

DANIEL M. FINER  
Syracuse University

RADICAL NARCISSISM AND  
THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE OTHERWISE:  
A CRITIQUE OF HÄGGLUND'S DERRIDA

Derridian scholarship has recently been unsettled by a new reading of Derrida's work at odds with established interpretations. This new reading is that of Martin Hägglund in his book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, which argues that, contra the generally accepted position that he underwent a distinct religious and ethico-political turn, Derrida's entire corpus is animated by a univocal commitment to atheism, or the rejection of any reality or registry of meaning beyond the limits of finitude. While I find Hägglund's thesis persuasive as a reading of Derrida, I categorically disagree with his analysis of the desire that animates deconstruction. While Hägglund argues that the desire for mortal life underlies Derrida's commitment to finitude—religiously and politically configured as radical atheism and radical democracy, respectively—I view these positions as fundamentally driven by the desire for an inverted immortality which, more significantly, is the desire of a radical narcissism.

Whereas traditional narcissism refers to a perspective or frame of reference centered on the self, *radical* narcissism consists in the complete erasure of the very perspective from which a self could be located: the utter forgetting of a self, body, or generative agent; *nothingness* as a state of awareness; the eradication of the very possibility of choice, decision, and responsibility. This seeming erasure of perspective operates in service of the self by removing the specter of responsibility that haunts a narcissism still aware of the ego producing it. In this way, the deeper import of Derrida's atheism is not a radical commitment to immanence but to narcissism, for which the antidote is the affirmation not of a hypostasized finitude but of a relational materiality.

I attempt to flesh out this thesis in three parts. In the first, I lay out the central themes in Hägglund's book (themes that I often supplement directly with the

texts of Derrida himself) and explain how they specifically function as religious and political modalities. My delineation of Hägglund's work then unfolds into a larger critical project informed by recent materialist thinking, specifically that of Slavoj Žižek. Here I employ the latter's notions of radical freedom and parallax in order to reappropriate Derrida's desire for mortality as a dissimulated and fundamentally narcissistic desire for immortality. While my treatment of Derrida here is unapologetically critical, this should not be read as a pious or condescending criticism; rather, I find Derrida's radical narcissism to be invaluable, as it functions as the gateway to a traumatic encounter with the Real on which any alter-narcissistic economy depends. In my third and final section, I employ the motif of relational materiality—informed largely by my reading of Antonio Negri's concept of multitude—as a thematic platform from which to constructively re-vision the core components of Hägglund's Derrida.

#### I. THESIS:

#### RADICAL ATHEISM AND RADICAL DEMOCRACY, OR THE RELIGION AND POLITICS OF SURVIVAL

Hägglund's project consists fundamentally in a reappropriation of the logic of temporality in Derrida and an analysis of its subsequent ramifications for the thinking of identity, meaning, and value. His argument is systematic: Beginning with Derrida's rigorous insistence on the thoroughly temporal conditions in which meaning is always already constituted, Hägglund proceeds to elaborate the logic of identity that Derrida develops in light of such parameters. Hägglund identifies this logic as that of temporal spacing, or the spacing (*espacement*) of time, in which identity unfolds as the simultaneous becoming-space of time and becoming-time of space. The logic of spacing (as the spacing of time), Hägglund contends, "defines all of Derrida's key terms (such as *trace*, *arche-writing*, and *différance*)", despite the scarcity of attention it has received in the analysis of his work.<sup>1</sup> The logic of spacing implies the subsequent conceptual crossbeams of Hägglund's project: the trace structure of time (a.k.a., the structure of *différance*), the autoimmunity of life, and the logic of survival.

Hägglund contends that Derrida's entire philosophical machine is set in motion by a rigorous insistence on the constitution of time, which is to say on temporal finitude as the exclusive terrain in which identity (or the apperception of meaning and value) is constituted. To posit temporal finitude as the exclusive condition of constitution, however, presents identity with an acute aporia, for it internally divides the very fabric of constitution itself. On the one hand temporality absolutely forecloses presence because the continuous movement of time structurally precludes the possibility of its retroactive confirmation. Simultaneously and paradoxically, however, temporality also absolutely requires presence because the continuous movement of time minimally presupposes the retroactive confirmation of its non-confirmability as such. The very structure of

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, ed. Werner Hamacher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2.

the constitution of time (of constituted time, of time as constitutive), in other words, is divided within itself: Time constitutes itself in the very impossibility of self-constitution, which it then posits as the constitutive condition of life.<sup>2</sup>

The constitution of time thus entails a logic of identity that posits the constitution of meaning in its very unconstitutability as such, and it is precisely such a logic that Derrida develops in his logic of the spacing of time. The spacing of time names the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space as “the condition not only for everything that can be cognized and experienced, but also for everything that can be thought and desired.”<sup>3</sup> This spatio-temporal transvaluation occurs for Derrida in terms of the structure of the trace, in which the continuous flow of time is constituted in its very spatial inscription, or its very discontinuity. Time becomes time in the very moment it is taken out of real temporality—literally, when time itself is traced. If time is constituted in its spacing, this also means however that spacing itself is always already temporal, for it is only space insofar as it traces the non-spatiality of time.

The trace structure of time is precisely what Derrida describes as the structure of *différance*, which indexes the purely differential and always already deferred conditions in which meaning is constituted. The simultaneously differential and deferred status of *différance* is another way of articulating the spatialization of time and the temporalization of space that is constitutive of Derrida’s logic of spacing. Here, difference is the spatial inscription of non-iterability, while deferral is the non-coincidence or non-presence of temporality.<sup>4</sup>

The logic of spacing, the tracing of time, and the structure of *différance* are various articulations of the same concept then, i.e., the co-incidence of time and space as the conditions of identity in constitutive temporality. We should note here, however, that the full significance of these motifs is not exhausted in the constitution of identity that each results in, but rather in how their active ingredients reconfigure the very nature of constitution itself. This is the real radicality of Hägglund’s reading, for he argues that what the various motifs of the spacing of time entail is not merely the paradoxical nature of constitution (as the co-incidence of space and time) but, more significantly, the “ultratrascendental” status of contradiction itself. The constitutive status of the tracing of time reconfigures the very substance of synthesis, such that it indexes not the productive congealing of negation, but the production of negation itself. The logic of spacing, the tracing of time, the structure of *différance*: each index the pure absence of being as the very fabric of being itself—not because they function as place-holders for “something ineffable that transcends time and space” but, to the contrary, because they designate the spacing of time as the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

ultratranscendental condition of constitution, which in turn renders it impossible for anything that is to *be* in and of itself.<sup>5</sup>

