he caresses their soft skin, his desire catapults him into a hallucinatory state. He sees “une multitude de petites bites,” a unifying vision that “fais[ait] sentir à Pirate la bouche de Lune qui se regreffait dans la sienne, faisant monter en elle l’acidité d’une faim démente” (101). The superposition of Lune’s lips on those of Pirate perversely reenacts the only instance of perfect coincidence in the text, the supernatural fusion that magically reunites the twins during the battle. Pirate succumbs to his uncontrollable hunger for the young, moribund corpses and acts on the desires grafted onto him through the specter of Lune’s mouth. He moves from simply suckling

the dead boys to penetrating them and falls asleep with them in the grass. He awakes to find his gang looming over him, and, like Lune, he is sentenced to death as Loup pronounces the banishment of the number two—now a cursed number—from their system. The text ends on the image of Pirate answering to Loup, muttering: “vous m’avez fait former des fantômes...”

Aside from being a physical site of entry, pleasure and recrimination, the mouth signifies the production of language, the act of naming. Several of the training rituals, which involve inserting a knife into the boys’ mouth, impair or reappropriate these functions, destabilizing the fixity of names. One ritual involves rechristening the boys, tattooing their numbers inside their lower lip. This activity leads Béb , the bandit responsible for this task, to daydream as he imagines his knife a wandering pen, a softer version of the Kafkian Harrow, scratching out forever indecipherable verse: "B b  r ve que son stylet d borde de la l vre inf rieure, qu’il caresse toute la peau de l’enfant... il couvrirait le corps d’un po me  nigmatique dont on ne pourrait jamais trouver le sens de lecture..." (26).

The most brutal ritual involves removing the boys’ goiters to prevent them from speaking, reducing them to guttural grunts or screams or incoherent brays. In an offhanded comment, Persil laments this practice, exclaiming his sadness at not being able to put their vocal cords to use: “les faire chanter, leur apprendre   lire, ou   causer comme nous”) (ibid.). The text offers a particularly florid description of the abundant saliva flowing, in the place of words, from the boys’ mouths, to the point of imagining it as a source of fantasy, a channel of creative endeavor, of strength and even expression (31-32). But the pain of this loss does not go by uncommented. During a poignant “battle” scene, one of the few in the text closely narrated from the boy’s perspective (though still in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular), the boy experiences an intense urge

to speak to the “giant,” the Infantero preparing to assail him. In reality, the Infantero is a young man barely older than the “beast,” but his elaborate costume makes him appear much larger than he is. To distract the Infantero, the boy plans to engage him in a detailed discussion about his costume, complimenting him, asking him questions about the provenance of the gold adorning it, whether the gold is real or fake, what his black bow means, etc. But as he opens his mouth to speak, he finds himself thwarted, without voice:

Il aimerait recouvrer la parole pour amadouer le géant. En courant, il conçoit la palabre qui contournera son assaut, il freinera devant la statue et se mettra à lui poser civilement des questions, il lui fera un compliment sur la fierté de ce port de tête qu’il cherchera à rompre, il lui demandera de quelles terres on a extrait tout cet or qui la pare, s’il est en chaque endroit de l’habit vrai ou factice, quel est le deuil dénoncé par le noir de sa petite cravate, de quelles teintures on a tiré ce rose écœurant qui épouse ses jambes, et quels plissés de femme ou de coquillage elle a voulu afficher sur la fronce de son plastron, mais tous ces mots se roulent en pelote dans sa gorge, c’est un crachat qui en sort. (81-82)

In fact, it is not only the physical ability to speak that has been compromised, but rather the entire signifying system itself. Before being thrown into battle, the boys are kept in a cage where, with their hands tied, they search, using their other free limbs, for signs left by those who preceded them. A few scratch words into the walls or feel the walls to decipher what words have been written. Instead of finding vocabulary one might expect (names or substantives associated with the boy’s condition or identity), the words are random, without order or meaning:

Ils n’avaient plus, leurs mains entravées, que leurs bouches et ces quelques surfaces de peau libre...un genou, un pied défait de son lien, pour tenter de détecter sur les barreaux rouillés les signes que les ongles des anciens captifs avaient voulu inscrire : ce n’était jamais liberté ou mort, ce n’était ni haine ni amour, ce n’était pas non plus un prénom, c’étaient des mots imprévisibles apparemment insensés, ce n’étaient pas des notions mais des couleurs, ce n’était pas espoir mais jaune, ce n’était pas vengeance mais chapeau. (69-70)

Conversely, the engraving can also have the opposite effect. Instead of having no meaning at all, the markings can all of sudden acquire a very weighty significance for the wandering bit of flesh that happens upon them, in the case, for example, of when an individual boy finds that an engraved number in the cage corresponds to the number branded on his forehead, his new “name”:

Il y a avait un moment où le bout du doigt presque paralysé ou la pulpe surexcitée d’une épaule qui cherchait à ramper, en suivant la ligne plus parfaite d’un chiffre qui semblait partie prenante de la cage, comme son code ou son emblème, se confondait diaboliquement avec le chiffre de leur front et de leur lèvre. Ils voulaient alors abolir cette similitude qui les menaçait, et frottaient les chiffres l’un contre l’autre en espérant que l’un dissoudrait l’autre, *qu’il pourraient ressortir de la cage sans aucune sorte d’identité*, ou que la cage libérée de son numéro les délivrerait en même temps, par confusion. (ibid.)

The boys’ response to this confusion—or seeming providence—is a desire to erase the number name, physically rubbing it out in hopes of deliverance from their circumstances. This image strongly recalls our discussion earlier of Foucault’s proposal for an identity-erasing *mouvoir*, prefiguring it in Guibert’s writing. Names in this text are paradoxically both more and less permanent. The number names are, on the one hand, indelible marks, burnt onto the forehead and carved into the lip of the boys. But, as soon as the boy dies, the number is released for reuse on the next captive. As for the names of the bandits, we know from the outset that they are simply nicknames that the brigands do not know how to write: “...ils se donnaient des surnoms, Pirate, Bébé, Persil, Lune. Ils ne savaient pas les écrire” (13). Original names and prior histories are covered over and eventually forgotten. There is only a brief moment, immediately before the Infantero delivers his fatal blow, when a boy has a fleeting memory of a previous life, a desire to “faire corps” with it as he sees himself—or at least a long-lost brother—



in the face of the giant: "...les cheveux en retombant encadrent le visage d'un très jeune homme, à peine plus âgé et plus mâle que lui, tendre et démuni comme une vierge, et l'enfant reconnaît un frère avec lequel il a joué, bâti des châteaux de sable au bord d'une mer, conversé des nuits entières dans un même lit sans trouver le sommeil. ..L'enfant voudrait se fondre dans le corps de l'aîné..." (88).

As 2 is escaping from the jute sack after Lune's careless mishandling, the reader is given insight into the psychological consequences on the boys from their sustained trauma: "Le dressage l'avait rendu amnésique. Il ne se souvenait plus du visage de ses parents ni des cloisons qui avaient abrité ses premières années..."(46). Forgetting is the ultimate goal of the training and of the games, the law of the land. Later, the text makes explicitly clear that the imperative to forget applies to all witnesses of "the games"; to risk telling or writing of the engine driving this aftermath society would incur grave consequences, threatening both the writer and the reader: "La loi des jeux était qu'on s'en éveille amnésique le lendemain, et qu'ils ne soient jamais sujets de discussions ou de souvenirs, celui qui aurait pris une plume pour témoigner de leur existence se serait condamné par son récit, il y avait des milliers de personnes qu'un intérêt ou une foi rendait mauvais dès qu'on soulevait l'hypothèse de leur suppression" (73). This statement, of course, puts the very existence of the text—whose function, it would seem, is to bear witness—into question if not jeopardy. It also loops the reader into a troubling complicity with the violence and with the silence.

## *Allegorizing Catachresis*

How are we to make sense of such a text in relation to the larger context of HIV/AIDS in which Guibert was living? One way to read it is to dismiss it as an ultimately failed foray into fiction—not even a novel but rather a measly tale, *un récit*. Jean-Pierre Boulé embraces this reading, quoting Guibert, himself, who likens the process of correcting the manuscript to “un travail de l’échec.”<sup>80</sup> But I would prefer to read it in another way, as a working through of and oblique testimony to Guibert’s experience as those around him—handsome young men—are captured, tortured and ultimately slain by the virus. *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* is an attempt to give words and a context to this vicious captor. Moreover, it is

On a grander scale, it also functions as a social critique, an attempt to decry the silence surrounding HIV/AIDS through a provocative disruption of readerly expectation, precisely the kind of catachresis to which Judith Butler and particularly Ross Chambers were referring. Indeed, Chambers goes on to qualify “catachresis”—this “purposeful infringement”—as the primary mode of AIDS witnessing. According to Chambers, the function of catachresis is to be “taken seriously,” to sufficiently shake and unsettle the accepted cultural norms and generic boundaries so as to allow the “obscene” to infiltrate:

Thus catachresis can work the magic whereby an infraction is read as deliberate, but necessary, and hence as constituting, not an error and not an act of madness or even of gratuitous provocation, but a meaningful utterance that requires—not in spite of but because of its untimely character—to be taken seriously. The sole condition of such an outcome is, however, that the generic catachresis not become

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<sup>80</sup> “Ebranlé par toutes les corrections que je dois faire sur le manuscrit des *Fantômes*...c’est un travail désespérant, comme un travail de l’échec, une activité menaçante, j’ai l’impression qu’elles sont le symbole d’une charnière dans mon écriture, et dans ma vie, et que je suis seul, une fois de plus, à devoir l’encaisser. C’est presque un acte de cessation, un triste armistice après la guerre joyeuse de l’écriture. Ne pas devenir un mauvais écrivain: *ne jamais être le faiseur de soi-même*” (*Mausolée*, 396, my emphasis).

conventional...but retain its rhetorical character as improvisation, a discursive making do or *art de faire* that disturbs ordinary genre expectations and may well bring in its train a certain sense of anxiety.<sup>81</sup>

Guibert's practice of alluding to the truth while never completely telling it, an aspect of his work that has been thoroughly analyzed (see Jean-Pierre Boulé's extensive, if somewhat reductive study, which considers each and every one of Guibert's works through the critical lens of truth vs. fiction,)<sup>82</sup> may indeed constitute this kind of a disruption. But *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes* heightens the stakes of catachresis by challenging one of the most traditional generic forms, namely the allegory.

