ARTHUR BRADLEY

A Critical Conversation on "Political Erasure"

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The following interview with Arthur Bradley on his book Unbearable Life *took place in May 2022. The interview was conducted by Whitestone Publications as part of its ongoing Critical Conversations series.*

Carl Raschke: Hello, welcome to critical conversations I'm Carl Raschke. I'm here with Roger Green who is a contributing editor to *The New Polis*. We will be meeting today, Arthur Bradley, who is a distinguished political philosopher, political theologian. I know he wears a number of hats. But he's very well-known at Lancaster University in the UK, and he's been so gracious to join us to talk about his book. Which is entitled *Unbearable Life*, which is on the topic of political erasure.

Which is especially relevant, given what's been going on the last two weeks with the Russian Invasion of Ukraine and some of the ideological rhetoric about erasing Ukraine which has been in the news a lot, so we're not going to just talk about Ukraine. But we're going to try to look at this whole question of political erasure which, in terms of the academic literature, or the philosophical literature on sovereignty is kind of a unique contribution that Arthur makes in the book.

I'm going to turn it over to Arthur in just a minute, I want to say that for variety of reasons we're going to have a shift at the end of the first hour. I will be leading or I guess you say provoking Arthur for the first hour, this is the Arthur show. Roger will be taking over for the Q and A the second hour because I have to leave for a university assignment. That being said, we're really glad to have you, Arthur.

I do need to make one comment that this session is being recorded. And it will be put live at some point, so if you have any objections to being recorded or being part of a session that is recorded, you will probably have to sign off now, we don't encourage that, but if you really feel strongly about that, you know, I think that it is an option. At the same time, if you don't ask a question or say anything, you won't be recorded, you won't appear on the final recording.

So, that's your way out, too, you can listen, but just don't say anything but we assume that your participation in this two-hour seminar is implicit consent to be recorded. That being said we'll get started here so Arthur I think we set this up quite a while back before the war in Ukraine and the current global crisis became manifest in the way it did on February 24. And that wasn't the intent but, in many ways, there are some very

interesting parallels between the theme that you develop in your book *Unbearable Life* and what is happening right now. So could you kind of start off and explain what that is.

Arthur Bradley: Okay, firstly thank you so much Carl, thank you Roger, thank you to everyone at *The New Polis* and thanks to everyone for coming as well it's great to see some familiar faces and also some new ones and I'm very happy and honored to be here to be able to talk to you about my work, and I know really help with it, we can have a fruitful and interesting conversation. I think you're absolutely right Carl, and this is a particularly timely moment to be talking about this topic. I read an article in the Guardian newspaper in the UK the other day, which contains the following quotation from President Zelensky of the Ukraine and he was referring specifically to Russia's attack on Baby Yar, which was the site of a second world war massacre of Jews by German occupation troops and Ukrainian auxiliaries and in response to this Zelensky said this strike proves that for many people in Russia our cave is absolutely foreign. They don't know a thing about our history, but they all have orders to erase our history, to erase our country to erase us all.

And I thought a way into the conversation today is just to think about what exactly is meant by this thing called political or military erasure. What specifically is the difference between erasure and mere killing? Why is erasure worse than killing? Zelensky does not say "he wants to kill us all", he says "he wants to do something even worse than killing us, he wants to erase us". Well, I think the difference is that when you kill someone, obviously you kill them in the present and you kill them in the future- they no longer exist. But when you erase them, you also kill them in the past. It's not that they once lived and now are dead, but they simply never existed in the first place. It's total annihilation of life which retracts even that very minimal recognition or dignity that the act of killing bestows upon us.

To kill someone, you have to recognize that some very basic level that they are worthy of being killed. That they exist okay, even the act of killing against that minimal act of recognition, but erasure is an act of erasing, taking away, subtracting even that minimal point of recognition. And then, finally, and paradoxically, political erasure, political annihilation also annihilates itself, it erases its own act of erasure. It's a strangely self-negating act because, if something does not exist, if you're retroactively annihilating something, then there is no need to annihilate it in the first place.

So, I'm just unpacking here just a couple of statements or hypotheses from Zelensky's statement. And in the book what I

really try and do is tease out some of the political, philosophical and theological implications of this phenomenon of political erasure. As we know, political erasure has a long history in the 20th century, you know, we can think back to acts of proscription, acts of enforced disappearance, the political disappearance in many countries around the world, acts of censorship, what Trotsky called the Stalin school of falsification, where Stalinist Russia employed bureaucrats to retrospectively amend minutes to meetings, removing people from existence, airbrushing photographs famously, to remove people from existence. This process of political erasure has a very long history and, in fact, in the book, you know, I begin with ancient Rome and with the practice of *damnasio memori*, the damnation of memory, which consisted of again erasing every trace of the existence of some proscribed person.

In one way or another, removing their property knocking down or defacing their statues coins and so on, that have their faces on them. So, at one very simple level I'm trying to tell a political the political story or the history of this phenomenon called political erasure in the book. But I'm not really a political theorist. What I'm interested in is the reasons why this happens, or perhaps the world view, to put it, to put it crudely, the particular metaphysics of political erasure, what view of the world, what view of power, and what view of political power, in particular, does this act of political erasure imply? So, what I try and argue in the book, my hypothesis is that political erasure is not simply an extreme or apparent instance of sovereignty. You know it's not simply an exception, or if it is an exception, it's the exception in the Schmttian sense, that proves everything Schmitt famously argues that you know that the exception contains the essence of politics.

So, the second thing I want to do in the book, in addition to tracing in outline form, some of the political forms that erasure takes, is to actually explore the history of sovereignty itself. The history of the theory of sovereignty, through some key figures within its political and theological history from Augustine through Hobbes, up to Schmitt, Benjamin, and Foucault, in order to make a quite a precise you know, admittedly, provocative speculative argument.