The constitution of time does not posit identity then as the productive interruption of temporality by its spatial inscription, but as itself the ultratranscendental negation of identity as such. The spacing of time names the contradiction of time as the very condition of temporality, such that identity occurs not in spite of time but as the “negative infinity” and infinite negation of time—the infinitization of the conditions of finitude, which “cannot ever be eliminated or overcome”.<sup>6</sup> Identity, or the presence of being, only occurs as the death of temporal existence, or the cessation of life, because the constitution of time forecloses presence from the very conditions of finite existence.

In this way Derrida’s logic of spacing entails the “autoimmunity” of finite existence, a concept which originates in Derrida’s writings on religion, but is redeployed by Hägglund to index Derrida’s entire project. Autoimmunity for Hägglund refers to the immunization of life from the negating power of the fullness of either time or space. This immunization is “automatic” because life is constituted in the very obstruction of temporal fullness by its spatial inscription, and of spatial presence by the tracing of time. The fullness of time or pure time, that is, only occurs as the annihilation of space, while the fullness of space only occurs as pure presence or the cessation of time. In either case, life as finite existence is negated. Its very possibility is located in the blockage of the fullness of time by space and the fullness of space by time, such that the immunization of life is simultaneous—or automatic—with its conception. Life is constituted by its internal attacking of its own defenses.<sup>7</sup>

The autoimmunity of life subsequently entails what Hägglund calls the logic of survival. The logic of survival names the condition of mortal life because mortality is constituted in the clash between the fullness of time and the fullness of space, both of which seek the annihilation of the other. In their attempts to completely dominate each other, the clash between time and space results in the partial subsumption of time by space and of space by time, but this partial subsumption occurs simultaneously as the partial dilution of each. Survival subsequently names the condition of finite existence, because the latter is produced and reproduced not in the affirmation of life but in the avoidance of death. The pure affirmation of both time and space can only occur as the annihilation of the one by the other, which would also be the annihilation of finite existence. It is the prevention of both time’s and space’s pure affirmation that enables the survival of both, and as such of finite existence. Life is not, therefore, the affirmation of presence—but the avoidance of the death that presence would effect. “To survive,” Hägglund writes, “is never to be absolutely present; it is to remain after a past that is no longer and to keep the memory of this past for a future that is not yet.” Survival not only names the avoidance of

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<sup>5</sup> Hägglund, 3, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

death as the condition of life. Rather, because survival consists precisely in the avoidance of death, it also requires the continuous risk or threat of a death it can thereby avoid. Survival entails structural exposure to the threat of death and the risk of annihilation.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Religion of Survival: Derrida's Radical Atheism**

From here, we can move into an elaboration of how the logic of spacing (or the thinking of the trace) operates in a religious context for Hägglund. The religious implications of the spacing of time are, for Hägglund, indexed by the motif of radical atheism, which names not simply a modality of belief (or non-belief) but, more significantly, a particular orientation of desire. That is to say, the radicality of radical atheism consists not simply in the denial of the existence of God and immortality but, more deeply, in the denial that immortality is itself even desirable. As Hägglund writes, traditional atheism "has limited itself to denying the existence of God and immortality," while leaving unquestioned the underlying assumption that God and immortality are desirable to begin with. As such, traditional atheism still conceives mortal being as a lack of being that is, if not possible, at least desirable to transcend. By contrast, the logic of radical atheism contends "that the so-called desire for immortality dissimulates a desire for survival that precedes it and contradicts it from within."

The pivotal feature of radical atheism consists in its "unconditional affirmation of survival," an affirmation that does not occur as an individual choice but as the universal condition of all mortal life as such, engaging everyone "*without exception.*" As Hägglund insists:

Whatever one may want or whatever one may do, one has to affirm the time of survival, since it opens the possibility to live on – and thus to want something or to do something – in the first place.

Radical atheism unconditionally affirms the finitude of survival because it desires mortality over immortality. Contra its traditional precursors, it views mortal life not as a "lack of being that it is desirable to overcome," but as the possibility of anything and everything that is desired. Mortality is desirable for radical atheism, because in unconditionally exposing itself to "the threat of everything that is feared" it simultaneously opens the possibility "for everything that is desired."<sup>9</sup>

The logic of radical atheism runs throughout Hägglund's text, as it designates the logic of the desire for survival that follows from the constitution of time. Here Hägglund reads Derrida's explicit and prolific use of religious motifs as an intentional displacement of the religious desire for immortality by the radically atheistic desire for mortal life. For Hägglund, the radical atheism which animates

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

Derrida's project is constituted, more than anything else, by its antagonistic relation to the religious desire for immortality (which for Derrida takes the various names of absolute immunity, unscathability, messianism, indemnification, salvation, etc.).<sup>10</sup> This is acutely demonstrated, for instance, in Derrida's essay "Faith and Knowledge", wherein the latter categorically differentiates deconstruction from any and all discourses on "salvation: which is to say, on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed...the immune."<sup>11</sup>

Contra the religious appropriation of such a refusal—which reads the rejection of sacrality not as an act of religious denial but rather of religious affirmation because it functions to preserve the possibility for a deeper, more authentic faith or a closer relation to the true content of religious experience—Hägglund argues that this refusal is in fact a radically atheistic gesture of religious rejection *tout court*. Derrida uses religious motifs not to depict the transcendental affirmations of deconstruction, but to denote the ultratranscendental negation that founds it. This is the meaning of Derrida's notion of *chora*: "*Chora* is nothing (no being, nothing present)," Derrida writes, although this is not to be confused with "the Nothing which in the anxiety of *Dasein* would still open the question of being." Rather, the nothingness of *chora* is a radical and rigorously thorough nothing, a nothing which precedes the very stabilization of meaning in nothing-as-a-representable-concept. *Chora*, Derrida writes:

is neither Being, nor the Good, nor God, nor Man, nor History. It will always resist them, will have always been (and no future anterior, even, will have been able to reappropriate, inflect or reflect a *chora* without faith or law) the very place of an infinite resistance, of an infinitely impassible persistence...an utterly faceless other.<sup>12</sup>

The logic of radical atheism affirms the desirability of finitude, because it is precisely finitude's infinite exposure to the threat of annihilation that creates the possibility for all that is desired. This is because the constitution of time a) indexes the conditions of possibility for anything to exist at all, and b) locates constitution in the spacing of time and the correlative thinking of the trace, which subsequently entails

that everything is subjected to the infinite finitude of time and consequently that God himself is 'an effect of the trace.' It follows that any notion of God as a positive infinity is contradicted from within by the spacing of time, which cannot be appropriated by religion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42. See also Hägglund, 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> Hägglund, 143.