Granted, allegory, etymologically, already suggests a form of inverted speech that is meant to disturb or resist. From the Greek words, *allos* (other) + *agoreuein* (public, open, declarative speech), allegory implies *un détournement* of words, an "other" speak. This semantic othering has frequently been described as a secondary plane of meaning that is both separated from the initial utterance or narration—"walled" off (to use Angus Fletcher's metaphor)—and yet connected to it through an elaborate system of correspondences.<sup>83</sup> For Paul de Man, this semantic doubling amounts to a breach of propriety (of the proper, *le propre*, with all of the connotations we have discussed), a semantic inability to properly line up: "...[the author] states a proper meaning...by using a literal sign which bears no resemblance to that meaning and which conveys, in its turn, a meaning that is proper to it but does not coincide with the proper

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<sup>81</sup> Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 30.

<sup>82</sup> See Jean-Pierre Boulé, *Hervé Guibert: Voices of the Self* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> Angus Fletcher, "Allegory without Ideas," *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, ed. Brenda Machosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 10 (9-33).

meaning of the allegory.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, when interpreting allegory, the reader is always at a second degree of separation from the text, where the literal, first degree, “proper” level seems haunted by a double layer that insists throughout, whispering echoes of a potential other story.

Angus Fletcher, in a recent essay (an addendum to his seminal 1964 study), shows how allegory, in the postmodern era, has been emptied of its purpose as a channel for conveying meaning, particularly in its function of communicating universal ideas and ideals (whether sacred or secular in nature). He uses Walter Benjamin’s reevaluation of allegory to help illustrate and unpack this change. Benjamin views allegory not in terms of truth and transcendent meaning but rather as a state of emergency marked by fragmentation and ruin. Fletcher emphasizes how Benjamin moves allegory from the realm of ideas and anchors it in decaying material, the emblem of impermanence: “[t]hings and material conditions here become surrogates for what before would have been patently recognizable ideas...the realm of the ideal is not only empty but false to any truth we may hope to attain. Thus we get the famous remark, ‘Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.’”<sup>85</sup> Allegory, in this state, has become associated with melancholy and loss. More gravely, says Fletcher, as ideas are replaced with things in allegory, personification devolves into nominalism (an endless naming of objects); meaning retreats.

Fletcher attempts to establish fundamental criteria for allegory that have held true through its various incarnations—criteria that certainly are applicable to Guibert’s *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes*: “...allegory is always involved in symbolisms of power. Furthermore, this

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<sup>84</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 74.

<sup>85</sup> Fletcher, “Allegory Without Ideas,” 23.

involvement takes the complex form of ritual sequence, such that its repetitions provide its rhythm, a pacing that in turn dulls the mind and senses, by virtue of the noise implicit in the redundancy....” (26-27). Indeed, Guibert’s entire text, as we have seen, is a *mise-en-scène* of power dynamics and how these dynamics are forcibly maintained through the ritualistic training of all persons involved. Does Guibert’s text adhere to Fletcher’s vision of postmodern allegory as “an allegory without ideas”? Guibert does replace transcendent ideals found in classical, medieval allegory (under the names of *Faith*, *Loyalty*, *Hope*, and *Love*, for example) with much less meaningful descriptors that only loosely link to revealed character traits (Lune being somewhat of a dreamer, Plume being responsible for the creative design of costumes, traps and masks, Loup becoming the ruthless hunter, etc.). As we have discussed, these names—and names, in general, in the text—appear to have been pulled out of nowhere, stripped of their symbolic function. But to a certain degree, Guibert’s text also avoids falling into sheer meaningless consumption, strangely adhering to what Fletcher lays out as the oldest function of allegory: “the human reconstitution of divinely inspired messages, a revealed transcendental language which tries to preserve the remoteness of a properly veiled godhead.”<sup>86</sup> Only, in Guibert’s case, the godhead could not be more human.

Guibert had originally entitled this text *Hombres*, but later changed the title, leaving *Hombre* as the only unifying figure between the three parts of *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes*, the ruthless ring leader of the arena and the games. From the first part, we learn that *Hombre*, who is disgusted by children, trained *Pirate* to serve as his intermediary, thus exempting himself from much direct contact with the kids while solidifying his hold on all aspects of the

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<sup>86</sup> Angus Fletcher, “Allegory Without Ideas,” 21

“sport.” “Hombre avait éduqué Pirate, il l’avait engagé comme garçon de piste pour remplacer le sable souillé, et c’est lui qui, ensuite, lui avait avancé l’argent pour l’achat de la cave et de la fourgonnette. Par son intermédiaire Hombre devenait son propre fournisseur, détenait son propre sérail, et échappait ainsi au trafic...” (VM, 66). Hombre is all-powerful while explicitly declaring all things sacred as anathema to his pursuits. Like his name phonetically suggests when pronounced not in Spanish but in French, he lies in the shadow (*l’ombre*), remaining veiled, untouchable and unseen by those not in his inner circle: “Hombre, il n’apparaît jamais, quand on croit le voir ce n’est qu’un homme de paille à qui il laisse le soin de représenter son nom, une poupée obèse boudinée sur un coffre-fort...” (205). The third and last segment of *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* ends with, Baleine, the “headhunter” (in this upside-down world, the whale hunts the man), calling on Mickey, the hapless if lucky Infantero, to help him in his quest to bring down Hombre’s ring. By placing “Hombre” at the heart of these “games,” which are quite literally the life-blood of this allegorical society, Guibert makes a strong statement about man’s innocence or guilt. Guibert’s allegory is not laced with a beautiful or transcendent underlayer of truth or divinity. God is absent here. Rather, his text is haunted by the all-too-immanent ugliness of men, their ability to inflict mind-numbing violence, to celebrate and then turn a blind-eye, to willfully forget over and over again the death before them; he paints a grim portrait of man at the height of his potential for destruction and denial, the engines, as Chamber so judiciously underlines, of an “aftermath society.” By the end, the reader has grown weary, but perhaps the evocation of this weariness is the very point of the text. Perhaps Guibert’s take-away allegorical meaning—separated from the horrific narration, as it were, not

by a wall but by the brilliant red of the Infantero's cape<sup>87</sup>—is best summed up by Avital Ronell who also places AIDS squarely on man's shoulders:

If AIDS appears to us as an event within history, or even as *historial* event this means that it cannot be seen, as a misfortune, to come from elsewhere: *it comes from man*. Situated within the limits of a history gone bad, revealing its infirmity, AIDS for us does not come from God. But because it is not (yet) curable, it is perceived as a kind of self-destruction of a society abandoned to its own immanence. The renewed experience of God's mute complicity or historical withdrawal ('God' is to be understood here as a promissory transcendence capable of forgiving debts and healing), explains in part why AIDS is a peculiarly *human* symptom, functioning as the locus of a suicidal impulse that increasingly determines our species. AIDS is the affair of man at the end of the millennium: it is 'about' man's self-annihilating toxic drive and his scorn for the figure of humanity as it has been disclosed until now. A sign of the failure of man's custodianship, AIDS is the end of the credit line humanity thought it could have with some form of transcendence.<sup>88</sup>

The evocation of failed custodianship brings us to a final remark pertaining to the question of meaning in Guibert's version of allegory. Though blame may lie solely with man, it is the child who carries the burden of symbolization. In traditional allegory, as Walter Benjamin (quoting Novalis) notes: "Children are hopes, young girls are wishes and requests."<sup>89</sup> In Guibert's writing, it would seem that the child's signification could not be further from this cheery equivalence. What, then, does the child represent for Guibert? We have already explored how the abuse of children at the heart of Guibert's allegory contributes to the text's catachretic

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<sup>87</sup> We find a terrific description of the Infantero's red cape that recalls for our reading the virus' seductive coat. The red cape appears as the boy is dying: "Mais le bond de l'enfant est sabré par un revers, un déplacement de la robe courbée en cape dont le rose-rouge tournoyant le distrait de sa velléité, ce simple froissement trop coloré a un effet de fouet...[L'enfant] croit que sa cape est un animal, sa bête si bien dressée qu'elle peut changer ses couleurs, se ceinturer en robe ou rétrécir en éventail, se déplier en siège, se chiffonner en fleur ou sombrero ou boule trompeuses de papier tapie dans la poche, que la cape est la partenaire du géant, sa femme, son enfant volé, que lui-même pourra devenir la cape de la statue une fois qu'il l'aura séduite" (*VM*, 83).

<sup>88</sup> Avital Ronell, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994), 43-44 (my emphasis).

<sup>89</sup> Walter Benjamin quoted by Angus Fletcher, "Allegory Without Ideas," 24.

function by jarring the reader and forcing her to take stock of the cultural boundaries of acceptable testimony in play, but we are still somewhat puzzled as to what meaning to impart to these victims.

James Kincaid's analysis of the uncanniness of the child offers an insightful framework through which to consider the burden of signification. Kincaid, far from reducing the child to a symbol of futurity, emphasizes the ambivalent associations evoked by the child, the jarring oscillation between a feeling of loss (connected with nostalgia and envy) and a sense of promise: "The child is that which we are not but almost are, that which we yearn for so fiercely we almost resent it, that which we thought we saw in the mirror and almost wanted to possess yet feared we might. The child is the embodiment of desire and also its negation."<sup>90</sup> In *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*, Guibert seizes upon these paradoxical libidinal movements and exploits them. As we remarked in the beginning, for Guibert, the child is "obscene in its perfection"; the child bothers him precisely in the way he remains beyond compromise, culturally untouchable. He is pure, untainted, innocent; as such, he remains forever elusive, impassive and, most frustratingly, incommunicable. The child's body is the immune body, *par excellence*, virtually sealed off from signifying multiplicity. Guibert's treatment of the child—the way he knocks the child around, violates, desecrates and destroys it—amounts to the undoing of this immunity on his own terms. Following *ce corps trainé dans la boue* makes it impossible for the reader to be lulled into "blind sympathy" (to reinvok Schehr's fear) or easy sentimentality. All of a sudden, the child's body—its perfection sullied—becomes associated metonymically (his limbs are responsible for soliciting the desecration in the first place, particularly his "petite bite," the

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<sup>90</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 7.



constant provoker of forbidden temptation) with the most reprehensible and de-meaning impulses and acts (according to Western cultural mores). The reader, when confronted with this disturbing chain of associations, experiences uncomfortable identifications and desires that challenge both her sense of other and her sense of self, childhood being a universal stage through which self and other have both passed, a time forever lost, and thus a site of psychological ambivalence and anxiety. In this way, Guibert menaces the child's body so as better to "get at" his readers, not through the well-trodden paths of empathy and idealization but through an appeal to the reader's base humanity, both to the child and to the *Hombre* in each and every one of us.