And it's the argument that this gesture of political erasure, as I've said, is not exceptional. Rather, it's the actualization or it's the art working of some essential possibility that's contained within sovereignty itself; and in the introduction to the book, I formulated in this way: I say that sovereignty is not the power to make die and let live, as the ancient Romans had it. Nor is it the power to make live and let die as Michel Foucault famously had it in his work on bio politics, but rather the power to make life neither live nor die.

Life and death, do not exist as empirical phenomena, as recognizable empirical phenomena until that sovereign decision is taken, that there is a kind of originary almost ontological, political ontological state of exception, in which the subject exists until the sovereign takes the decision one way or another to let them enter the realm of existence. So, I trace this argument this phenomenon as I've suggested through various scenes and each chapter focuses on a particular figure of this thing that I call "unbearable life". Life that neither lives or dies, life that was never their life, that has been annihilated, and whose own gesture of annihilation has been annihilated. I focus on the figure of Caucus in Augustine's City of God. I focus on Macbeth in Shakespeare's play of that name. I focus on the figure of the cutter con in Carl Schmitt. I focus on the figure of Jeffers daughter in Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan, and I focus in, finally, on Walter Benjamin- on Walter Benjamin's theses and the philosophy of history.

And where I focus in particular, is on what he calls the life that was never lived, there's a very famous and obscure and much debated passage in Benjamin, where he says what we envy in the past, what we seek to return to, what we seek to re actualize is not the life that we did live, but the life that was never, that was never lived. So, in a sense, the book is a gesture of political recuperation, is trying to give these voices back, to bring these unbearable erased bodies back to let them speak, to let them articulate themselves.

And also, finally, to try and articulate a form of resistance to this act of political erasure when we all know that right now there is a very strong and courageous act of resistance going on in Ukraine to this gesture of political erasure, and what I try and do in the book is trace some of the ways in which, both in terms of philosophy and politically different figures, have sought to resist unbearable life, not simply by reasserting ever more strongly their right to exist- the fact that, yes, I am here, I am un-erasable, but even in in certain paradoxical cases to take on and to mobilize this strange state of non-existence, of existing outside life and death as a site of political possibility and revolutionary political possibility itself. So, if it's okay with you, I think I'll stop there. Hopefully I've given people a general flavor of what I tried to do and what my ambitions are for the project, and I'll hand it back to you, Carl.

Carl Raschke: Okay, great. I have quite a number of questions, and again, as we talked about prior to going live here, if we can kind of toggle back between the contemporary situation and also the theoretical matrix in which you're presenting this argument. So, let me ask you just some questions, about the theoretical matrix. You have all these examples that include everything from Augustine to Shakespeare, and you tend to

contextualize it in terms of the argument of Foucault about sovereignty. Now, of course, the question of sovereignty is really sort of the key question- it's the overarching question within this general field that has undergone quite a revival in the last 30 years that we call political theology.

I think, political theology myself is somewhat of a kind of a red herring, because it very often, it means in people's mind "well I'm a theologian I'm going to talk about politics" and that's, of course, not the original meaning. It was first formulated by the person who may not necessarily invented the term, but he gave it currency, and that, of course, was Carl Schmitt in his book in the 1920s entitled *Political Theology,* where he defines sovereignty As basically, we say, executive decision, suspending the rules of laws for a moment. Now, I would like to hear you, if you want to kind of talk about this kind of classical notion of sovereignty and relationship to your unique way of coming at it as the notion of political erasure and, of course, the first thing that comes to mind is Vladimir Putin, who, in some ways, seems to have suspended, you know not only the rules domestically, which he's been doing all along, but even international law, we hear a lot of kind of chatter about Rule based international order. And Putin is saying well you know the rules don't apply, because this big what's ever been going on with Ukraine and what he thinks he's been going on Ukraine the encroachments of NATO blah blah blah is a matter of extreme exigency. It's existential. And you know, he also, in his infamous speech, just before the invasion, or maybe was right as the invasion started, I don't remember exactly talks about you know redrawing the map that Ukraine and Russia have always been the same people, but in some ways, this is political erasure political erasure, not only in the conceptual sense political erasure in the very real existential sense of annihilating a people and one doesn't have to be going on a limb to say that the actions of the Russian army, particularly the bombing of civilians is now being perceived as acts of genocide.

Whether what the International Court will rule, eventually, you know we don't know, but clearly we're in that particular zone, so I was wondering if you could kind of look at contemporary events and maybe if you don't want to talk about Ukraine, you could talk about other examples, you have a lot of examples in the book, but they're all really historical examples your thematic examples from different time periods, and I realize your background is in comparative literature, so you use a lot of those kinds of references, but I was wondering if you could kind of talk about this issue of sovereignty in both the Schmittian sense and in terms of specific examples to kind of give us a real kind of lived experience of what that might mean.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, there's a lot there, so let me just take it stage by stage. I mean, firstly, yeah, I'm happy to call this work a work of political theology, for better or worse. I don't think political theology is necessarily a very helpful term anymore, but it seems to be the one we're stuck with. For me it's really just the site of a problematic. Okay, it's not it's certainly not the answer to anything. I have no agenda behind it—certainly neither a political nor theological agenda. As far as Schmitt goes, and you know, Schmittian political theology, we're still debating what that is, everyone knows that famous statement from Schmitt about "all modern concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts," but what exactly he means by that- is it a historical claim, is it a. genealogical claim, is it a morphological kind of claim, we don't know.

The bits that I find most helpful and fruitful from *Political Theology* are not so much the genealogical dimensions, but what he calls the sociology of concepts. That's his other definition of *Political Theology*, and particularly his idea that every physical form of governance, any state of governance in the world will always contain within it, some kind of metaphysical worldview, and for us it's his gambit, it's the Christian theological one, but that it doesn't always have to be. It could operate differently. So, all that's a very long way of saying that, for me, political theology is really just the name of a question or a problem. Sovereignty, equally, we could have a long debate about just how useful the term sovereignty really is, how over-determined and simultaneously empty that term seems to be.