The thinking of the trace, in other words, as Catherine Malabou explains, denotes the radicality of the temporal conditions of constitution because it explicitly shows how the spacing of time and the temporalizing of space locates the concrete in the conditions of temporality even as temporality is always located in the concrete.

In pronouncing “the outright impossibility of incorporating meaning” (i.e., since it “*forms no body*”), the structure of the trace also pronounces the impossibility of God, since God is that which incorporates all meaning.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is the very impossibility of incorporating meaning that is desirable in the logic of the trace, for it is the infinite risk of meaningless finite existence—or life as survival—that opens the very possibility of desire itself. Sacrality, or the spatial incorporation of meaning, actually forecloses desire because it invokes an absolute indemnity that ceases time and, with it, the desire for survival that is the precondition for all that is and can be desired as such. Radical atheism is precisely this desire for survival that, because it affirms the absolute threat entailed by meaningless existence, simultaneously affirms the absolute possibility of all that can be desired. In this way, the desire for survival constitutive of radical atheism “will never have entered religion and will never permit itself to be sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized.”<sup>15</sup>

### **The Politics of Survival: Derrida’s Radical Democracy**

In a political context, Hägglund appropriates Derrida’s logic of spacing in terms of the aporia between the responsibility for political justice and the violence of political struggle. Politics concerns the lines of force or power that structure and traverse desire. Political responsibility, then, is the obligation to use force or power so as to structure and traverse desire. For Hägglund, what is desirable is “the survival of finite singularities”, such that political responsibility consists in the obligation to use power in the affirmation of their survival. At the same time, political responsibility occurs as political struggle, which is to say that to affirm the survival of certain finite singularities always already occurs at the expense of “the survival of other finite singularities”. In other words, the responsibility for political justice always and only occurs through the violence of political struggle—or the anarchy of political disequilibrium—because the affirmation of one instance of survival entails the negation of another instance. As Hägglund explains:

the violation of integrity [i.e., violence] is inscribed in the movement of survival as such. If I survived wholly intact—unscathed by the alteration of time—I would not be surviving; I would be reposing in absolute presence. When I live on, it is always at the expense of

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 58. See also Hägglund, 143.

what does *not* live on, of those past selves that are obliterated or eradicated in the movement of survival [...] whenever I affirm the survival of another, it is at the expense of another other.<sup>16</sup>

Such are the dynamics of power within the logic of the constitution of time. Life only occurs through its exposure to death, so that the power to affirm one's life only occurs through the power to affirm another's death. We are responsible for survival—whether it is our own or that of others—which paradoxically means we are responsible for negating the survival of others. And it is precisely such a dynamics of power that describes Derrida's political deployment of deconstruction in the form of a "democracy *to come*."

Democracy to come does not refer to the utopian hope for a future society. On the contrary, deconstruction's futural modification of democracy denotes the simultaneity of deferral and actualization that is intrinsic to the political logic of democracy. In democracy, that is, what underwrites or justifies the actualization of power is precisely that there is no sovereign basis from which to employ it. Democracy is actualized (constituted, justified, legitimated, authorized)—which is to say its logic is mobilized or empowered—by the absolute deferral of sovereign power as such; its power is mobilized (in theory) precisely by the disabling of Power as such. It is the deferral of any transcendent criterion of justice that makes us responsible for political struggle and what locates justice, without remainder, in acts of political force. "The point" then, Hägglund writes, "is not that democracy is deferred [to the future] but that democracy *is* deferral and cannot overcome the movement of deferral without ceasing to be democracy."<sup>17</sup>

What Hägglund seizes upon as the aporia between political responsibility and political struggle is articulated by Derrida in terms of the paradox between justice and law. Justice for Derrida—as he made famously clear in his 1989 address, "Force of Law"—is the undeconstructible foundation that precedes all foundationalisms which deconstruction seeks to unsettle. "Justice in itself," Derrida affirms, "is not deconstructible." It is not deconstructible because deconstruction is itself undertaken as an act of justice. In seeming contradiction to justice stands the law, for while justice consists in an unprogrammable and immeasurable experience of the impossible, law consists in the programmatization and codification of the possibility of experience, or the rules by which one may live. And yet, Derrida argues, neither justice nor the law is capable of erasing the other. If justice entailed the erasure of law it would damn finitude to chaotic annihilation, which would in turn be the dissolution of justice itself (or the negation of survival). Similarly, the law cannot do away with justice, for it is the very desire for justice that constitutes the authority of law.<sup>18</sup> In this

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<sup>16</sup> Hägglund, 164-70 (brackets mine).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 176 (brackets mine).