### **Reproduction and Contagion**

The symbol of the child also inflects (infects) questions of Guibert's textual generation and imagined reception. Janet Beizer reminds us that textual production is often framed in terms of procreation, imagined along gendered metaphorical differences; texts are either "sired" ("metaphors of penetration, insemination, and dissemination") or they are birthed ("gestation, labor, and delivery").<sup>91</sup> In our analysis of Zola's *Le Docteur Pascal*, for instance, we highlighted the ambiguity of the birth metaphor underpinning his *Rougon-Macquart* series. Guibert also employs the metaphor of reproduction to discuss his relationship to writing, and particularly to writing issuing from his experience with AIDS. He, however, mixes the metaphors; insemination and gestation are confused, working along a logic of replaceability, one for the other, instead of linear cause and effect. Rather than valorizing successful, healthy conception and birth, Guibert repeatedly defaults to images of failed reproduction and the need for

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<sup>91</sup> Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 169-170.

alternative insemination to compensate for the lost offspring. Ultimately, metaphorical replacement—with its imperative of self-same replication—proves an unreliable method of textual dissemination. Guibert evokes, instead, a metonymical method—dissemination through spatial proximity. According to Guibert’s logic, texts, like viruses, are transferred through contact; they “contaminate” the reader in the etymological sense: com- "together" + \*tag-, base of tangere "to touch." They touch and change the reader from the inside out, embedding themselves and co-opting the mechanisms defining self.

### *Mort-né*

Still-born babies and failed conceptions abound in Guibert’s post-diagnosis works. One of the most disturbing passages that employs or perhaps hijacks the metaphor of reproduction is found in a short chapter in *A l’ami qui ne m’a pas sauvé la vie* in which Guibert attempts to recreate the sequence of couplings that led to his contraction of the virus. The narrator gives a brief medical/sexual chronology in which he offers an ambiguous portrait of this fateful encounter, reconfiguring it as a series of births.

He begins in 1980 when his long-time lover, Jules, gave him hepatitis. He then goes on:

Dans décembre 81 à Vienne, Jules baise sous mes yeux le soir de mon anniversaire un petit masseur blond et frisé qu’il a chopé dans un sauna, Arthur, qui a des taches et des croûtes sur tout le corps, à propos duquel j’écris le lendemain dans mon journal, dans une semi-inconscience car à cette époque on n’accorde qu’une foi relative au fléau: ‘En même temps nous prenions la maladie sur le corps de l’autre. Nous eussions pris la lèpre si nous l’avions pu.’ 82 a été l’année de l’annonce par Jules à Amsterdam de la procréation d’un premier enfant qui devait s’appeler Arthur et qui a fini dans la cuvette des chiottes, annonce qui m’a traumatisé au point que je priai Jules d’élever dans mon corps en échange une force négative, ‘un germe noir’...En décembre 82, à Budapest où [Jules] est venu

se recueillir sur la tombe de Bartók, je me fais juter dans le cul par un veau  
d'amerloque originaire de Kalamazoo, Tom, qui m'appelle son bébé. (AL 61)

We see the repeated substitutions in this passage, the oscillating movement between conceiving a child and “catching” the virus. On his birthday, a commemoration of his own entry into the world, Guibert looks on as Jules has sex with Arthur, a man “caught” (“chopé” like a disease) in a sauna. The occurrence “gives birth” to writing. The narrator cites himself in a journal entry that he half-consciously scribbled after the fact, musing about his chances of contraction. Akin to a heterosexual couple waiting to see whether their efforts have paid off, the narrator is hesitant to invest too much faith, not sure if the transfer of disease, despite valiant efforts, has “taken” (as indicated by the usage of the literary form of the hypothetical conditional perfect, “eussions pris”). The next year, the theme of reproduction is concretized when Jules announces first the procreation then the miscarriage of a presumed “real” child named Arthur, a failed pregnancy that perhaps also indicates a failed attempt at contracting the virus from the first Arthur (the reader is given no indication of who the mother of the baby is—in this chronology, the female body is entirely glossed over).<sup>92</sup> The narrator is traumatized by *la fausse couche*, offering himself as a replacement, a body he proposes as a receptacle for Jules’ “black seed” (the fact that “germ,” in English is the general word used to designate bacteria and viruses should not go unnoticed).<sup>93</sup> Later that year, while Jules is praying (*se re-cueillir*—harvesting the seed?) on

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<sup>92</sup> Arthur is a privileged name for Guibert. In 1983, he wrote a novel entitled *Les lubies d'Arthur* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1985) in which we find an example of male pregnancy. A fantastical character, “Bichon,” is inseminated by Arthur when he steals and drinks Arthur’s tears (18). The theme of male pregnancy anchors the text. Ultimately, though, the child is lost when Bichon dies in a car crash: “Bichon était empalé par le ventre sur un des troncs. Son enfant aussi devait avoir été transpercé par le pieu” (90). Guibert subjects another of his characters, Jayne, to a similar death by evisceration. As we will discuss, Jayne also gets pregnant but ultimately loses the child.

<sup>93</sup> There is a passing resemblance between the name “Arthur” and the Welsh *arrdhu* which means “very black” or “raven.”

Bartok's tomb, the narrator is squirted<sup>94</sup> "in the ass" by an American "calf from Kalamazoo." Out of this *jus de veau* comes a baby.<sup>95</sup> Though the exact moment of "conception" remains elusive, if our reading holds, the realization of this "bébé" also implies the successful transmission of the virus.

Questions surrounding a still born child—*un mort-né*—also figure prominently in *Le Paradis*, Guibert's last text published posthumously in 1992, shortly after his death. *Le Paradis* is another fantastical tale of travel and adventure between a character, Hervé Guibert, and his lover Jayne. Andrew Asibong convincingly argues that the representation of Guibert in *Le Paradis*—with his three-fold transformation into a heterosexual, hexagonal (his white "Frenchness" is highlighted and accentuated by the exotic surroundings), and healthy man—is undermined by the text's ultimate failure to negotiate boundaries—between man and woman, between Europe and Africa and, finally between life and death. Themes of illness, pregnancy, death and amnesia intricately intertwine in this text, paralleling the complicated narrative techniques that advance the story through flashbacks and flash forwards. Late in the text, for example, the possibility of having a child is explicitly tied to the couple's HIV-negative status: "Nous avons fait le test ensemble, nous n'avons pas le sida... Puisque nous n'avons pas le sida, pourquoi ne pas nous offrir un enfant?"<sup>96</sup> The open ended question, however, does not lead to a convincing decision. Though the couple may be HIV-negative, the narrator concludes that their

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<sup>94</sup> For a wonderful exploration of *jus* as both "suc" and "loi", see Larry Schehr, "Jus," *La revue des lettres modernes: le corps textuel d'Hervé Guibert* (1997), 213-228.

<sup>95</sup> In his autobiographical text, *Mes Parents*, Guibert reuses this analogy, comparing having cancer to having a baby. Speaking about his mother, he says: "Arrive le moment où l'on pense au cancer, à sa possibilité, à sa nécessité. Le cancer en soi est d'abord comme un enfant" (131).

<sup>96</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Le Paradis* (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), 127.

behavior—Jayne’s drinking and the narrator’s propensity to arouse Jayne by sticking a revolver in her vagina—still creates an environment that is less than propitious for baby-making and carrying.

We, in fact, know from the very beginning that no babies will come out of this text. *Le Paradis* begins as a mystery: the image of Jayne dead, her entrails hanging out, is the first that is offered to the reader. Progressively it is determined that Jayne, a champion swimmer, was eviscerated by a coral reef marked on the horizon by a “frange blanche et mousseuse” (27). Coral has taken up residence in her stomach where a baby used to be (42; 52-53). The text then piles on dramatic reminders relating to failed reproduction: Jayne finds the remnants of a fetus in an ice freezer and is reminded of her own still-born baby (95); the couple contract Chlamydia and are forced to abort their child due to a lack of reliable access to antibiotics (100-101). The *blennorragie* runs unimpeded between the two bodies, which, “troués comme des passoires,” keep nothing in: “On se refilera sans fin ces *chlamydiae*, jusqu’à la mort définitive de nos organes génitaux hypertrophiés et troués comme des passoires” (134). The narrator becomes obsessed with the origin of the Chlamydia, suspecting Jane of having had an affair with one of the African boys who worked at their bungalow. Fears of HIV surface as the dark undercurrent to this flow.<sup>97</sup>

In view of these concerns, the narrator and Jayne attempt to build up their immunity. Jayne, for example, as a preventative measure, tries to habituate her body to the dirty African

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<sup>97</sup> There is only one character declared HIV-positive in the text, a young boy that the narrator and Jayne see in a bar on their way from Bamako to Ségou. “Dans la pièce sombre et presque fraîche où nous avons bu la bière glacée était assis, quasiment allongé, tapi tout au fond d’un coin d’ombre, un petit garçon décharné, immobile et silencieux, qui me fixait avec ses trop grands yeux creusés dans le visage...En sortant de la casemate j’ai chuchoté au père : ‘Qu’est-ce qu’il a ?’ Il a répondu : ‘Le sida’” (87).

water, “immunizing” herself by drinking small doses each day: “Je suis immunisée, je me suis entraînée à boire chaque matin un peu du filet maigre de la douche, à doses homéopathiques, maintenant mon corps est résistant” (104). Despite their best efforts to bolster—and even remold—the self against its hostile environs, ultimately the body’s borders do not hold up. Jayne endures a physical undoing. She succumbs to illness to the point where she can no longer drink the water (“Jayne est malade. Tout le monde s’attendait que ce soit moi qui tombe malade, et voilà Jayne clouée au sol, fiévreuse, transpirante, la peau jaune et les yeux hagards qui me regardent à l’envers quand je viens lui porter un peu d’eau”) (128). She dies tragically, though ironically not from the water itself, but from what lurks underneath the water.

### ***Retrouver le corps d’enfant***

Many critics have argued that Jayne is, in fact, the last incarnation of Vincent. Vincent was the original “bad” child, “l’enfant disgracieux” from *Voyage avec deux enfants* whose “obscene” body torments and tempts the narrator throughout the text. He is one of the most consistently recurring characters in Guibert’s work, though he is often disguised. The argument for seeing him as the basis for multiple iterations—and in particular the iteration of Jayne—is compelling.<sup>98</sup> The fact that he is killed off in two books, both at the very beginning of the story, supports this theory. In *Fou de Vincent* (a text Guibert published in 1989, the same year he published *Incognito*), Vincent dies from jumping out of a window trying to parachute using a bathrobe. In *Le Paradis*, Jayne—his most radical disguise—is eviscerated after an accidental

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<sup>98</sup> See Arnaud Genon, *Hervé Guibert: Vers une esthétique postmoderne* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2007), 61-63. For a detailed analysis of the character of Vincent in Guibert’s journal writing, see Clara Orban, “Writing, Time, and AIDS in the Works of Hervé Guibert,” *Literature and Medicine* vol.18, no.1 (1999): 132-150.

collision with a sandbar of coral. Unlike previous texts that feature Vincent (or one of his *sosies*), *Le Paradis* is not explicitly written in journal form (as we noted, it is fiction); but in both the journals (*Voyage avec deux enfants* and *Fou de Vincent*) and the novel, the story progresses with leaps and starts, jumping forward and backward in time, resisting any sort of linearity. One theme remains consistent, though: Vincent, in his many disguises, serves as a receptacle for illness, as a means of cleansing the self through projected abjection. In the early text, *Voyage avec deux enfants* (1982), Guibert documents his seduction of Vincent, playing with the word “sacre fils/ sacrifice” to strip the child’s body, “obscène de perfection,” of its chastity.<sup>99</sup> In *Fou de Vincent*, picking up where *Voyage avec deux enfants* leaves off, the narrator contaminates Vincent through the boy’s own words, ventriloquizing him: “Vincent me disait : j’ai des champignons, il disait : j’ai la gale, il disait : j’ai une syph : il disait : j’ai des poux, et j’attirais son corps contre le mien.”<sup>100</sup> The narrator is not seeking transcendence of illness or transformation for Vincent or for himself—rather he is performing transference, alternating pronouns between “il” and “je” to achieve the desired effect of confusion to the point of coincidence; the two merge, the “il” is silenced.