The book really the starting point from the book is a very brief moment in Foucault's "Society Must Be Defended" lectures, which, as far as I'm aware, almost nobody has ever commented on before it's in the final lecture from 1976 and March 1976 in which he very briefly comments, and this is where we're getting into the Foucault on bio politics, where he talks about the sovereign power of life and death, and he says, almost extemporaneously, "this is a very strange thing you know, because if you really have sovereignty over life and death life and death. Well, it can't just be the power to kill, if you have sovereignty over life in some sense, you must be putting the subject or positioning the subject in some state before life and death. Whereupon you then take the decision that they live or that they die."

Okay. And he just sort of leaves that out there for a moment and then disappointingly, in my opinion, just defaults immediately to the idea that sovereignty is simply the right of the sword, the right to kill. So, so I guess what I tried to do, is just actually explore what would that mean? What would sovereignty over life and death, the sovereignty that's not just the power to kill, but the power to decide what is life, what counts of

this life, what counts as bearable life, in in my understanding, (so that's just a little bit more on the theoretical armature of the book). You ask about examples, I'm not a kind of. political scientist, so there'll be people here, I think, that will be much more qualified to speak about this, and certainly to speak about what's going on in Ukraine.

The only thing I would say is, I wonder whether we speak about the rule based international order and as much as it exists, I wonder whether the real exception in the history in the modern life of nations, might be this moment of the rule based international order. This is something that has existed for a relatively short period of time, and it may, we may be going through the process in which is nigh ceasing to exist. Okay, 100 years from now 50 years from and I, this is something we may look back on the international order itself as the exception to a kind of multipolar world, but that's just my own speculation. Examples of this thing called political erasure-well, they're all around us, aren't they? One of the final examples I gave him the book is the phenomenon of the so called "unlawful enemy competent". This invented legal category that was created for the Iraq war, in order for the United States of America to circumvent the Geneva Convention and the specific rights that are according to the figure of the enemy, and to place those people in Guantanamo Bay in a kind of legal equivalent of a black hole. And there's been quite a lot of interesting work on this phenomenon, which, although it was at the time, presented as new and exceptional and revolutionary, in a sense, was really just a continuation, perversely and ironically, of the practices of political disappearance that we all know from Latin America in the 1970s, from the Middle East in the 1970s and 80s. From my home state of Northern Ireland, I grew up in Belfast in the 1970s and 80s, political disappearance was a phenomenon there too, so I don't think we have to look very far to find really existing examples of this phenomenon called unbearable life. I think in many ways these practices, these dispositives are kind of all around us.

To end where I started with, I guess with Ukraine is again, like this gesture, the gesture of political erasure in the field of international relations, whatever you want to call it is, it is one of the oldest ones there is- it's the gesture of any form of settler colonialism or invasion. It's always saying well you know, there was nobody here before we arrived, this was never anything, an independent state will just it was all just you know desert or jungle or something like that it's the classic colonial moment or colonial gesture. Of but over erasing its own its own gestural of colonization or invasion hope that answers the question a little bit.

Carl Raschke: Yeah, that's very good, and I want to again follow up, because I think the theoretical background is very important here. Because you can't talk about examples, without really getting the nuances out of, what we might say for the whole discourse of sovereignty. By the way, I'm trying to clarify this in the latest book I'm working on, but you know, that's neither here nor there. I want to go back to something that hasn't been brought up, and again, some people here would be familiar with this argument and some people would not.

But that's a Giorgio Agamben's rather celebrated notion of "Bare Life", where he defines sovereignty and that term which he also starts out the book *Homo Sacer* from an example from ancient Rome, so my question is even though there's a kind of alliteration here: bear/Bare life and unbearable life, what is the relationship between the two concepts as Agamben uses it and you use it, how do you innovate, and do you have any criticisms of Agamben, or do you think you and him are on the same page?

Arthur Bradley: Yeah obviously it's a partly a homage to Agamben, the title and I wanted the resonance of bare life to be heard there. But I think hopefully there's also a difference. And it goes back to where we started, which is this notion that political erasure retracts the real horror of political erasure, the thing that makes it worse than an act of killing right is the fact that it retracts even the recognition that your murder gives you. A murder still bestows on you the recognition that you are something that exists, even if you exist purely in order to be killed, and this is a point that Emanuel Levinas makes in *Totality And Infinity*. Okay, this is not a new argument, that even the act of killing the other bestows this meager dignity of recognizing that person or that body as killable life. And that's my difference from Agamben, because for Agamben effectively, what Bare Life does is defined in the logic of the inclusive inclusion exclusion rather that he develops in homeless soccer.

What bare life does is expose life unconditionally and define life absolutely and purely in terms of its capacity to be killed bare life is killable life, it's nothing other than killable life. What i'm trying to do. What I think I'm trying to do in this concept of unbearable life. is to argue that well there's a life that you know that is beneath bare life that's beneath killable life. a life that perhaps does not need to be killed because it never is granted that minimal recognition of even being bare life in the first place. Okay, so all these gestures are gestures of what the gestures that I trace in the book are not gestures of killing paradoxically, empirically they cashed out in violence and extreme violence and all sorts of ways, but I'm trying to move beyond necropolitics more than auto politics, all those various gestures that define bio politics in terms of killing and unconditional capacity to kill life.

I'm interested in what Foucault speaks of something called indirect murder in to which you know if you read history of madness birth of the clinic any of those books. You know these are all acts of indirect murder in direct non empirical violence thoughts of silencing marginalization exclusion, which, in some way philosophically foreclose the act of killing, killing is no longer necessary, but it's redundant or it's tautological, because that body is not granted the right to exist if something doesn't exist, you can you don't have to kill it, that would be the difference for me.