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 242-43.

way, radical democracy entails an autoimmune relationship between law and justice that reserves

the possibility of a justice, indeed of a law [*loi*] that not only exceeds or contradicts law but also, perhaps, has no relation to law, or maintains such a strange relation to it that it may just as well demand law as exclude it.<sup>19</sup>

## II. ANTITHESIS: THE DESIRE FOR SURVIVAL AS RADICAL NARCISSISM

According to Slavoj Žižek, true freedom resides not in an economy that radically subverts the positional authority of any particular “world” as such, but in a perspective that illuminates the very positional coordinates by which such an economy is itself constituted. Here, an acutely tyrannical and stifling motor can be detected beneath the surface of allegedly anarchic economies—a motor which ruthlessly and immediately tears apart the possibility of any world that would seek to legitimate itself outside the parameters of a self-generated frame of reference. True freedom, Žižek contends, is not located in a logic or economy of meaning that designates the constitutive conditions of freedom, however broadly depicted. Rather, it consists in the ability to make a decision that retroactively posits its own reality; that determines economies of meaning themselves; that enables not simply the autonomy to freely indulge one’s desires but, more significantly, to refuse to indulge them—to radically reject the exclusivity of legitimation as the correlation between truth-value and its externalized validation. In a true act of freedom, possibility does not precede choice, Žižek writes; rather, “the choice is a choice among possibilities”. This is because, while “I am determined by causes,” to recognize such from a perspective of radical freedom means that I can also

retroactively determine which causes will determine me: we, subjects, are passively affected by pathological objects and motivations; but, in a reflexive way, we ourselves have the minimal power to accept (or reject) being affected in this way—that is to say, we retroactively determine the causes allowed to determine us, or, at least, the *mode* of this linear determination...This excess of the effect over its causes thus also means that the effect is retroactively the cause of its cause—this temporal loop is the minimal structure of life.<sup>20</sup>

From the perspective of radical freedom then, we can analyze Hägglund’s project in general, and its religious and political configurations in particular, as not just the correlates of the constitution of divided time but as a particular preference for—and a radically undetermined choice to privilege—certain desires. We can

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>20</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Short Circuits, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 188, 202-04.

entertain and explore such possibilities because beneath any logic of constitution is an instance of originary decision made in the space of parallax. Parallax names a condition in which the difference between two distinct positions is absolutely indeterminable as anything other than their non-sameness. In Žižek's terms, parallax names the condition of a gap between two closely linked positions which disables the possibility of any neutral or common ground between them; the perspectival condition of "two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible."<sup>21</sup>

In a condition of parallax then, it is impossible for the implicated elements to rely on any method of constitution or legitimation which locates identity in relation to external objects; the substance of each element is identical to the form in which it is presented. The structure of parallax subsequently names the formal condition of radical freedom, which is experienced as the complete co-incident of substance and form, meaning and figure, reality and its representation. From the perspective of parallax, therefore, questions of constitution, identity, desire, and ethics are not problems to be analyzed but presuppositions of their very conditions of possibility; they are forceful expressions of desire which construct the very space of freedom (and desire) itself. As such, we can employ the notions of parallax and radical freedom as critical tools with which to analyze the dynamics of desire operative in Hägglund's project. Specifically, we can look for the spaces in which the logical supports that prop up Hägglund's/Derrida's logic of spacing are themselves unsupported. This in turn serves as the structural indicator of the site of parallax—the "X" that marks the spot of radical freedom in which constitutive desire manifests itself.

The systematic nature of Hägglund's project immediately reveals the cornerstone of his logic as the constitution of time. As we will recall, it is the exclusive location of constitution in the internal division of time that determines the sites on which Hägglund erects his subsequent conceptual edifices (i.e., the spacing of time/structure of the trace, the logic of autoimmunity, the desire and unconditional affirmation of survival, and the political violence which it entails). The question that immediately follows, then, is what determines the internal division of time as the condition of constitution? The only response here—i.e., that time is constitutive of life because all of life occurs within time—is both a tautology and a non-sequitur. The co-incident of existence and a condition that existence experiences simply names existence itself; it does not determine a causal relation between the two.

The point here is not that Hägglund's project is undermined by logical fallacy—it is, rather, that we can displace our analysis of his project from the temporal constitution of desire to the desire that retroactively posits the conditions for its very constitution. What is the desire, in other words, that ensures the possibility of its totalization while foreclosing the conditions of choice, transformation, and resistance that would enable its impossibility? Here we can reappropriate

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<sup>21</sup> Žižek, *Parallax View*, 4.

Hägglund's Derrida in such a way that the deeper import of his radical atheism is not its rigorous insistence on temporal constitution, but its radical affirmation of narcissistic desire.

As outlined in the introduction, radical narcissism would be the intensification of traditional narcissism; whereas the latter consists in the temporal privileging of self-gratification, radical narcissism would consist in its infinite expansion. It would be the pursuit not of simple self-gratification but of the possibility of infinite self-gratification. The traditional narcissist wants self-gratification on the terms in which it is already given; the radical narcissist wants to determine the very terms that give gratification as such. Radical narcissism, then, is the ontological intensification of traditional narcissism, and it entails not the devaluation and exploitation of others, but the annihilation of anything and everything that would limit the possibility of self-gratification in any way, to include the very conditions of possibility of choice, agency, responsibility, and the capacity for transformative production. This is because it is only in the absolute negation of the possibility of an alternative that the specter of anxiety is fully eliminated and the possibility of infinite self-gratification is constituted. In this light, Hägglund's project emerges not as a rigorous deferral of presence for the sake of mortal authenticity, but as the radical pursuit of narcissistic desire, which attempts to effect the negation of an alternative by locating constitutive status in the structure of contradiction itself. Such a rendering creates a constantly kinetic and self-referential (purely contained) circle of meaning, in which the memory of its own conscious production by a responsible agent is erased the moment it is inhabited. The ego is therefore finally able to lose awareness of its own self-production, which is the condition for the possibility of its absolutely uninhibited – infinite – gratification.

The structure of radical narcissism is indicated precisely by a certain radically negative form of dialectics, which I argue is identical to that of *différance*. Although *différance* (deconstruction) has been largely characterized in opposition to dialectics—and specifically, as the movement which precedes the dialectical operation itself—I suggest instead that it constitutes a radicalization of dialectics in the form of the infinite negation of negation, or the endless dialecticization of the dialectic itself. In *différance* the negation of the thesis by the antithesis does not result in a higher sublimation or synthesis (*Aufhebung*), but rather in the infinite repetition of the negative movement, such that: antithesis negates thesis → antithesis then negates [antithesis negates thesis] → antithesis then negates [antithesis negates antithesis negates thesis] → so on and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

Such a reading of *différance* is given explicit textual support in Derrida's earlier essay on Hegel, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve." In it, Derrida critiques the conservatism of the Hegelian dialectic; rather than subsuming thesis (positivity) and antithesis (negation) in *Aufhebung* (sublimation), Derrida champions a dialectic that infinitely negates the foundation upon which its preceding opposition (thesis/antithesis) is founded. Such a radical dialectic, Derrida writes, would be the "absolute rending" of

negation as such; an insistence on infinite negation, or on the “negative without ‘measure,’ without reserve.” As he states:

The blind spot of Hegelianism, *around* which can be organized the representation of meaning, is the *point* at which destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice constitute so irreversible an expenditure, so radical a negativity—here we would have to say an expenditure and a negativity *without reserve*—that they can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or system.