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<sup>99</sup> “[L’enfant maussade] me dit qu’il est encore chaste et qu’il ne veut pas sacrifier sa virginité dans les bras d’un homme, alors je vénère sa pureté et je le sacre fils” (Guibert, *Le Voyage avec deux enfants*, 93). A few pages later, the narrator directly addresses Vincent, naming him for the first time, and refers back to the conversation about sacrifice, threatening him if he doesn’t “go back” on his language: “Vincent, si tu ne renies pas ce langage qui nous a unis l’autre soir, je te sacrerait fils unique et ta parure de sacre sera cette robe rose à volant que j’ai repérée pour toi au souk” (98).

<sup>100</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Fou de Vincent* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), 30. This image alludes to one of Guibert’s favorite characters, Saint Julien l’hospitalier, who, in Flaubert’s version of the story, embraces a leper at the end, an action of compassion that redeems him from his sins. The leper reveals himself as Jesus, and the story ends as he and Julian soar up to Heaven. Saint Julien de l’hospitalier is a very important reference in Guibert’s work. It is the name behind which Muzil chooses to hide in *A l’ami*. Arnaud Genon proposes a reading of *Les lubies d’Arthur* as an inversion of Flaubert’s short story where Arthur, instead of being redeemed at the end, is condemned (Genon, *Vers une esthétique postmoderne*, 137-138).

Returning to our discussion of *Le Paradis*, Jayne, the final incarnation of Vincent, is also projected as an elusive site of illness and contagion. Jayne is killed off; her body dismembered. After *Le Paradis*, she has no hope for textual resuscitation. However, Vincent's secrets are kept by Jayne. We never find out who she really is, where she comes from, or what she is working on. Her disappearance strikes the reader as just as foreign as her improbable story and her improbable life.

The narrator of *Le Paradis*, on the other hand, to whom we have more access, endures a much more profound dissolution of self; it is less a physical than a psychic undoing, a deep “dérèglement” that culminates in “un oubli de soi” that shakes the foundations of his experience. Lost memory—and with it lost self—is at stake in the text, though, in contrast to *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* where memory is willfully forgotten or suppressed, here it has somehow, inexplicably, slipped away. Did the narrator go to Africa? What did the narrator encounter there? What did it mean? We learn that, three days after his return from Africa, the narrator “*a disjoncté*,” falling into a coma (*Le Paradis* 59). His memory comes back very slowly; only writing can help reconstitute his experiences as they emerge from the “zones d’ombre” (83). The narrator turns to accounts written by other authors—Rimbaud, Roussel—to anchor his own memories and, most importantly, the writing that is helping to retrieve—or perhaps carve out—these experiences.<sup>101</sup> Ultimately, though, instead of allowing the narrator to

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<sup>101</sup> Ross Chambers identifies “Rimbaud syndrome” as a common link between Hervé Guibert, Pascal de Duve and Cyril Collard, three writers who were the first to give voice to their experience with AIDS in the French context: “This syndrome (before AIDS I’d have called it a ‘complex’) combines the charm exerted by the figure of the ‘rebellious angel’—young men of ambiguous, androgynous charm (sometimes bisexual), seemingly intent on a short but intensely lived life, and whose attitudes defy the conventional mores and values of their society—with the cultural attractiveness of intoxication, *griserie*, and the dark sublime: what Baudelaire, an earlier hero of this cultural tradition, would have called (in direct reference to Blaise Pascal) *le gouffre*, the abyss, and what...I have been calling ‘the edge,’ and ‘extremity’” (Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 180).



regain control, this process leads to greater confusion to the point where the most fundamental givens—the very words propelling him forward—are endangered:

Je suis devenu amnésique en une nuit. Je suis allé en Afrique pour trouver l'oubli et m'oublier moi-même, Rimbaud pour effacer son passé...loin de ses frasques de jeunesse et de son écriture d'antan. Les mots sont de plus en plus doubles, j'ai failli écrire enfant, ça sonne pareil et la dactylo n'aurait pu rétablir ce mot une fois que je serais incapable de me relire et de me corriger, et à quoi bon tout ce tintouin pour un mot qui n'est pas un contresens de surcroît. Laisser courir. Ne plus savoir écrire. (*Le Paradis*, 112)

The child creeps up in his writing, the return of the repressed. In this passage, the child is a synonym for days of old, time long since passed and over. But, in light of Rimbaud's life story, it also signifies the abrupt end of creation. Rimbaud ceased being a writer once he went to Africa, moving on from his "*écriture d'antan/enfant*"; the childhood writing indicates a limit beyond which writing dies. Paradoxically, childhood, as the irretrievable, incommunicable and thus dead, is also that toward which the narrator moves, a state of increasing loss and disorientation. "Je suis perdu. Je ne retrouve plus mon chemin. Je me suis perdu. Je suis un enfant" (125). This sensation of becoming/being a child, a state of utter closure, also hauntingly concludes *A l'ami*: "La mise en abîme de mon livre se referme sur moi...Mes muscles ont fondu. J'ai enfin retrouvé mes jambes et mes bras d'enfant" (*AL* 284).

### *Le Club des 5*

Facing death ultimately involves regression to earliest life. There is a biographical explanation that might tentatively elucidate the intimate link between childhood and death for Guibert. In *Mes Parents*, his most autobiographical text written at roughly the same time as he was writing *Vous m'avez fait former des fantômes*, Guibert recounts the story of his mother's

horror at discovering she was pregnant with him: “Ma mère me raconte alors, pour la première fois, que les neuf mois pendant lesquels elle m’a attendu ont été les plus horrible de sa vie: c’est mon père qui l’avait forcée à cet enfantement...pendant ces neuf mois son désir hystérique était de m’expulser, elle se faisait tomber dans des escaliers pour me perdre. Lorsque enfin [sic] on m’a extrait de son ventre, elle suppliait : ‘Pourvu qu’il soit mort ! Pourvu qu’il soit mort-né !’” (*Mes Parents* 124). His mother recants this statement once she sees her new baby, but for Guibert the dead-born association sticks. The narrator later lingers on the cruelty of having a child, speculating about his own parental instincts: “Si moi j’en avais un, je serais encore pire: je le violerais, je le tuerais, je ne le laisserais pas m’échapper...” (125)—precisely the instincts enacted in *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes*.

There are, in fact, two "real" families in Guibert’s life. Guibert takes great pains in distancing himself from his own parents. As previously discussed, he kills off his father in *Mes Parents* and repeatedly emphasizes how little tolerance he has for his mother, even as she goes through treatment for breast cancer (which he compares to “un enfantement” [*Mes Parents*, 131]). Guibert refuses to tell them of his illness: “L’avouer à mes parents, ce serait m’exposer à ce que le monde entier me chie au même moment sur la gueule, ce serait me faire chier sur la gueule par tous les minables de la terre, laisser ma gueule concasser par leur merde infecte. Mon souci principal, dans cette histoire, est de mourir à l’abri du regard de mes parents” (*AL* 16). The reader is struck by the virulence of the narrator’s resolution and the abjection to which he feels he would be exposing himself were he to tell his family. His exclusion of them in his life goes as far as officially disowning them: “Quelques mois après, je remets solennellement à mes parents une enveloppe ‘à n’ouvrir qu’à ma mort’...Quel est ce biscornu et inutile besoin de leur dire que je les déshérite, moi qui ne possède rien?” (*Mes parents* 108-09)

But there is also another family in play, with children at risk. Guibert's long-time lover, T. (Jules in *A l'ami*) is bisexual and has two children with a woman named Christine (Berthe in the text). As Hélène Jaccomard rightly notes, save for the character of Claudette Dumouchel, Guibert's heroic doctor in *Le protocole compassionnel*, and his great aunts with whom Guibert is fascinated and who appear frequently as characters, very few women occupy pages in Guibert's writing and even fewer mothers.<sup>102</sup> Berthe is the only positively portrayed procreator, "...la personne que j'admira le plus au monde," Guibert affirms (*AL* 163). In *A l'ami*, the reader is left in the dark regarding Berthe's HIV status as is she (at least textually); we never find out definitively whether she (or the two children) has contracted the virus. But her sealed fate is assumed and, with Guibert, Jules and the two kids, she is a member of the "Club des 5," a family "soudée dans l'aventure du Malheur" (223). As for the children, in contrast to their typical invocation in his work, the narrator of *A l'ami* professes an undying love for Berthe's kids. His declaration stems from an imagined shared destiny similar to the one he experienced with Muzil.

J'aimais ces enfants, plus que ma chair, comme la chair de ma chair bien qu'elle ne le soit pas, et sans doute plus que si elle l'avait été vraiment, peut-être sinistrement parce que le virus HIV m'avait permis de prendre une place dans leur sang, de partager avec eux cette destinée commune du sang, bien que je priasse chaque jour qu'elle ne le soit à aucun prix, bien que mes conjurations s'exerçasse continuellement à séparer mon sang du leur pour qu'il n'y ait jamais eu par aucun intermédiaire aucun point de contact entre eux, mon amour pour eux était pourtant un bain de sang virtuel dans lequel je les plongeais avec effroi. (227)

We see here the true force of Guibert's reversal of *idées reçues* concerning children: solidarity is experienced with them not because they will continue a legacy for Guibert, but rather because they are destined for a similar demise. Guibert uses the metaphor of layers of skin as protection

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<sup>102</sup> Hélène Jaccomard, "Du sexisme dans les écrits du sida," *French Cultural Studies*, vol.9, pt.3 (27: 1996): 321-335.

from blood that, as we discussed above, both threatens contamination but also founds community. In this passage, with its repeated “bien que,” an “although” or “despite” which only heightens the sense of inevitability, we know that these children will be touched, their immunity compromised, because love itself is poured out as virtual blood, blood that is always already contaminated. HIV, more so than other viruses, permits contamination through mediation. Guibert shared his blood with Jules who fathered the children. A subsequent diagnosis of HIV for the children would indelibly connect them to Guibert. In their *séropositivité*, they would be of the same blood, of the same community.