Carl Raschke: Okay and just again, to kind of nuance that a little bit, Agamben uses the example of the camp, with the concentration camp from World War II, which was, of course, related to the Holocaust, which was an effort at extermination, not just killing, but extermination of a whole race. That's what we mean by meaning of the term genocide, with the idea of erasing from memory, the *damnasio memori*, that you talk about and so forth, and he also talks about the *Muselman*, neither alive nor dead in the camp now.

This what I'll be honest when I was first reading your book, I had a little bit of a problem saying okay what's different here? And you kind of explain that a lot, but because I think you take or you go where Agamben fears tread here. And we are really raising a very important issue about sovereignty – it is not just in the classic sense of the ability to kill, because when you talk about the state of exception you're talking about you know, use the language of the current situation, you know basically suspending the rules, not just the Constitution, which is probably what Schmidt had in mind with the Weimar Republic in the 1920s and, of course, was because Germany had really been a kind of autocratic state, which kind of gestures democracy in a lot of ways that Russia has in recent years.

But he saw possibilities that were going on here that both solve the problem of the inability of parliamentary democracy to really resolve important issues, particularly when the Republic was under threat, but also, in a kind of odd way he foresaw the rise of fascism and totalitarianism, which wasn't just about fascism, you could say Stalinism was just as totalitarian if not worse so, this question the day we don't talk about totalitarian as we talk about autocracy. I find this a little bit specious, because you know where exactly is the line but when you talk about the camp and I'm going to use that as I know you don't talk a lot about the camp, you didn't reference it, but what is the relationship between the camp and the figure, however you define that, who is the figure of unbearable life?

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, I try not to talk about the camp because, again, I think it's become this massively over determined figure within contemporary bio political theory.

Carl Raschke: It's like the word fascism has become useless in terms of our theory.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, yeah, I mean, I think, if there's one thing hopefully, we can all agree on is we need some new words, right? I mean, I think we should expect to talk about these things. I'm not sure totalitarianism fascism appeasement and so on, there's always this strange lag between the conceptual or political vocabulary and the political imaginary and contemporary events. In this country, unfortunately, the country where I live, everything is still seen through the frame of the Second World War- a pre nuclear age, so we talk about people appeasing Putin and so on and so forth.

I try and avoid talking about the camp for the reasons I just suggested, except I mean I'd say there's one or two things that I would say, which and again, you know I'm not an expert on the camp, I'm not an expert on the Holocaust, so I will defer to anyone here who will say something different, but, two moments I think, or two phenomena that I think are worth drawing attention to here, that perhaps again, speak more to my interest than to a to Agamben's, were obviously: yes, yes it's genocide, yes it's holocaust- well Agamben says it isn't Holocaust. Yes, it's mass killing, it's reducing people to *Untermensch*, and so on and so forth.

When he was announcing the Holocaust, Heinrich Himmler gives a notorious speech to the upper echelons of the Nazi party, where he invites them all there to tell them what they're going to do, and this is partly an active spreading the blame spreading the responsibility, making sure that no one can say that they're out of the loop on this one, he names all the people in the audience there we know you know we know this as a fact. But, of course, you know what does he say, how does he describe what they're doing to the Jews, at that moment in history? He says, "this is a glorious page in our history that will never be written. No one, no one will know about this, no one can know about this." And that's quite an interesting moment. Why, why is this something that that cannot be spoken about or written by even in front of the so-called pure believers?
Why does this active political annihilation have to annihilate itself, have to erase itself. So, I don't mention that in the book. In retrospect, I wish I did, but I mean, there are other there are other touchstones here that in writing on totalitarianism that I think speak quite well to what I'm talking about when Hannah Arendt talks about the *Nacht und Nebel*, you know "the night and fog" maneuvers which again where these undercover, the secret activities, the activities that could not could not be spoken of, and should, should not be spoken off again, these are where Nazi bio politics, Nazi thanato-politics enters into this territory I'm calling unbearable life now.

Carl Raschke: Since I'm going to have to go here in about 15 minutes, and maybe this would be a lead in to Q and A to get beyond the topic of Ukraine, and also the theoretical matrix this is kind of Roger's area of expertise, who I've been holding off on it a little bit. And I don't know Roger, if you'd like to jump in now, while we're you know just engaging directly between the moderator and our guest on this, but you brought up settler colonialism, as an example.

And, of course, the last time we dealt with sovereignty in a Critical Conversations, it was exactly over know this. Not just settler colonialism and the genocide of indigenous peoples, which has been happening around the world, and again you're not dealing with some kind of monster autocrat like you have in the case of Hitler or Putin, but you're dealing with a whole process of say the X Board of political institutions and the erasure of indigenous values and rights and so forth, and even through forums like cultural expropriation.

This is Roger's bailiwick and he may have something he really wants to comment on this, but in what degree and in what context, does this fit the whole question of colonialism and de-coloniality as Walter Mignolo talks about. We've had Walter Mignolo on critical conversations here before. The fact that in in some ways the whole question of indigeneity in a globalizing world becomes a question of political erasure, and you can say whatever in this general frame of reference, you want to, I'm not asking a specific question, but you brought it up so we give you the opportunity.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, I mean I don't I don't have a great deal to say about this, and it's not something that you know I want to. claim any authority over you know it'd be very in a way, I kind of prefer to listen to people like Roger on this one, you know, except to reiterate my point that I suppose that you know I think one of the classic gestures of colonialism on a settler colonialism is thought is a form of political erasure isn't it- I mean, linguistic erasure, cultural erasure, institutional erasure. Yeah, I don't know. I mean, could you come in at this point, Roger?

Roger Green: Yeah, thank you so much for this this it's like, very rich for me thinking about this. So, on the question just briefly of the of the camp, I'm thinking of some black feminist thought, and particularly Alexander Weheliye's book *Habius Viscus*, which is another sort of avenue on this trajectory of talking about bare life—a critique of Foucault and Agamben from a black perspective.