To insist on such a “Hegelianism without reserve”, Derrida goes on, would be:

to [convulsively] tear apart the negative side [of the dialectical operation], that which makes it the reassuring *other* surface of the positive...to exhibit within the negative, in an instant, that which can no longer be called negative. And can no longer be called negative precisely because it has no reserved underside, because it can no longer permit itself to be converted into positivity, because it can no longer *collaborate* with the continuous linking-up of meaning, concept, time and truth in discourse; because it literally can no longer *labor* and let itself be interrogated as the ‘work of the negative.’<sup>22</sup>

In direct contrast to a conception of *différance* as the movement which founds dialectics, I contend that what Derrida decisively demonstrates here is the radically dialectical composition of *différance* itself—*différance* as the utter radicalization of the dialectic in the form of an endless negation of the (dialectical) negation itself. Returning to our discussion of narcissism, we can see how the structural representation of *différance* as radical dialectical negation implicates radical narcissism as its generative source. Infinitely deferred dialectical negation represents precisely the conditions of radical narcissism in that it constitutes a constantly kinetic and self-referential circle of meaning, which effects the eradication of the specter of anxiety which formerly functioned as the final barrier between the ego and its infinite self-gratification.

In such an economy, the only thing limiting the narcissistic ego—the only thing that can effect a pause or halt in its frenetic traversal of self-referentiality—is the limitation of its own body, its own thresholds of physical, mental, and/or emotional exhaustion. As such, it is wholly significant that the only ‘rest stop’ Derrida affords deconstruction is the point at which the negative is no longer *recognizable* (by an embodied subject) as such—the point at which the body is too exhausted to continue negating; the point at which, to reinvoké the above passage, “it literally can no longer *labor*” because it is

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 259-60 (brackets mine).

physically/mentally/emotionally unable to “collaborate with the continuous linking-up of meaning, concept, time and truth in discourse.”

### Derrida’s Radical Atheism: The Religion of Radical Narcissism

The narcissism on which Hägglund’s/Derrida’s radical atheism is built can be decisively articulated in terms of *chora*’s radical opposition to “the safe and sound,” “the holy and the sacred,” to anything that “admits of any indemnification” whatsoever. *Chora* refuses to enter religion and “will never permit itself to be sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, *chora* refuses to occupy any and all spaces requiring stabilization, immunization, security, or protection. While this may initially pass for a noble anarchy – i.e., the rejection of safety, stasis, or immunity for moral reasons, such as the refusal to accept an unjust law or to let one’s own desire for consolation distort the truth – I argue that, as Hägglund himself reveals (albeit unknowingly), the crux of its meaning is located in a deeper narcissistic desire.

Specifically, *chora*’s radical refusal of stasis and safety – its insistence on infinite threat and risk – is not a willingness to endure danger or vulnerability for a higher (moral) end, but rather a sort of philosophical insurance policy for narcissistic desire. As Hägglund himself remarks, radical atheism insists that “everything is threatened from within itself” because it is precisely such a radical threat which simultaneously “opens the chance for everything that is desired.”<sup>24</sup> The true character of *chora*’s rejection of sacrality, therefore, emerges finally not as a rejection of the law in the name of mortality, but as a rejection of the law in the name of the infinite desire of radical narcissism.

Radical narcissism is acutely spelled out in Derrida’s autobiographical works, and particularly the auto/biographical sketch he writes in collaboration with Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*. This text – to which Hägglund himself devotes considerable attention – consists in a split experiment in which Bennington writes on the formal method of deconstruction while Derrida provides a running commentary (positioned on each page directly below Bennington’s text) on various events of his life. Derrida’s desire in so doing, both Hägglund and Derrida write, is to undermine the “theologic program” that Bennington’s formal articulation suggests by shocking it with the intimate, non-programmable details of Derrida’s own mortal life – events which Bennington and the reader “will not have been able to recognize, name, foresee, produce, predict.”<sup>25</sup> Derrida aims, in other words, to preserve the singularity of his own life, to ensure his own survival. Derrida is fighting, as Hägglund puts it, “against the obliteration of his name and unique signature.” He is fighting

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 58.

<sup>24</sup> Hägglund, 2, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession*, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, Religion and Postmodernism, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 31. See also Hägglund, 153.

to 'reinscribe' his name in order to oblige 'the other, and first of all G. [i.e., Geoffrey Bennington], to recognize it, to pronounce it, no more than that, to call me finally beyond the owner's tour he has just done, forgetting me on the pretext of understanding me, and it is as if I were trying to oblige him to recognize me and come out of his amnesia of me.'<sup>26</sup>

While Derrida's narcissism here supposedly operates out of love for his dying mother (who is suffering from Alzheimer's and whose amnesia is replicated by Bennington's "forgetting" of Derrida "on the pretext of understanding" him), I contend that such a reading is a nascent dialectical one, which subsequently misses the more radical dialectics at work here and the radical narcissism which performs it. That is to say, the narcissistic desire for infinite self-gratification requires the ignorance of its object of desire as well as the agent generative of its desire. It is precisely this ignorance which Derrida seeks to affect by way of the stream-of-consciousness juxtaposition of his desire for Geoffrey Bennington's recognition and the desire for his mother's remembrance.