*J'attrape tout...*

In fact, Guibert's creative paradigm—both the writing and the reading—is most aptly captured by this notion of contamination through mediation. In *Fou de Vincent*, Guibert articulates the possibility of incorporating an abjected body by bringing it close to the self: “...et j'attirais son corps contre le mien.”<sup>103</sup> He gives us another example of how this logic of contagion might pertain to the reader. In *Incognito*, Lenoir's fears of contamination apply to even more remote forms of contact. Someone can “catch” AIDS simply from reading about it: “Ce n'est pas ma veine: j'attrape tout ce que je touche, tout ce que je lis qui existe. C'est en lisant les journaux que j'ai contracté le sida. Je suis immunodéficientaire” (I 222). The contaminated text “leaks” into the reader. Guibert offers an example of this transmission when discussing his relationship to Thomas Bernhard whose invasive, “metastasizing” writing takes over Guibert's powers of expression: “...parallèlement donc au virus HIV la métastase

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<sup>103</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Fou de Vincent*, 30.

bernhardienne s'est propagée à la vitesse grand V dans mes tissus et mes reflexes vitaux d'écriture, elle la phagocyte, elle l'absorbe, la captive, en détruit tout naturel et toute personnalité pour étendre sur elle sa domination ravageuse" (AL 232-33).

Retroviral writing, like the virus, penetrates, transforms, and engulfs, co-opting words and style, transforming the reader—and the reader's own writing—from within. For Leslie Hill, Guibert's response to Bernhard (to whom Guibert refers as T.B.), his movement towards imitation, constitutes a line of defense against its metastasizing powers: "...[Guibert] se défend contre les ravages de Bernhard seulement en l'imitant, en tentant ainsi de déjouer cette prose qui rivalise la sienne, et donc de la transformer, par homéopathie, en une protection et non pas un appareil d'extermination."<sup>104</sup> Just as the "substance immonogène de Mockney," the bogus cure Bill has promised to the narrator in *A l'ami*, is meant to combat the virus by imitating it, thus tricking the immune system to protect itself, so too is Guibert's appropriation of Bernhard's style an effort to stimulate his own expressive defenses. As Hill clarifies the mechanism of self-preservation in question: "[La substance immonogène], en imitant le virus, déclencherait de la part du corps une réponse immuno-protectrice qui défendrait ainsi contre le virus. De même, en écrivant à la manière de TB, Guibert pense peut-être pouvoir se protéger de lui, et ainsi en fait, par moyen interposé, se protéger, sur le plan de l'écriture, des affres à venir du sida" (ibid.).

However, adopting strategies of imitation, masking so as better to defeat is not simply a question of self-preservation. Indeed, like Thomas Bernhard's writing, the virus acts as a generative source of writing. As we noted above, Guibert uses the metaphor of the colander to describe the way the S.T.D. flows between the narrator and Jayne, their bodies "troués comme

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<sup>104</sup> Hill, "Ecrire—La Mort," 98.

des passoires.” For writing to live on, it must be able to run, “elle doit couler de source.”<sup>105</sup>

There is no benefit—no possibility of creation—when things remained neatly contained and sealed off. On the contrary, watertight writing ferments and sours, loses its fizz. Hector Lenoir, Guibert’s alter ego in *Incognito*, laments the flatness of his autobiographical project, his boredom in trying to tie up all of the loose ends of his life: “...C’est comme si j’avais enfermé quinze ans de ma vie, avec tous ses personnages, dans un grand sac, que j’ai solidement ficelé, pour qu’il n’y ait plus de fuites, plus d’étincelles, pour que la synthèse soit bien étanche...” (*I* 176). And *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* only advances when the burlap sacks holding the infant bodies are opened, or, still more tellingly, punctured. These holes give birth, so to speak, to story,

The individual’s—and expression’s—“erosion,” the holes created by the virus, undo impediments to contact and unlock the possibility of newly imagined direct connections (*PC* 180). Muzil states in *A l’ami*: “Cette menace qui flotte a créé de nouvelles complicités, de nouvelles tendresses, de nouvelles solidarités. Avant on n’échangeait jamais une parole, maintenant on se parle...” (*AL* 30). This, for Guibert, is the positivity implied in the seropositivity. At one point, the narrator imagines fusing into Jules, also seropositive, an echo of the ethereal twins who, during their combat, reattached to each other becoming one in *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes*: “Deux sidas c’était trop pour un seul homme, puisque j’avais désormais la sensation que nous formions un seul et même être, sans miroir au milieu” (180). The bond of two expands to five, once Jules’ wife and two children are included under the umbrella.

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<sup>105</sup> Donner, “Pour répondre aux quelques questions,” 149.

The virus equally opens connections with those who are not seropositive but who also live in that space of uncertainty blurring life and death. HIV creates holes in time, speeding up the clock to allow the narrator to catch up to his ninety-five year old aunt Suzanne: “Ca me rapproche de Suzanne, qui a elle-même quatre-vingt-quinze ans, ce serait comme un sort qu’elle m’aurait jeté pour que nous continuions à nous aimer malgré nos soixante ans de différence...Maintenant nous pouvons de nouveau nous comprendre et communiquer” (PC 130). Together, they share in their “trous de memoires.” But most importantly, *le sida* opens up the text, preventing it from closing in on itself as it appeals to this “frange d’incertitude, qui est commune à tous les malades du monde” (AL 11).

### ***Prendre le relais***

A porous text allows for passage on both sides of the page. Three-fourths of the way through *Le protocole compassionnel*, the narrator declares that he has renounced writing (194), a declaration that leads to two distinct openings. First, he begins incorporating letters received from people in response to *A l’ami*, letters that give him advice about possible cures, ways to take care of himself better. One letter ultimately persuades him to embark on a new adventure—and to relaunch his writing. This letter—and the trip he takes in response to its promises of cure—result in an intratextual incursion entitled *Miracle à Casablanca*. The writing of this segment of *Le protocole* stands in stark contrast to the rest of the text. *Miracle à Casablanca* unfolds chronologically, in linear progression. In relaying his experience with the mystical healer in Morocco, Guibert resorts to much more traditional story-telling devices. He develops long dialogues and avoids his usual fast-and-loose play with the signifying chain. In a certain

way, the incorporation of this adventure into the text—entirely spurred by an outside “intervention”—anchors Guibert’s writing and assures a more reliable passage from writer to reader.

The second opening comes in the form of a proposal by “[l]a productrice charognarde” who asks him whether he would have any interest, since he is not writing anymore, in making a film: “...je vous propose d’occuper cette zone intermédiaire en réalisant un film dont vous seriez à la fois l’auteur et le sujet” (*PC* 199). Guibert agrees. “La pudeur ou l’impudeur” aired on TF1 on Jan 30, 1992, shortly after he died on December 27, 1991 from complications associated with a suicide attempt, the realization of sorts of the experimental project he had laid out for himself so many years before in *La mort propagande*. Through the metaphorical hole of the lens, the spectator watches. The film opens with a scene of Guibert, sitting in a large red chair as he talks on the phone, relating his most recent blood results and medical horrors. In fact, many scenes depict Guibert in the midst of engaging in some form of secondary communication: talking on the phone, listening to someone read a letter imploring him to reconsider his lifestyle, assisting him at the doctor’s office when he is discussing a friend’s condition, contemplating suicide with his Aunt Suzanne. One haunting scene shows Guibert viewing the video footage he has taken of his operation to remove a ganglion from his throat (a scene he also writes about in his hospital journal: *Cytomégalo*virus). The spectator witnesses Guibert’s reactions of horror and awe as the doctors open him up. The light “censures” the blood, casting an eerie blue haze over everything, emphasizing the several layers between spectator and the “event.”

What interest is there in showing—or watching—these moments of secondary mediation: telephone calls, letters, conversations and even intimate video footage? In an early passage in *Le*



*protocole*, the narrator entertains the thought of exposing himself nude on stage in Avignon. He discusses this prospect with Jules and Hector (Bianchiotti), the Argentinian writer and Guibert's good friend. He decides against it, finally feeling a protective instinct toward this body that has been put through every kind of *supplice* imaginable: "il y aurait eu un défi, une tentative de courage et de dignité dans la limite la plus extrême, maintenant il n'y avait plus que de la pitié, une très grande compassion pour ce corps ruiné, qu'il fallait préserver des regards. Ce n'était pas trop tôt" (31). Guibert references his very first text, *La mort propagande*, in which he envisioned exactly this kind of performance as the culmination of his artistic *œuvre*: "J'avais retrouvé des textes, écrits quand j'avais vingt ans, qui décrivaient déjà ce spectacle, cette maladie et cette nudité" (ibid.). With this acknowledgement, though, he tacitly establishes the distance he has taken from these initial ambitions of putting death on scene, of donning "the ultimate disguise." He has a different legacy in mind for his creative *corpus*. Exhibition is no longer his motive. His focal point has shifted, moved from displaying his body as a primary source to documenting—conserving—his subjective, incorporated experience from one point removed.

Ross Chambers, in his continued elaboration of "writings of extremity," proposes what he calls "metaphors of portability." One of these metaphors, "relay," describes an instance where the writer acts as a "mediating agent, connecting or attempting to (re)connect those who cannot speak (the dead) and those (the living) who seem oblivious to their fate."<sup>106</sup> In Guibert's later texts, the ethical imperative—and hope—of relay is explicitly laid out. Fittingly, the metaphor he chooses to facilitate the "laying over" ("relay" originated as a hunting term from the 15<sup>th</sup> century meaning to "leave tired dogs behind in order to take fresh ones") is that of transfusion.

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<sup>106</sup> Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 37.

Etymologically derived from the Latin meaning to “pour across” (trans—across, “fundere”—pour), it is through transfusion—and all of the dangers that transfusion implies in this context—that Guibert imagines keeping alive the symbolic space. As part of the episode we quoted in the very first section, when the narrator in *Le protocole compassionnel* subtly equates his ability to carry (trans-port) his own blood across the room without falling “dans les pommes” to mastering medical-speak (“le jargon des médecins”), he, for the first time, directly addresses the reader: “J’aime que ça passe le plus directement possible entre *ma pensée et la vôtre*, que le style n’empêche pas la transfusion” (PC 123). Through Guibert’s techniques of disguised trickery and slippage, through catachretic practices that force the reader to confront the obscene, the unmentionable that reifies cultural boundaries and defines her own sense of self, the reader feels her internal resistance collapse. Her response to the writing is not sentimental compassion; she is not blinded by an overwhelming sympathy with this text written from a place where life is petering out. Rather, like the narrator in *Gangsters* (another fictional text written, like *Vous m’avez fait former des fantômes* and *Incognito*, during the blurry time around Guibert’s diagnosis), she cannot help but take it in. She is “comme une éponge qui ne comprend pas pourquoi elle prend l’eau, par une transfusion immédiate [elle a] capté son malheur, il est en [elle], mais impossible de l’analyser; [elle] devien[t] l’armure... percée en une seconde d’un milliard de trous perfides.”<sup>107</sup> The recipient of a linguistic transfusion, the reader picks up—or catches—the “ça” and all that it entails.<sup>108</sup> She is contaminated in spite of herself.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Hervé Guibert, *Gangsters* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988), 62.