And, in particular, one of the things, he's not the only person to note this, but this guy Whitman, I think is his last name, *Hitler's American Model*, makes this point as well, that the concentration camps that the Nazis produced are produced upon

an American legalistic model that is initiated by the reservation system. So the Indian reservation is the camp, and there's the encomienda into their earlier sort of iterations of that. I'm going back to Spanish colonialism as well, but my expertise is in North America at the moment.

I'm also thinking of Theodore Allen's two volumes study on *The Invention of the White Race* of these colonial gestures the invention of whiteness has to sort of come because of this relationship that develops with native people in the colonies after the discovery of the new world. And that sort of formulates itself over a few centuries into the different iterations of whiteness that we have. What I think is very useful for me, in terms of your take on unbearable life—and I really, really appreciate the distinctions with bare life and Agamben there—is that it almost feels like to me that that unbearable life is the descent of the *basileia tou theou* that Christianity gives, that is, the remaking over of the world in the euro-Christian image of God, that is inherently genocidal.

And I know this is controversial and provocative for me to say this, but at its heart is to wipe out the other, and so it becomes so difficult to speak of indigenous life or to speak of what you know. Sylvia Winter talks about a different notion of human than what Foucault is talking about in the earlier, the lectures on the psychoanalysis book with …forgetting the 72 lectures. So, those are the things that are kind of arriving for me, and just to bring it back to the earlier sort of discussion around political theology, I wonder what the theological residue might be for your concept of unbearable life, although we see it, of course, with Putin and, in this very concrete, realistic situation that's not using the kind of rhetoric of religiosity in any sort of way, but I wonder, what you might make of the theological residue in a kind of euro-Christian sense.

Arthur Bradley: Great question and it's something that I'd have to think quite a lot more about. I'll just pick up a few sort of footnotes to what you're saying, if you don't mind. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler actually says, "I got my inspiration from the USA, eugenics- those guys have got the right idea over there." Some of this sort of scarier moments in *Mein Kampf*, the race laws and the southern states and so on. And, obviously, (and this is something I do talk about in the book) you have to see the Holocaust and genocide as the conclusion of a violent bio-political program that's been going on for almost 10 years by that point, right upon (Roberto Esposito talks about this very well, I think), when the Nazis come to power 1933-34, they're already doing things like compulsory sterilization of undesirable peoples.
So, they're killing the future children and saying these people are no longer allowed to have children. And this circle of sterilization becomes wider and wider. The plan was, before it

was interrupted by the Second World War was, all women over the age of 36 would be sterilized to prevent impurities in the race and this kind of thing, and again in some ways, the book is a homage Esposito here because he says, and I'm just quoting from memory, that "Yes, sovereignty is the preemptive. It's not killing, it's the preemptive foreclosure of existence, it's erasing the necessity to kill. If you sterilize somebody, if you ensure that they're unable to have children, it's a kind of virtual, I don't want to use the term genocide here, but you know what I mean, in the sense that it's sort of, it's creating an intergenerational act of violence by preventing these future people, these future children from being born.

I think you're right on the money, that this is a kind of maybe unbearable life, maybe it is a Christian project, maybe it is a Christian political theological project. I end one of the chapters, the chapter on Macbeth by talking about the witches cauldron (in Macbeth), when they're easy to remember, when they're throwing all these things in there and cooking up their diabolical spells. And what are they putting in there, that you know these are still Christian witches? You know this because they put in the liver of Turk, the something, something, from the unbaptized child and this kind of thing. So, it's this weird kind of Christian political theological mix of all these forms of life that are deemed unworthy of life or were unworthy of being lived but which can be, Frankenstein style-mixed together in order to produce this this new kind of body.

Yeah and, of course, Putin would be one example of this kind of Christian bio politics/ Christian political erasure. But as you know, as you well know, a lot of the discourse around Ukraine in this country and in France in America has been this incredibly offensive rhetoric that "they're like us, they're white, they're Christian, they're European". It's not like Iraq or something like that, so we must. care for them, because they are like us, so it's that we have even the act of solidarity or defense contains its own violences.

Carl Raschke: If I could just jump in here, because I'm going to have to go for five minutes/ six minutes and I'm not going to ask questions. But I'm going to make a comment on this, because I think this is a very fruitful area discussion. Of course, this is one area where Roger and I've seen significant disagreement. Between mentioned the *basileia tou theou,* which gets translated as a kingdom of God, but actually the Greek translation means for the kingship of God and it gets basically into the Judaic monotheistic notion of the kind of unamiable God, and the power of that enable God, which, if you want to read the Old Testament, becomes genocidal, particularly when it talks about wiping out the Canaanites-what does that mean?

A lot of this lot of this discussion of being a euro-Christian project, I would say, a euro Christendom project, and the whole notion of Christendom, which gets to an important fact, part of the book that I'm working on which Roger is reading the manuscript, where I coined the term "mono-politics", related to monotheism and how that's different than using the word Christianity, because after all, there's also Islam, which is even more monotheistic, at least in its origin than Christianity. Christianity as the three code monotheistic religions is probably the least monotheistic religion, because it has this paradoxical notion of the Trinity, which Agamben makes a lot out of. But my point is, what does that have to do with erasure? Well, there are a lot of things that has to do with erasure. I mean, it's clear that when Columbus came to the United States, the way he treated the indigenous people was because he had this idea that he was planting the flag of "Christendom" which historically comes from the idea of *Romanitas* which is associated with *Humanitas*. Mignolo makes a very strong and accurate point about this in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

I would say a lot of what is used the word Christian is really a kind of mono- political *Romanatas*, modernist idea that has a very long genealogy to it, and it's also behind Nazi totalitarianism and that that is basically the idea that there is this kind of ultimate moral order that is God ordained. That, and in the case of Islam, you can see that, in terms of the behavior of ISIS too, it's there in all monotheistic traditions. Especially when you try to secularize or moralize these things. I mean, if you look at the whole Constantinian transformation, you can see how a lot of this process does that.