While such a fine-toothed analysis may initially seem overdetermined, the extent of Derrida's narcissism comes into clearer focus via his blatant (and tragic) erasure of his mother's singularity. Written during the final days of his own mother's life, Derrida's *Circumfession* continually reflects on the experience of his mother's slow and painful demise. In a poignant display of the annihilation of the other required by a radical commitment to narcissism, Derrida re-codes the bedsores which afflict his mother's body in terms of inanimate matter. She was covered in sores "from head to toe," he recounts:

an *archipelago* of red and blackish *volcanoes*, enflamed wounds, *crusts* and *craters*, *signifiers* like *wells* several centimeters deep, opening here, closing there, on her heels, her hips and sacrum, the very flesh exhibited in its inside, no more secret, no more skin.<sup>27</sup>

The full significance of this description is insufficiently captured by a poetic or rhetorical reading. Rather, its deeper meaning consists in Derrida's literal annihilation of the singularity of his own mother – his literal flattening-out of her memory into an utterly disembodied piece of geological terrain: an "archipelago" of "volcanoes," "crusts," "craters," and "wells."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, this is precisely the result of Derrida's radical and rigorous commitment to the preservation of

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<sup>26</sup> Hägglund, 155; and Derrida, *Circumfession*, 33 (brackets mine).

<sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Circumfession*, 82 (emphases mine).

<sup>28</sup> Nell Champoux trenchantly points out the inanimate, or geological, character of Derrida's relation to his mother in *Circumfession*. See Nell Guenna-Beatrice Champoux, "Nature's Excess: Botany and Geology in Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession*," paper presented for the *Philosophy and Philosophical Theology* panel at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion – Eastern International Region, Ottawa, Ontario, May 7, 2010.

his own narcissistic desire. With the death of his mother, he is faced with a choice: He can either permit the dissolution of his ego by acknowledging the trauma of her loss, or ensure his egoistic survival by insulating himself from her singularity and refusing to concede any value to her. Derrida chooses the latter, literally assigning her a value no greater than dirt, rocks, holes, etc. Such is the price of his own insulation—the betrayal of his mother’s memory for the perdurance of his own—and so great is his narcissism that he is willing to pay it.

The extent to which radical narcissism is willing to annihilate the other for the sake of its own enjoyment is transgressively illustrated in the passage, quoted though not cited by Žižek, from a contemporary English novel:

There are women for whom it holds that, in order to be allowed to fuck them freely and repeatedly, one would be ready to calmly observe one’s own wife and small child drowning in cold water.<sup>29</sup>

The subversiveness of such imagery effects a short-circuit which illuminates the *real* apocalyptic stakes of what was previously thought to be a merely local (literary, poetic, philosophical, or rhetorical) event. And, returning to Hägglund, it is precisely the apocalyptic (annihilatory) goal of deconstructive desire that he profoundly misses in his reading of Derrida’s “mourning” of his mother. Hägglund reads Derrida’s mourning as a rigorous refusal of “every possible cure for the affliction of mourning,” of any “transcendent consolation” or “reconciliation” of her death—a radical insistence on “a desperate and autoimmune struggle to prolong the life and preserve the memory of himself and his mother.”<sup>30</sup> In the words of Žižek, however, we might contend that “the truth is precisely the opposite”—that Derrida here is not refusing consolation for his mourning, but rather is refusing to mourn. His “desperate and autoimmune struggle” is not undertaken, contra Hägglund, to “prolong the life and preserve the memory of himself and his mother”, but in order to inure himself (literally, to *autoimmunize* himself) from the vulnerability that mourning his mother would require, so as to prolong his own life and preserve his own memory.

This brings us to a larger critique of Hägglund himself. While Hägglund gives a persuasive reading of deconstruction as a radically atheist insistence on survival, he misunderstands the relationship between survival and mortal life. Survival and mortal life are not mutually constitutive, but parallaxically separate. To insist on naked survival as the condition of finitude is not to desire mortal life, but rather to desire immortality in the form of an *infinite* finitude. Finitude may be the dominant figural motif here, but the desire for infinity/immortality is the affect that triggers it. In this way, Derrida’s refusal of traditional icons of immortality (transcendence, closure, sacrality, religiosity, etc.) effectively functions to affirm the eternity of nothingness, just as Hägglund’s insistence on the incommensurability of survival and immortality effectively operates as the

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<sup>29</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Short Circuits, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 63.

<sup>30</sup> Hägglund, 148.

affirmation of a perverse notion of immortality conceived as the infinite duration of the conditions of finitude.

### **Derrida's Radical Democracy: The Politics of Radical Narcissism**

Just as Derrida's radical atheism can be reconfigured as the sublimation of narcissistic desire, so too his radical democracy can be reappropriated as the application of radical narcissism to the political terrain of power and force. Here, the desire for all that is possible (or the possibility for all that can be desired) requires a total debilitation of the political, for it is here that desire is itself structured and traversed. Since radical narcissism seeks the infinite possibility of self-gratification, the gears of the political have to be not just jammed but rendered completely inoperative in such a way that autoimmunizes the politicization of radical narcissism. And this is precisely the effect of rooting the political in the constitution of time.

For Derrida, we recall, time is internally divided, such that to draw the lines of political force in terms of time is to render them constitutively violent. This, in turn, falls squarely within the logic of radical narcissism, for the ontologization of violence is the only condition in which the self can achieve the possibility of pure, infinite gratification. Here it is definitive (and completely unironic) when Hägglund writes that there is "no call for justice that does not call for the exclusion of others."<sup>31</sup> As we recall from "Force of Law," justice and deconstruction are tautologically related: "*Deconstruction is justice*", Derrida writes, just as justice "is not deconstructible."<sup>32</sup> The significance here cannot be understated: It is not simply that both justice and deconstruction are expressions of the ultratranscendental conditions of temporal division—it is that deconstruction wholly affirms division, rupture, violence, etc., *as justice itself*. Democracy to come is not the absolute rupturing of political legitimation—it is the absolute legitimation of political rupture: the infinite affirmation of the violent pursuit of self-gratification *tout court*. Hence, for deconstruction democracy "*is deferral*"—not because true democracy consists in "a violent economy between two principles that cannot be reconciled but are indispensable to one another",<sup>33</sup> but because radical narcissism requires the endless deferral of actual democracy itself.

In the technically specific terms of Hägglund's project, the politicization of radical atheism occurs by means of an autoimmunizing operation in which life is born out of the desire for survival—for without "the affirmation of such survival," Hägglund writes, "nothing could happen to us"—which in turn makes survival the unconditional desire of life. Hence, the affirmation of survival constitutes the unconditional "law of finitude", Hägglund writes, because it "is not something that one can accept or refuse," but the condition that "precedes

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, "Force of Law," 243.