<sup>108</sup> For an analysis of the metaphor of “transfusion,” see Isabelle Décarie, “*Le protocole compassionnel* d’Hervé Guibert: Une écriture-transfusion,” *French Prose in 2000* (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 241-248.

<sup>109</sup> David Caron also evokes the the notion of contamination in Guibert’s texts. While I focus on the mechanisms by which the metaphor of contamination allows Guibert to pry and keep open the symbolic reception

## The Unavowable

The figure of Berthe—of Christine—offers a model of how to live through the contamination and carry out the imperatives of this corporal legacy. In *A l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie*, we learn that the narrator marries Berthe (just as Guibert marries Christine in “real” life) to assure that she and her children will receive all the benefits from *les droits d'auteur*. Unlike Muzil, Guibert protects his inheritance, making sure his family (i.e. his parents or siblings) does not receive the rights to his story. More importantly, not only does Christine inherit Guibert's estate, but we also learn she is responsible for taking over and completing his literary *corpus*. In the preface to *Le mausolée des amants*, she is credited with having typed the last 51 pages of Guibert's journal and helping to publish the manuscript. Through these acts, she literalizes the form of relay and accompaniment epitomizing Guibert's alternative creative paradigm.

In *Mausolée des amants*, we find the following passage entitled “the unavowable”:

L'inavouable: en 1980, à La Rochelle, fouillant chez mes parents dans les cartons de photos pour *L'image fantôme*, je tombai sur une série de photos en noir et blanc, prises par mon père sur une plage, qui me montraient, en maillot de bain, tournoyant avec une serviette, perdant l'équilibre, le rattrapant, sur le point de tomber : ces photos étaient choquantes comme celles des Biafraïens décharnés qu'on publie pour symboles de la faim dans le monde, prises à distance, comme si mon père m'avait surpris dans l'outrance de ce dévoilement, le mitraillant comme les reporters tout autour du point mortel, ou document d'un médecin nazi, sadisme

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between his writing and the reader, paradoxically rendering its signifiers “resistant” by lowering the resistance of the reader, Caron focuses on the dangers of the uncontrolled circulation of signifiers and, specifically, the role of gossip in Guibert's texts. He writes: “Guibert eventually reclaims contamination not only as a destructive but as a productive process. Just like HIV infection, diseased discourse can then spread like an epidemic...” Caron, *Aids in French Culture*, 139.

ou conjuration : c'était une squelette qui voltigeait avec la corolle ou le drapeau d'une serviette de bain, coiffé d'une massive chevelure, curieusement joyeux et courageux dans son être si charnellement démuné. Je déchirai les photos en mille morceaux et repensai plusieurs années de suite que je n'avais pris garde de détruire aussi les négatifs.<sup>110</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint, exactly, what pushes the narrator to tear up these childhood photos of himself. Is it the identification that he experiences with his father's desire to exploit or document the skinny child's "outrageous" act of unveiling? Is it jealousy in the face of the child's seeming ability to find joy and courage in spite of his lack of flesh? Unlike so many writers for whom the child stands as the comforting memory of what once was, Guibert cannot tolerate this former embodiment, it, too, "obscene de perfection" precisely because it demonstrates no interiority. A closed body, it remains incommunicable, untransferable and untouchable. The unavowable act of destruction is Guibert's means of establishing a certain kind of contact.

Here the act of shredding leads to the irrecuperable destruction of the closed, immune body. But for Guibert, this is a good thing. As we already remarked, a good *corp(us)* is an open *corp(us)*. Another of Guibert's texts revalorizes the process of cutting and reassembling, showing its redemptive power. In a Barthesian moment, the narrator remarks: "Le lecteur aura toujours la possibilité de composer un autre livre à partir du matériel fourni, je lui livre donc avec d'imaginaires ciseaux..."<sup>111</sup> In the age of AIDS, it makes sense that Guibert would switch metaphors, replacing the metaphor of cutting and recomposition with one of textual transformation via a "pouring through." Ultimately, it is this kind of a relationship that Guibert

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<sup>110</sup> Guibert, *Le Mausolée des amants*, 412.

<sup>111</sup> Hervé Guibert, "Le roman posthume," *La piqûre d'amour et autres textes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 84.

establishes with the reader, one of absorption and integration, a redressing from within that inalterably modifies the reader's imagination and, along with it, body.

A vignette taken from Guibert's book on photography, *L'image fantôme*, to which he makes reference in the quote about his childhood photos, perfectly illustrates his alternative paradigm of transmission and incorporation. In an excerpt entitled, "L'image cancéreuse," Guibert describes an experience he had with a photograph of a young man stolen from a friend's house. His treatment of this photo differs radically from his violent response and destruction of his own young image. The narrator describes the progressive deterioration of the photo as it traverses time. The young man's face has become covered with spots, scratches, pigmentations: "Il était vérolé. Mon ami malade."<sup>112</sup> There comes a moment to "bury" the photo, and, not knowing what else to do, the narrator decides to wear it pressed against his bare skin like a corset. One day, he goes to remove it and realizes that the remains of the image had worn off on his skin: "Chaque pigment chimique du papier avait trouvé sa place dans un des pores de ma peau. Et la même image se recomposait exactement, à l'envers. Le transfert l'avait délivré de sa maladie..." (169). Guibert recombines possible contamination through clothing with the metaphor of the photo again seven years later in *Incognito*. Speaking of the gypsy who is assumed HIV positive (and who, therefore, is also the suspected "assassin" in the text), the narrator concludes: "Puisque ma peau a touché des vêtements qui recouvraient la peau du Gitan couverte de taches blanches de dépigmentation, son tee-shirt imbibé va les décalquer sur la mienne comme un négatif photographique. Je suis positif, très sensible en ce qui concerne la reproduction" (I 222).

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<sup>112</sup> Hervé Guibert, *L'image fantôme* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1981), 167.

Perhaps Guibert is hoping a similar kind of transfer will happen with his spectators and his readers: that a part of his image will embed itself in the spectator and stick, thus freeing him of the burdens of representation. Ross Chambers writes at length about the writing of accompaniment, even identifying Guibert's treatment of Muzil (Foucault) as an example of such. Chamber writes: "The survivor is *not* the other, and has another life; yet the survivor's responsibility—to continue the other's life by telling the story of the other's death—is of a kind that, out of solidarity, cannot be refused, especially when one both survives the other and is conscious of sharing the other's fate, 'un sort thanatologique commun.'"<sup>113</sup> With his transfusion through writing and transference through film and image, with his refusal to entertain the possibility of reproducing the self, the reader/spectator will agree to accompany him, to witness and recount even a small bit of what she has seen and read. Though she may not share the exact same 'sort,' Guibert enlarges the space, facilitates her "contamination" so that she, too, can include herself in the ranks of this "frange d'incertitude," and thus of the promisingly impressionable. In this universe, paradoxically, it would seem that holes in immunity, a lack of being sealed up tight, keep the text—and the legacy—if not standing, then at least flowing. And should the reader lose hope in his or her ability to carry on, just as he did with Muzil, Guibert reassures from the other side, still casting his nets: "Et toi, lecteur ou lectrice de ces lignes, si tu n'as plus non plus aucun espoir, crois-moi, tu peux toujours le retrouver, même si tu te sens seul(e) sache que depuis ma tombe je veux te réconforter comme on vient de le faire pour moi."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, 248.

<sup>114</sup> Guibert, *Le mausolée des amants*, 375.

## Conclusion: Declining (the) Subject

“...[O]ne is not born an organism. Organisms are made, they are constructs of a world-changing kind. The constructions of an organism’s boundaries, the job of the discourses of immunology are particularly potent mediators of the experiences of sickness and death for industrial and post-industrial people.”<sup>1</sup>

I came upon the title of my dissertation reading Timothy Campbell’s illuminating introduction to Roberto Esposito’s *Bios*. Discussing Esposito’s reaction to Ronald Dworkin’s unequivocal defense of biotechnology and what Dworkin calls “playing God” in the service of “mak[ing] the lives of future generations of human beings longer and more full of talent and hence achievement,” Campbell pinpoints the faults in the argument:

Dworkin fails to weigh properly the singularity of all life, which is to say that as long as the emphasis is placed on *the individual* and other traditional forms used to *decline the subject*, Dworkin’s perspective on life is disastrous for any affirmative biopolitics...[I]n such a scheme, ethic individualism quickly becomes the norm that transcends life; it is a norm of life that limits *life to the confines of an individual subject and individual body*; in this it operates, as it has traditionally done, to immunize the community and modernity itself, from the immanence of impersonal, singular life.<sup>2</sup>

Campbell critiques Dworkin's defense of the "old" categories (and one category in particular) defining life: "the individual," broken, in a predictably Cartesian fashion, into the "individual subject" and "individual body." These are the "traditional forms" that have been used through "modernity" to "decline the subject." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "to decline"

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway, “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 208.

<sup>2</sup> Esposito, *Bios*, xxxvii.

has four different meanings. As an intransitive verb it can mean: 1) to become smaller, fewer or less; to decrease or to diminish in strength or quality; or 2) to move downwards (as in the sun declined in the sky). As a transitive verb it connotes: 3) to politely refuse (an invitation or offer); or 4) (in grammar) to state the forms of (a noun, pronoun, or adjective) corresponding to case, number and gender. Campbell is loosely employing the fourth definition in the quote above, indicating the ways in which the "subject" is inflected by all the factors that go in to maintaining "the individual." From Campbell's point of view, it would seem that these "traditional" categories have lost their value in sustaining life on a scale greater than what is the "individual norm."

"The individual subject"—paradigmatically incarnated by the white, heterosexual male—has bumped up against his limits, a collision that has, effectively, sent him into a decline. The stage of modernity in which we are living—what Bauman has called "liquid modernity"—is eroding the power structures and institutions that have previously been immune (more or less) to the vicissitudes of history and that have kept the ramparts of the "individual subject" afloat. While patriarchy is still largely in place—men still predominantly call the shots in many of society's big arenas—it has faced and is facing strong forces of contestation. Many more people have voices now—women, people of color, the previously colonized, the developing, to name only a few categories—and all are eager to step up and take the microphone. These discursive confrontations have called embodied Man out and dragged him into the light where he once existed as the invisible rule.