I just spent my course on Christianity, trying to explain this, so we're looking at the idea of an exception, which basically says, there is one culture. It is a true culture; it is a morally grounded culture in the idea of this absolute sovereign God. Which is how you find that rhetoric in Schmitt, who was a Catholic, by the way, and Catholicism historically has been the basic carrier of this monotheistic/ this mono- political idea. So, the issue is, we're seeing it right now. I mean some kinds of the paradoxes. I mean, everybody is behind Ukraine. Which, of course, I'm behind Ukraine. I mean, this, this is abominable, what what's going on, but at the same time you have all these subtleties which come out, is like okay, Putin has a particular idea of mono-political, which is not the same as the Roman Catholic idea that influenced Columbus.

It's an idea that goes, all the way back to the eighth century it's the Orthodox idea, the third Rome, which is you know scholars have known about for a long time and he's basically saying he's a guarantor of Christian value, which means that this is an idea we don't want a lot written about. This idea of the

third Roman and the religious vision the way Putin essentially captured the Orthodox Church. With all the effort of political erasure under the Communist regime and his recapture that and use an idea which in many ways goes back 1000 years, to try to reorder the world.

But it's still not the idea of Christendom, it's a particular variation of Christendom and it's been politicized and, of course, this mono-political idea of Christendom is always. politicized, but it has different kind of variations and it is ultimately the basis of a totalitarian gesture. It's ultimately that simple, so you may want to respond to that. Unfortunately, I have to go now, but I wanted to get that in there.

Roger Green: Dropping the MIC and walking away. Ha, yeah, so just to acknowledge that this is a fruitful tension and intellectual disagreement that Carl and I have had, and its ongoing and since Carl and I can talk about that all the time, I'd like to sort of first allow you, Arthur, to respond to that and then carry over with Kieryn, who had a question earlier, and she has a comment in here that I'll let her address next, and if anybody else in the meantime has questions just maybe like throw yourself that "I have a question" in the queue and then I'll let you carry on, but this is really great.

Arthur Bradley: There's an awful lot of food for thought here, and I'm sympathetic to Carl. I'm not going to suggest that there is one kind of Christian project or one monotheistic/mono-politics of Christianity. The gesture, or the trajectory that I pursue in the book really is in the chapter on Augustine which is, obviously, a kind of critique of Eusebian imperial Christianity, and one way or another, also a forerunner to what will become political realism. I tried to plot the tragic realisms of political theory and the 19th and 20th centuries- people like Hans Morganthau and so on. But nonetheless, I'm really interested in in in the violence of even that that kind of minimal position of Augustine, and I do a reading of just the really, incredibly shocking passages in book 19 of *City of God* around Augustine's defense of torture.

Where, effectively, he anticipates every single, concedes every single argument against torture that you'll ever come across. You know it's wrong. It doesn't work. You know, if you torture someone they'll just say whatever you like, whatever they think you want to hear, in order to stop you torturing them. But, nonetheless, you still have to torture people, and you just have to hope that god's grace will win out in the end, so it's this. So, yeah, all I'm saying is I wouldn't want to give that-the so-called realist wing of Christian political theology- a free pass, like, having a bad conscience about your imperial ambitions doesn't let you off the hook, I think.

Roger Green: Kieryn, you had Stefan on when I was talking but you had a question before that, so I'm just going to turn it to you, if you don't mind.

Kieryn Wurts: Okay, what I wrote in the chat is I'm a bit torn, fully related to this conversation about Christianity and kind of imperial and colonial strategies, but it's fascinating. I think I told myself I wasn't going to make a comment on that, but now I'm going to, I think. I think there are, I would agree with Carl, that there's more than one strategy of Christianity and there are multiple Christianities, right? And I think it's fascinating, even a comparison between kind of Roman Catholic, this colonial universalism as opposed to the Orthodox third Rome. I think Protestant missionaries are colonizing approaches, which are much more, they have a different anthropology kind of it's an entrepreneurial or even a popular or populist kind of colonization, so I think that's a fruitful discussion, and that was just speculative what I said right there.

I wanted to ask, actually, thank you for your presentation, first of all, Mr. Bradley, and I guess, for this question of unbearable life, I wrote a little bit in the chat about this particularly Russian strategy of these breakaway or semi-autonomous regions, and some of the examples I've looked at in my own work, include the Nagorno-Karabakh, that is, the region contested between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there's Transnistria, and that is in Moldova.

The Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics play a really important role in this Ukraine conflict, as well annexed Crimea, and I think this is a really interesting it's not individual persons who are made into this form of unbearable life as I think I've understood your argument, but it's more it's persons and territories, the way that they're excluded from the international system, and kind of in a backwards way brought under Russian imperial control Russian centralized control.

But it's also the effect this in many cases by playing on a local ethnic conflict—that's very present in Nagorno-Karabakh—and I think that's a really important part of the Russian story, and I think, maybe has some interesting resonances with your work, your work is new to me ,so maybe you wrote about this and can just talk from your book, but I would love to hear your thoughts on that.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, I wish I could reply. I think you know an awful lot more about this than I do.

One of the things I try and do in the book is talk about the history of this thing called "unbearable life", I begin with *damnatio memori* in in ancient Rome, where, if you committed some particularly heinous crime like treason, or something like that, you wouldn't simply be killed, your memory would be damned. Okay, that's the literal translation of *damnatio memori*. And this

was something that, as I said, you would be divested of all your properties, anything that you had willed would be taken, it would be expropriated, statues of you would be defaced, coins and so on, but this was applied to a specific person/ to specific individuals.

But obviously what happens over history is, as you say, is that this concept of *damnatio memori* becomes, it metastasizes, it just gets bigger and it applies, it becomes racialized. It becomes regionalized, it becomes nationalized. So these are some of the examples that we could talk about here.