<sup>33</sup> Hägglund, 174.

every decision and exceeds all mastery."<sup>34</sup> To be finite is to survive – and one *has* to survive. In other words: *This is what it means to live in x conditions, and there can be no conditions other than x.* Here, Hägglund shows precisely how a radically narcissistic desire structurally requires – indeed, is itself the desire for – the utter annihilation of the singularity of the other, which manifests itself as the totalization of the desire for survival as the possibility of all possibilities: the elimination of any freedom to choose otherwise.

What has to be categorically challenged here is the tautological nature of Hägglund's logic. That is, if survival is "to never be absolutely present," then the law of finitude – as the lack of presence which precedes any and all experiences of presence – does not imply the logic of survival, but presupposes it. In other words, the law of finitude does not index the conditions of life which then make survival its necessary existential modality; it is the modality of survival, rather, which presupposes the very conditions of life as a finitude that always already lacks presence. Once again, the significance here is not that Hägglund commits some sort of logical fallacy, but that the circularity of his logic of spacing indicates the extrinsic character of its generative source. Here, the constitution of time does not name the conditions of possibility, but is itself a pre-determined set of possibilities. *Différance*, I contend, does not deconstruct into the autoimmunity of finitude and the desire for survival, but into a choice among the possibility of possibilities – and more specifically, into a radically narcissistic decision to determine the singular ego itself as the possibility of possibilities.

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Read from the radical freedom of parallax then, radical atheism is not a rigorous preference for the autoimmunizing (self-negating) experiences of finitude or mortal life. It is a rigorous holding-out for the possibility of egoistic immortality – *at the expense of* truly experiencing finitude, mortality, and real life. Similarly, radical democracy is not ultimately an oscillation between law and justice or freedom and equality. It is rather a rigorous insistence on justice-as-measurability over love-as-immeasurability, and on freedom as the negation of equality over equality as the condition of true freedom. In democracy to come, the law is not in vacillation with justice: Rather, the law *is* the vacillation that justice always issues in when it is constituted as measurability – which is to say as the capacity of the insulated ego to subsume the world as its own (a feat which it can only accomplish by *measuring* its own inability to measure, and which is experienced as the inherent vacillation of measure as such). Likewise, deconstructive democracy does not merely configure freedom and equality in aporetic tension with each other. On the contrary, it configures freedom *decisively* as the totality of the singular ego, which is to say the categorical negation of equality; just as it configures equality *decisively* as the dissolution of singularity, which is to say the categorical negation of freedom.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 164-66.

<sup>35</sup> Hägglund articulates democracy to come in terms of multiple aporias: i.e., the aporias between political responsibility and political struggle, justice and law, deferral

### III. SUBLIMATION: THE RELIGION AND POLITICS OF RELATIONAL MATERIALITY

While the parallax of constitutive desire allows us to re-think Derrida's atheism as radical narcissism, such a reappropriation is lacking if we do not name an alternative concrete desire that displaces it. That is to say, desire as a mere formal category of constitution is incapable of affecting the actual displacement of particular desires, since all that counts is the mere fact of their constitution. In order to displace narcissism then, we need to go beyond the constitutiveness of desire itself to the constitutiveness of particular desires—desires that displace narcissism precisely because they invert its very object of desire. It is only here that we fully affirm the constitutiveness of desire indexed by the parallax of radical freedom.

To this end, I argue that narcissistic desire is displaced by a materiality of relational desire, or the desire for material relation, both of which are different formulations of *love*. My thinking here is fundamentally informed by the work of Antonio Negri, who in his explosive essay *Kairós, Alma Venus, Multitudo*, defines love as the desire for the common which is itself “the location from which the power of the whole of the possible is generated...the ontological power that constructs being.”<sup>36</sup> If being implies being in time and space, then love is the sole source of ontological generation because it alone has the capacity to productively bind time and space. Love is the desire for relation, or what Negri terms the desire for the common. To desire relation requires the productive employment of both time and space because relation consists in the temporal continuity between spatial singularities—or as Negri writes: “love seeks the common, both the eternity of the common (i.e., the already generated) and the *to-come* of the common (i.e., that which is to be constituted on the edge of time).”<sup>37</sup> Love desires the animation of space and the determination of time because both are necessary for relation to be actualized. Furthermore, it is precisely because love desires

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and actualization, and freedom and equality. It is in terms of the latter aporia that he articulates democracy's originary problematic, i.e., as the irreducible tension between individual freedom and general equality implied by a regime in which the singularities comprising a multiplicity are each given autonomous authority in and of themselves. As Hägglund writes: “If the people have the power to govern themselves, it follows that they are free to do whatever they want. But this freedom is immediately restricted within itself, since there is always more than one member of the people, which forces each one to act in relation to others that limit his or her freedom. The freedom of the people is thus unthinkable without equality, since the plurality of people only can constitute themselves as an entity if everyone is equally free.” See Hägglund, 172. My appropriation of love and justice in terms of measurability and immeasurability, respectively, is taken directly from Antonio Negri's analyses of time, measure, and social production in the conditions of real subsumption. See Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2004), 23-30, 159-68.

<sup>36</sup> Negri, 209-10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

relation that it constitutes the power to produce the very conditions of relational possibility. The power of love, therefore, “is the name of absolute immanence, but of an immanence that generates.”<sup>38</sup>

Here, Hägglund’s entire logic of temporal spacing is inverted: Life is not constituted by the internal division of time, but by the constitutive power of love that, out of the very desire for something *to* love, constructs a space—out of time—that it *can* love. Time is incapable of constituting space, just as space is incapable of negating time, because the two are purely exclusive of each other. They never coincide, even antagonistically, for there is nothing in and of themselves that draws them to each other. To posit their intersection, even in the form of a clash, is already to deny their real nature. The only relation between time and space is the pure gap of parallax that separates their infinitely parallel trajectories.