Anxieties about this newfound visibility have coalesced around the concept of immunity, a metaphor that straddles the discursive realms of law and biology. Immunity (like the unconscious when talking about the psyche) is a poorly understood force that shapes the



biological individual from the inside. While the age of liquid modernity is by and large an age of surface, immunity holds the trump card precisely because it draws the subject into his depth, into his unique biology. It brings the body's interior to the fore, and this because we have not yet figured out a way to live without our bodies, with their bones, blood and organs. Even if part of us has taken flight into the virtual ether with its endless possibilities of expression and expansion, our bodies—and the subjectivity tied to them—are still stuck in front of the screen, fingers tapping away, heart beating.

Nicolas Rose has analyzed the assumptions undergirding calls, like Dworkin's, to "play God" and "optimize" resources in the service of making lives "longer" and "more full of talent." In our dream world, there would be Viagra for every organ.<sup>3</sup> While maintenance of the individual's standing in society is not new, particular attention to preserving the soma is, resulting, Rose argues, in a new ontology of the self.<sup>4</sup> Rose references Ian Hacking who argues that such life "optimization" has redefined the body in terms of its mechanical parts: organs are exchangeable; biology can always be altered or re-engineered.<sup>5</sup> Though a person might be "dead" (i.e. brain dead), the body still has use-value and can help promote someone else's life. Under this regime, we are *not* our bodies, our bodies are simply the reparable structures we inhabit. As good "bio-citizens," our prime responsibility is to maximize our "bio-value" by eating well, watching our weight, taking care of ourselves, seeing the doctor regularly. However, birth is still a crap shoot. Fears about heredity, susceptibility, and predisposition have

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<sup>3</sup> There has been a dramatic upswing in the use over the last few years of a drug called Provigil. Originally designed for narcolepsy, Provigil is more commonly referred to as the "smart drug" or "Viagra for the brain," promising "limitless" concentration and performance. Robert Kolker, "The Real *Limitless* Drug Isn't Just for Lifehackers Anymore: Modafinil's Moment," *New York Magazine*, March 31, 2013. <http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/modafinil-2013-4/>

<sup>4</sup> Rose, "The Politics of Life Itself," 105.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Hacking, "Our Neo-Cartesian Body Parts," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Autumn 2007): 78-105.

crept back from Tante Dide's *la fêlure* and are, once again, front and center of our fears. We have more ways to test now for the expression of "undesirable" traits, but genetic engineering is not yet to the point of allowing us to fully design our biological makeup.

And yet immunity, though somewhat responsive to manipulations, throws a wrench into the wheel of perfect exchangeability because it is so intimately and resolutely attached to the embodied self. I have examined some of the ways in which this confrontation with the intransigence of biological subjectivity gets articulated. I have turned to the writings of three French, male authors who all tackle the limits of self through the experience of illness, examining their attempts to come to terms with what it means to be compromised.

So what of the female body and female subjectivity in the midst of all of this life ontological frustration and confusion? Donna Haraway's Beauvoirian pronouncement, quoted above, highlights immunology's discursive ability to shape bodies in decline. And yet, immunology is an equally "potent mediator" of the experiences of life, and particularly when life is imbricated in another life. In a note from the same text, Haraway, riffing on a quote made by Julian Huxley in 1912,<sup>6</sup> humorously explicates why modern Western discourses are frequently so loathe to endow the female body—and the woman subject enmeshed with it—full status as an individual (why, for example, state legislative "bodies" in the USA are willing to grant the status of "personhood" to a fetus over a woman's "ownership" to her person): "[Women's] personal, bounded individuality is compromised by their bodies' troubling talent for making other bodies, whose individuality can take precedence over their own, even while the little bodies are fully

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<sup>6</sup> "Julian Huxley defined individuality in biological terms as 'literally indivisibility—the quality of being sufficiently heterogeneous in form to be rendered non-functional if cut in half' (216). Haraway goes on to explain, however, that Huxley neglects defining what he means by functionality. Having a function implies having a purpose. Haraway continues: "You or I (whatever problematic address these pronouns have) might be an individual for some purposes, but not for others. This is a normal ontological state for cyborgs and women, if not for Aristotelians and men. Function is about action" (ibid.).

contained and invisible without major optical technology. Women can, in a sense, be cut in half and retain their maternal function—witness their bodies maintained after death to sustain the life of another individual” (253n8). As we remarked in the intro, Esposito embraces the pregnant mother as the counter to the immune body, an example of coexistence between identities (albeit a contentious one, and one still mediated by the father). Pregnancy is a tempting and terribly problematic model to adopt, offering its own host of immune promises, difficulties, and dangers. I would like to end considering two circumstances—surrogacy and autoimmunity—both of which carry physical and social consequences, emerging from the immunologically complicated terrain of the pregnant body.

Bio-technology has made a variety of reproductive options available to women who desire to have children, but are unable to bear them. From in-vitro fertilization to surrogacy, life is conceived through more varied pathways, and the choices to which one has access bring liberty and hope to those anxious to start a family. Surrogacy, in particular, offers an alternative to women who have exhausted other fertility options or who have endured life events rendering impossible any hope for conception.<sup>7</sup> By some measure, the surrogate body stands in still more radical contrast with the “immune” body. This is particularly true in the case of gestational surrogacy where the surrogate body is “simply” serving as “vessel,” harboring a life with which it shares no common genetic material, where the fetus is a “pure” stranger.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I am focusing on the promises to women since science has still not found a way to render male bodies impregnable. To have a child, men must still always rely on the willingness of a woman to carry for them.

<sup>8</sup> Gestational surrogacy brings to the fore all of the questions of how “active” the intrauterine environment is in shaping the child. In a book entitled, *Origins: How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of Our Lives*, Annie Murphy Paul traces the “fetal origin” movement, taking the reader on the T-9 month countdown, unveiling all of the ways the choices a woman makes when she is pregnant (what she eats, what she doesn’t eat, to what she exposes herself, etc.) shape the fetus just as much as genes and post-birth environment. See Annie Murphy Paul, *Origins: How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of Our Lives* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

The legal and ethical stakes of surrogacy are high. In the United States, there have been several court cases in which the surrogate contract made prior to birth has been contested post-birth by the carrying mother. In the most famous of these legal proceedings, the case of Baby M (litigated over the period from the time “Baby M” was born in 1986 to the final decision granting parental rights to the “social” parents in 1988), a “traditional”<sup>9</sup> surrogate invoked her right as birth mother, refusing to “hand over” the child. Christie McDonald uses this case to reflect on the philosophical and legal complexities that arise in such circumstances where technology, by virtue of the way it makes the “naturally” impossible possible, necessitates the creation of new identity categories.<sup>10</sup> We already discussed this issue in Chapter 1 in relation to Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Intrus* and the case of the transplant recipient. Here, technology throws into question traditional definitions of filiation, parental roles, and even origins. Surrogacy overturns the previous certainty of maternity and displaces the center of filial stability. As Phyllis Chesler provocatively wonders: “Is a child’s true mother really her father?”<sup>11</sup>

The legal status of surrogacy varies from state to state, country to country. Some states allow for “commercial” surrogacy (whereby the surrogate is compensated for the “use” of her body); this is by far the most contested form of the practice, evoking the question of whether babies can/should be “bought.” Many more states and countries allow for “altruistic” surrogacy whereby only the medical costs for the pregnancy are covered by the “social” parents. Still other countries have banned surrogacy altogether (thus limiting the categorical chaos the practice causes). The French have long made “la gestation pour autrui” or “la maternité pour autrui”

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<sup>9</sup> In contrast to a “gestational” surrogate, the “traditional” surrogate gives her genetic material—along with her womb—to “produce” the baby with the “social” father’s sperm.

<sup>10</sup> See Christie McDonald, “Changing the Facts of Life: The Case of Baby M,” *SubStance* 20, no.1, issue 64 (1991): 31-48.

<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Chesler quoted in McDonald, “Changing the Facts of Life,” 35.

illegal and are still reluctant to grant citizenship to children who are born abroad to French parents via surrogacy. French law bans it firstly on the basis that it constitutes maternal "abandonment" and, secondly because it goes against the principle of the "non-patrimonialité du corps humain," the principle that the human body—its "elements" and "products"—cannot be considered "property rights." The law was most recently upheld in 2009. It surfaced again as a hot-button issue in early 2013 during the debate surrounding *le mariage pour tous*. Though the prohibition is not likely to be lifted any time soon, the French courts are in the process of rethinking the legislation banning citizenship to children surrogately begot elsewhere so as not to unduly penalize the child.

Changing conceptual tracks, I will now turn to the second issue surrounding the pregnant body: autoimmunity. While autoimmunity affects men and women alike, auto-immunity is, to a large degree, a "feminine" problem. Seventy-five percent of the autoimmune diseases (over eighty have been identified)—lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, insulin-dependent diabetes, multiple sclerosis (to name only a few)—occur in women, "striking" most frequently during the child bearing years. As we have already gleaned, these diseases remain highly misunderstood—doctors cannot fully account for what triggers the diseases and thus cannot treat the causes, resorting to immune suppressant therapies that weaken the system, rendering it less resistant to "intrusion" from without.

As we mentioned in the introduction, Roberto Esposito frames of the fetal "attack" on the mother as a source of unexpected benefit for and protection of the mother from herself: "...[J]ust as the attack of the mother protects the child, the child's attack can also save the mother from her self-injurious tendencies..."<sup>12</sup> Esposito connects these "self-injurious"

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<sup>12</sup> Esposito, *Immunitas*, 171.

tendencies to autoimmune diseases, which he claims “undergo regression under pregnancy” (ibid.). But the relationship between pregnancy and autoimmunity remains ambiguous. While it is true that pregnancy can, in some instances, calm autoimmune reactions, there is also contradictory evidence that pregnancy can *trigger* autoimmune conditions through a process called microchimerism whereby cells from the fetus “pass through” the placenta into the mother’s body and establish cell lineages. These cells keep her immune system in a state of vigilance due to the ineradicable presence of this “foreign” matter that, for whatever reason, her body cannot eliminate. The phenomenon is scientifically observable, in particular, when the mother is carrying a baby boy, as one of the foremost researcher on fetal/mother cell trafficking, Diana Bianchi, explains: “The male chromosome, with its dangling Y, shows up better in the mother’s body and is quicker and easier to track, standing out as it does from maternal blood and tissue. Looking for a girl’s fetal cells in her mom’s body would be like searching for snowflakes in a snowstorm—sure, you could do it, but why would you want to? Scientists in the field presume that everything they have discovered about the persistence and function of male fetal cells applies equally to female fetal cells.”<sup>13</sup>

Metaphorically, microchimerism (simply defined as the presence of cells in a body that are genetically different and derived from another individual) presents great interpretative difficulty, in some cases framed as the culprit for ailments, in others as the cure.<sup>14</sup> The social stakes are high, as Aryn Martin shows. Martin examines the nationalistic vocabulary used to describe the “cell traffic” between mother and fetus. Martin argues that the reason there is so much debate and anxiety regarding how to understand this phenomenon can be attributed to the way it imperils the self/non-self paradigm, which, as we have remarked, still largely grounds the science of immunology today. We, as a culture, are reluctant to acknowledge the degree to which firm borders are imagined and imaginary, just as we have difficulty coming to the terms with the messiness that arises because of the “real” permeability and exchange that

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<sup>13</sup> Brue Morgan, “Profile: Diana Bianchi, Tufts Medical Feature. <http://www.tufts.edu/home/feature/?p=bianchi>

<sup>14</sup> See Aryn Martin, “Microchimerism in the Mother(land): Blurring the Borders of Body and Nation, *Body and Society* 16, no.3 (2010), 23-50.

goes on between embodied subjects despite our desire to want to maintain physical separation and ontological clarity, establishing what is and is not a part of the body.