How and when this happens is a difficult one. I talked about the French Revolution, as you know, obviously, is one kind of a key moment in this when you get someone like the ACS writing is what is the third state, where he's effectively says one of theirs is our third state. There's only the third state. There's only the people. The other states simply don't exist. And he even speaks about the aristocracy and so on, or just like a disease, part of the body, like a tumor that you simply remove. So, this is still being applied domestically. We're not in the territory of international relations here. But it's a key moment, and obviously CS did not invent the trope, the medical trope of medicalizing politics but nonetheless it's a key moment in the becoming, the statifying of this process of unbearable life.

Okay that's about as much as I can say in response to you. There's something else I could say about political Judaism as well, one of the interesting things in this book actually, is in the case of figures like Hobbes, is the return to the Hebrew Bible and for figures like Hobbes, Locke, and so on, way more interested in the Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew Bible models their politics than they ever are in The New Testament. Abraham and Moses are cited way more than Jesus, for example, so I could say more about that at some point, if people are interested, but I don't want to. It's still a Christian appropriation of Judaism, it's Christians using Judaism for political purposes, but I just wanted to throw that in there as well, but thank you very much for your comment.

Roger Green: Thank you. Patrick Soch has question/comment.

Patrick Soch: Hey, thank you! I guess I have two questions. Well, brief- both of them, hopefully. One is just, do you explore the sort of in this concept of unbearable life that may be the most resilient and life affirming reaction, and I'm thinking, especially in the indigenous context is self-erasure, is sometimes the most life affirming reaction that some communities have had, which is to refuse to play the sort of dialectical game of recognition, right, the politics of recognition that's required And so, some communities have simply stopped pushing against that, and have kind of quietly done some really amazing things. And then

30 years down the road the larger American Community kind of hears about them, so I never knew anybody who's doing these things and Then you can shake your head and there's a reason you didn't right so, I'm just wondering.

And then the second piece is in the German context where you talked about the self-negating sort of component of The Holocaust, in a sense, of the fact that has to be itself erased and I wonder if you dealt with Eric Voegelin's 1964 lectures *Hitler and the Germans*, in which he basically says, with it, we can't talk about Hitler, we have to talk about Hitler and the Germans and without a morally bankrupt German middle class, there would never have been a Hitler. And he said, and in fact I can show you the list of all of the civil servants and magistrates who were serving before the Holocaust and are still serving today in 1964, and I'm happy to give you their names and he himself was a German political philosopher. So anyway, it's very, very interesting so in some ways that whole systemic earthworks that supported the Holocaust was itself kind of erased.

Arthur Bradley: You're sure yeah, one of the words that, unfortunately, has made a recurrence in the last few years, or the last few days is denazification. Which is a process which has a very complex history. What on earth is going on there with this appeal to the process of denazification, that we now have Putin using it as a justification to invade Ukraine.

To go back to your first point on self-erasure. I think that's an absolutely brilliant point, and I think actually that's one of the arguments that I'm really interested in. To go back to that question of how one resists this gesture of political erasure. It is not simply the obvious forms of resistance, which is the reassertion of one's right to exist one's existence and so on. But actually, that exactly what you're talking about here, is that gesture of a kind of almost preemptive self-erasure. A rhetorical political act of self-regime which has a really long and interesting history.

I'd love to hear more about what you're talking about, but in the book what I'm talking about, again in the chapter on the French Revolution, I do a reading of Maximilien Robespierre's political speeches in which one of the most dominant tropes through Robespierre's political work is this figure of being already dead. "That nothing can be done to me, I cannot be killed, I cannot be destroyed because everything has already happened. I've already given my life to the revolution, I'm already dead." Obviously it has got residences that go back to Socrates, goes back to Jesus. There is martyrological references there as well. It becomes a means of wielding political revolutionary violence.

There's a kind of absurd surrealist exchange in the French National Assembly when Robespierre is being attacked by a

member who's just returned from one of the sieges and is criticizing the national government and Robespierre gives this really bizarre speech. Which is that, "I'm not going to listen to you because if I'd been at that speech, if I'd been at that stage, I'd be dead no I wouldn't have come back here in order to criticize," you so the very fact that you are alive disproves your argument. You know the fight, it shows that you have this selfish commitment to your own particular existence rather than *la fete*. The trope of the already dead, we can trace it through all sorts of movements. There's the Zapatista would be a great one, Subcomandante Marcos, you know the writings of Subcomandante Marcos, you know mobilize this trope of "yes we know, we are the already dead," and so takes self-erasure as a sort of sight of political productivity and of revolutionary productivity.

Patrick Soch: Thanks for that response, appreciate it.

Arthur Bradley: Thank you.

Roger Green: Thank you, Suhayb Yunus has a question.

Suhayb Yunus: Yeah, I'm going to zoom out from maybe some of the other questions and ask something that's more methodological, or maybe even epistemological, depending on how you understand it. Unlike a lot of works that deal with these kinds of topics you're bringing a lot of literary examples. What do you think the utility of resourcing works of Western literature in these types of discussion is? And how would you see future scholarship that's bridging these two areas? It's bringing in something like Shakespeare into the discussion both in terms of concept, like what's within Shakespeare? What's within, you know, fill in the blank? Also, in terms of the literary, the fact of the literary itself being something of a type of immortality. Just the fact that it exists.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, it's a great question. You know, obviously there's personal biographical reasons for why I am the scholar that I am. I've always worked somewhere in between literature, politics, and philosophy. So, I wish I could tell you that it was all part of some grand master plan on my part and a entirely finely tuned methodology but that wouldn't be true. Nevertheless, I take heart and I align myself self with quite a lot of really interesting figures who are exploring that middle ground between literature, political theory, philosophy. I admire people like Eric Santner, Belanger. You know, and I think there are strong methodological reasons for doing this because you know Shakespeare is a political thinker right. Shakespeare both inherits and creates political concepts. Concepts which will then go on to have so called "real world implications." You will get future English monarchs saying "I am Richard the second," Meaning, I am Shakespeare's Richard the second.