From the perspective of the parallax of constitution then, Derrida’s radical atheism (i.e., the unconditional desire for survival) becomes radical narcissism. But from the perspective of the constitution of love, radical narcissism itself is merely love’s displaced desire to create life, which is also the desire to annihilate death. The constitutive power of love thereby reconfigures each of the conceptual edifices of radical atheism. Life is no longer constituted *by* the internal division of time, but *through* the internal division of time. Identity is not the foreclosure of meaning determined by temporal constitution, but the constitution of meaning that love enacts because of its temporal foreclosure. Life is not produced by its parasitical consumption but by love’s capacity to devour death; autoimmunization is not the condition of life but of the negation of life that is internally generated by time and space themselves—the condition of time and space devoid of love’s touch. The desire for survival is not the desire to avoid death, but the desire to overcome death in a movement of life; concordantly, the affirmation of survival is the desperate affirmation of life that love enacts even in the eminent face of death.

Here we should note that the constitutive power of love in no way ensures the unscathability of love’s objects. To the contrary, love is the very capacity to scathe and to be scathed. Love is a tie that binds, but precisely because of this it is also a blade that cuts. Love does not cut into itself, but into that which lacks love—that which is dead and precisely because of this is torn open by life. In this way, there is fundamental validity in Hägglund’s/Derrida’s mapping of life in terms of division—i.e., its simultaneous exposure to promise/threat, reward/risk, life/death—but it is not for the reasons they affirm. While Hägglund/Derrida locate the desire to create and unite—the desire to survive, in other words—in the very capacity to destroy and rupture, in the constitution of love the relation between contradiction is linear as opposed to circular. It is because love creates that it can destroy that which is not created (i.e.,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 214.

nothingness); it is because love produces life that it annihilates death; and it is because love promises life that it poses a threat to death.

### **The Desire for Material Relation: Religion as Love**

If radical atheism is the unconditional affirmation of survival, then radical love is the unconditional affirmation of particular embodied relationships. The unconditional affirmation of embodied relationships is produced by and productive of love, not sacrality, for it is precisely because embodied singularity cannot be constituted by time that makes its constitution by love unconditional. And it is subsequently the constitution of love, not the constitution of time, that makes it possible to truly affirm mortal life.

The immanence of life is not affirmed, in other words, when the very fact of its finitude forecloses the possibility of its creative production and reproduction. The affirmation of life is not the same as the affirmation of survival: To affirm life is to create the very conditions for its production and reproduction. To affirm survival is to make the possibility of life's production and reproduction the conditions for life as such. When this is the case, real life is infinitely deferred, which is precisely why radical atheism's affirmation of survival is not a rigorous insistence on mortality, but is rather an inverted affirmation of immortality.

The final point, however, is not that radical atheism's unconditional affirmation of survival does not affirm real mortal life—it is rather that the affirmation of survival is, at its deepest level, itself produced by love's desire for living relation. Radical atheism gazes at naked time and space, and immediately recognizes the impossibility of their own internal constitution, which it expresses in the form of a contradiction between life and time/space. Ultimately however, this is not an affirmation of the constitution of life by the contradiction of time/space, but an affirmation of the solely constitutive power of love in the form of expressing the radical incommensurability between living production and the auto-negation of dead time and space.

### **Biopolitical Praxis of the Common: Politics as Love**

If the politicization of radical atheism results in the ontologization and justification of violence—the necessary consequence of desire-for-survival's application to the domain of power—then the politicization of love, or the desire for material relation, consists in what Negri describes as a biopolitical praxis of the common. Biopolitics names the condition in which lines of force no longer simply organize the ways in which embodied subjects experience life, but determine the very conditions of possibility for embodied experience itself. In other words, politics is the forceful determination of the ways in which bodies can and cannot be used; biopolitics, by contrast, is the forceful determination of the affective and sensorial channels that constitute bodies as such. Biopolitics, according to Negri, names the political conditions of our contemporary (postmodern) experience, because language has been transformed and

intensified to the point that it determines the very experience of our bodies as such. That is to say, in the conditions of postmodernity language is no longer used to negotiate embodied desires, but to structure, legitimate, and determine the very desires our bodies are capable of experiencing. The possibility of embodied desire is the possibility of its linguistic representation; the lines of force in postmodernity go through language, and their effect is constitutive not organizational.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, political action in the conditions of postmodernity is reconfigured as biopolitical praxis. Political action is practice that is undertaken to produce certain effects, or the intentional use of force to achieve a desired outcome. In the conditions of biopolitics, however, the practical, intentional use of force does not simply produce certain effects, but also determines the very possibility of effects that can be intentionally produced. Praxis, therefore, indexes the biopolitical reflexivity of production and the means of production, of effects and affect. Biopolitical praxis of the common, therefore, means the deliberate use of language not simply to affect desired forms of relation, but to affect the very possibility of relational desire itself. Common praxis not only constructs embodied relations—it constructs the very meaning of embodied relation as such. As Negri explains, a biopolitical praxis of the common “brings to the forefront the constitutive movement, the productive force and the procedures of love understood as energies that traverse common matter and transform it.”<sup>40</sup>

Once again, we must highlight the disparity here between the desire for material relation and the desire for survival. The politicization of the desire for survival locates the very possibility for the survival of certain singularities in the negation of the survival of other singularities. The political affirmation of survival, in other words, is itself constituted by the violent negation of survival. By contrast, the politicization of the desire for relation locates the possibility of particular embodied relations not in the intentional exclusion of other bodies, but in the deliberate production of the very meaning and conditions of inclusion as such. The powerful (political) expression of relational desire is not constituted by violence, but rather by the capacity of love to determine the very possibility and meaning of violence itself. In this way, the final distillation of radical democracy/democracy-to-come reveals its constitutive appropriation of violence to be not an affirmation of violence, but an expression—from the perspective of the creative power of love—of the destructive political conditions entailed by power enacted for the sheer sake of power itself.

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<sup>39</sup> Negri, 220.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

DANIEL FINER is a doctoral student in the Religion program at Syracuse University. His research focuses on Continental philosophy of religion, political theology, and post-Marxian critical theory. He has recently completed a Masters thesis on the biopolitical dynamics of recent materialist thought, entitled "Gaze from the Abyss: Resistance and the New Materialism in Continental Philosophy of Religion."

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