Teresa Brennan, whose theory of the “foundational fantasy” I presented in the introduction, seriously considers the physical effects triggered not only by the tangible exchange and remainders left between bodies, but by the psychical “communication” as well. Brennan's psychically (psychoanalytically)-based theory of self-constitution and border maintenance closely parallels the ANT explanation of immunity based on a complex system of constant self-regulation via the presentation of fixed antibody/self-antibody “images.” Marc Lappé notes that women’s immune systems tend to work at heightened levels compared to the systems of their masculine counterparts: “As a general rule, females...studied express stronger immunity to a given antigenic challenge than do males. On closer scrutiny, females generally outperform males in terms of immune strength throughout their lifetime, but especially after puberty.”<sup>15</sup> Lappé also states that this realization is “simultaneously one of the most dramatic and perplexing phenomena in nature” (idem). Extending the parallel between the immune system and the ego established in the introduction and supported by Moulin's suggestion that immunology, as the biological “unconscious,” “provides the indispensable myth of the birth of the ego,”<sup>16</sup> perhaps we could explain heightened “immunity” as the body’s way to respond to the potential physical harm incurred through “masculine” penetration/projection: not only sexual penetration (a heightened immune system would potentially protect a female from antigens in the male’s sperm) but the very physical penetration that occurs as the feminine subject absorbs affective energetic waves to facilitate the masculine body in its efforts to retain its invisible, proper cleanliness. If exchanged affects do have material, constitutional consequences, isn’t it possible

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<sup>15</sup> Marc Lappé, *The Tao of Immunology* (New York and London: Plenum Trade, 1997), 46.

<sup>16</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine*, 400.

that their bodily absorption would elicit a bodily response? We must acknowledge that, in terms of boundary control, the feminine ego—and her immune system—must do much more work to externally fortify the borders and to internally keep the system purified. Unlike the masculine subject who can conveniently establish a state of exemption *vis-à-vis* the (m)other, which paradoxically ensures his full capacity for “active service” in society (though at the cost of being dependent on the continued existence of the “dumping ground”), the feminine subject remains uncomfortably connected, solicited, and, at times, incapacitated.

In *History after Lacan* and *Exhausting Modernity*, Brennan reflects at length about the global consequences brought on by the escalating acting-out of the foundational fantasy paralleled, as it is, by ever-increasing commodification, a process that has modified time, space and even physical laws. Brennan “resolidifies” Bauman’s liquid modernity, showing that liquidity is simply a mirage hiding sluggish bodies: “If the parallel drawn here between psychical and socio-historical temporal interference is correct, if the construction of more and more commodities slows down real time while seeming to speed it up, then this means that the physical reality in which we exist, the physical laws under which we live, *are being and have been altered.*”<sup>17</sup> Taking this assertion seriously, would it be so strange that physical laws governing the body would also have been altered? Indeed, in bodies afflicted by auto-immune disorders, survival no longer seems to assert itself as the one governing principle.

It goes without saying that, over the last fifty or so years, society has chronicled a dramatic change in the feminine subject’s respective place.<sup>18</sup> More and more feminine subjects

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<sup>17</sup> Brenna, *History After Lacan*, 183.

<sup>18</sup> We must remember, of course, that the term “feminized subject” does not limit itself to women but extends to designate the objectified half in all “othering” relationships: between colonizer/colonized, rich/poor, etc. This said, my main focus here is on women, on the effects of the large-scale, acting-out of the foundational fantasy on women.



have succeeded in altering internalized images, in refusing the feminized, object position. “...[R]esisting the object position,” Brennan states, “can be done in two ways: by striving for subjectivity through the exploitation of others, or by seeking to release the life-drive by other means” (185). Some have refused to allow the dumping to continue and have themselves moved into the “dumper’s” spot. Others are seeking alternative means of boundary control (though alternative *voies/voix* for subject-preservation seem limited). But what is undeniable is that images are no longer nearly as fixed as they once were. Paradoxically, it could be true that the shift in images has triggered a destructive response in the body. As the mechanisms constituting feminine identity change, so, too, do the systems charged with protecting the identity—be they psychical systems or biological. Brennan declares that “[m]aking the (relatively) economic empowered woman-as-mother invisible is in some ways the essence of the foundational fantasy” (191). In this case, a willed invisibility could potentially lead to a willed self-destruction.

Cohen, in his article on metaphorical immunity, speaks about what the forgetting of genealogy—of origin—entails: “...[I]mmunity’s effectiveness as an instrument of biological knowledge relies on an explicitly imaginary appropriation grounded in the ‘forgetting’ of this genealogy...such forgetting is also a form of deciding; it is a decision about how the world gets construed.”<sup>19</sup> Brennan could make a very similar statement concerning the “ego” as an “instrument of self-knowledge” “grounded” in the “forgetting” of origin. The proliferation of fixed points, sites deprived of life, entrain an endangerment to all life-giving capacities. With auto-immunity, the body turns on itself, the death drive at work to undo identity, manifesting itself in the swollen, inflamed joints of rheumatoid arthritis, the thickened skin and organs of scleroderma, the persistent, pernicious pain of fibromyalgia or the gradual nervous (system) breakdown of multiple sclerosis. The abject seems to have taken hold, no longer forcing itself

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen, “Metaphorical Immunity,” 159.

out but rather inhabiting the body and threatening its internal cohesion: “Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de mort. J’y suis aux limites de ma condition de vivant. De ces limites se dégage mon corps comme vivant”<sup>20</sup> And it is not simply a question of self-produced abjection, but also the other’s remainder destabilizing identity: “Les restes sont des reliquats de quelque chose mais surtout de quelqu’un. Ils polluent du fait de cette incomplétude” (91).

As objectification and commodification continue to insist as privileged social mechanisms, tugging in their wake the energetic forces of repression and projection, is it possible that the pieces broken off within the mother through microchimerism.<sup>21</sup> might already be carrying death—petrification, mortification—within them more so than they had in the past? If so, Artaud’s quote would ring with particular relevance: “Une petite fille morte dit: Je suis celle qui pouffe d’horreur dans les poumons de la vivante. Qu’on m’enlève tout de suite de là.”<sup>22</sup>

Artaud’s little girl offers us our segue back to our writers. What of women—of the mothers—in these texts? What are the stakes for her body in this discourse of subjective, masculine decline? Zola, somewhat paradoxically (given his previous very unflattering portrait of Tante Dide, the mother of all, in his other works), leaves the legacy in the hands of a new mother, Clotilde, who is perhaps “solide” but also unpredictable. On the other hand, the woman/mother all but disappears chez Camus. Rieux’s wife, who leaves Oran early in *La peste* for a sanatorium to convalesce, dies before returning home; Rieux receives the telegram

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<sup>20</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Microchimerism, broken down semantically, evokes the theory of 1) small imaginary monsters made of incongruous parts or 2) small illusions or fabrications of the mind. A connection could suggestively be drawn between micro-chimerism and primary hallucination brought about through splitting and repression—*bref* the subject’s first stepping stone into time and toward death.

<sup>22</sup> Antonin Artaud, “Suppôts et supplications,” in *Œuvres complètes*, t.14 (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 14.

reporting her passing the same day Tarrou succumbs. And while Rieux's mother does join her son in Oran to keep him company in his wife's absence, the trait for which she is known and appreciated is her "silence," her non-imposing presence, hardly an ode to motherhood. Finally, Guibert, like Zola, leaves his legacy (and inheritance) to Berthe, the mother of Jules's children. She lives on beyond the text (and, in "real" life, Christine Guibert helped to finish his textual body, typing the last 51 pages of Guibert's journal, published as *Le mausolée des amants*). And yet, as we discussed, motherhood could not be more fraught for the writer who is determined to disinherit his own parents and who, in his last novel, repeatedly (and violently) aborts to the point of eviscerating the prospective mother as he obliterates her identity. All three cases reveal deep anxiety about the paternalistic model, the declining reign of the father and, subsequently, the difficulty of framing the body of the mother.

Toward the end of her remarkable "saga" of immunology's linguistic unfolding, Anne-Marie Moulin recounts this story as paradigmatic of the understanding we have gained about the body's complexity:

Des anecdotes font le fond commun de cette saga médicale: telle cette histoire d'un homme qui, en bonne santé apparente, peintre à ses heures, envoie un jour à ses amis une carte de Nouvel An représentant un dessin incongru, un arbre vasculaire tiré d'une planche d'anatomie, où en dessinant il a omis les artères rénales et spermatiques qui naissent du tronc aortique. Quelques mois plus tard, une prévisible hypertension maligne le conduit en hémodialyse, due à une insuffisance rénale terminale: prescience ou automutilation?<sup>23</sup>

The endocrine, nervous, circulatory and immune system merge here to offer what Moulin deems as the closest thing science has today to bridge the spectral divide (it forever haunts any discussion about the body, and particularly the male body) between body and soul. The troubling question posed at the end of her story, however, her gesture to the ambivalence of

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<sup>23</sup> Moulin, *Le dernier langage*, 421.

representation, does not capture Moulin's pen. And yet, for our study, this is the most pressing problematic: are there material consequences to representation? Stated more generally, do words matter (in all of the ways Calvin Thomas plays with this word)? The short answer, I would argue, is yes. Precisely because they work in, on and across bodies—in the epistemological “gaps” so to speak. They bring us away from normopathic mortification—the neofascist drive to fix roles and reify boundaries—by thrusting us into and under someone else’s skin. They leave their remnants—a microchimeric word trafficking—just as the reader leaves hers through interpretation. And they make us imagine. Christie McDonald frames literature as a space—a terrain, we might be tempted to say—engendering the “self ‘to be’ which our precursors never kn[e]w possible.”<sup>24</sup> The dialogue she imagines between Baby M’s two names offers a vital countervoice to Artaud’s emprisoned dead girl lamenting for release, a voice of hope, precisely because of its undecidability. Communication contaminates. It is up to us whether we want to purell it away or run the risk, take the chance, and incorporate a little dirt.

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<sup>24</sup> McDonald, “Changing the Facts of Life,” 46.

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