And then on another level political theory is really nothing but a question of fiction and a question of thought experiments, a question of heuristic fictions. What is the Hobbesian state of nature? He's making it very clear; this is not a real place. He's not saying it ever existed, it's a kind of subtractive thought experiment. He's saying, "here we are sitting in our Commonwealth, here we are sitting in our sort of civil post-civil war society. What would it be like if we subtracted everything? What would be left?"

So, it's a work of eliminative thought experiment. And I quote in the book as well that wonderful thought experiment that Hobbes gives, where he talks about who decides when a malformed baby is born, when this kind of prodigy or something is born, who decides whether it's a man or a human being, or not? Is it Aristotle, is it the philosopher's, no it's only the sovereign who will decide whether that child is a human being or not.

It's something I'm kind of exploring a little bit more. I'm writing a project about political theory and theatre. Which is about the relationship between not simply theater in the sense of dramatic works, but in the sense that theory and theater are two both opposed but interwoven forms of phenomenology, forms of political thinking, that go all the way back to the ancient Greeks. *Theoria* in the Greek is, at least in its inheritance, and the idea that we have of it today is supposedly the pure disinterested contemplation of the forms. You know, the bedazzlement or wonder. *Theatron* in the Greek, they both come from the same length *Theoreo* and *Theatron* they both come from *Thea* "to see." *Theatron* is a more interested, situated form of phenomenology, a form of seeing. It's someone who is placed in a specific position in order to see, and these two forms of, as I said, both political vision and political phenomenology are interwoven in really interesting ways.

Right from the beginning of the western political tradition in Plato himself. To put it really crudely I don't want to draw a distinction between literature over here and political theory or philosophy over here. I think the distinction between them is far, far more blurred and nuanced than that.

Suhayb Yunus: Thank you.

Roger Green: I have a lot of thoughts on that, and thank you Suhayb for asking that question because this is a particular concern of mine, as well the how the literary gets used as a rhetorical gesture in discourse in general. Are there any other questions? Or, I can carry on. But I want to make sure other people with questions have a chance to ask.

Kevin Hujing: I do have one on the power of political erasure in the global context. So, Foucault has this concept of the regime of truth that uses knowledge-power in order to establish

its ideas of true and false, which is an external act of attempts to erase and control madness, delinquency, and sexuality.
Is political eraser an external exercise of this sort of attempts of a regime of truth to establish its knowledge-power, and the validity and lawful existence of another? That's the first question, then, in the global context, is this even possible? For a true erasure to take place in the global context seeing as how we're sharing an active development of a cooperative history. That although an erasure can be attempted through the demolition of a state. If that is at all possible would it be the fault of the whole global community as a whole for allowing that erasure to take place, since we are all in a global context as a witness, and whether or not we participate in attempts of erasure.

Arthur Bradley: Okay yeah, that's a great question. I'll take the second one in particular. I think you're absolutely right and that there is a sort of irony that accompanies every act of political erasure that we're talking about today, which is that if they worked we wouldn't be talking about them. We wouldn't have known they happened. So, these are all failed acts of political erasure. Acts that for whatever reason did not work.
Which is not to say that there haven't been some that did work. That's an unknown unknown for us, that there may be many out there that that did operate. And one of the things I am really interested in is why do they fail? Where does this failure come from? Some of them are a strange combination of exhibitionism and secrecy at the same time, because one of the features of *dammnatio memoriae*. If you go back to Ancient Rome this would be both an eraser, but it would be a kind of publicly proclaimed visible act of erasure. You would deface the statue of a disgraced person but you wouldn't remove the statue. You would want everyone to know that this person was no longer to be spoken of, or to be known or remembered.

So is this interesting kind of gesture here and this plays into lots of different places and context as well. But I guess, is there more of a structural reason why this act of eraser fails or has to be continually reasserted? Judith Butler makes the point in one of her books *Precarious Life* that the very tautological nature of political erasure where you are erasing something which you say does not exist. You know, I'm going to say this thing does not exist. The statement this thing does not exist is kind of self-contradictory. It becomes self-defeating because it has to be continually reasserted. But, at the same time every reassertion renders it in some sense redundant and emboldens, or empowers the thing that you're saying does not exist.

And one of the things, to go back to the point of self-erasure which is the point that the previous speaker raised. I think one of the powers of self-erasure even as a rhetorical or political strategy, or one of the opportunities it offers is that, if you say

"you're right, I don't exist, I'm not here, I do not occupy a space and time, I'm already dead," all those things, and this is a gesture that you we can find from revolutionary France up to a movement like Anonymous and so on.

Today, you know you cannot fight, "I'm everywhere, I'm legion, I'm nowhere," all this kind of stuff. Well then, how can you erase it? How can you erase that which is already preemptively negated itself? It has done that act for you. So, o it's both already dead, but perversely kind of unkillable, unerasable. I don't know if that if that answers your questions at all.

Kevin Hujing: Yeah, that helps a lot, thank you.

Roger Green: There was one other question but the person had to leave and so the floor is open, or I will ask one. There is something you mentioned Arthur, that you have a new project in the works. Going back to this question of the literary and the erasure question makes me think of Samuel Beckett, and I thought of *Endgame,* maybe more than Godot, but also the character of *Ubu Roi*, the pataphysics and these very 20th century gestures about the eraser of sovereignty itself. But I'm kind of hearing it in a new register with this concept of unbearable life. I don't know if you have thoughts of where you're going to dig?

Arthur Bradley: Yeah sure, we should obviously talk more about this because the book that I'm currently writing is called, provisionally, "In the Theater of Sovereignty" and as I said, it's about the relationship between theory and theater. In both the literal sense and I examine quite a lot of political. I look at Shakespeare, I look at Schiller and I look at Genet, Ionesco, you know figures like. I'm interested in actual theater and representations of sovereignty and theater. But I'm also interested in theater in the more expanded sense of the particular form of political phenomenology that theater represents and whether and how that interacts with theory.

I think there is some you know, maybe I don't want to say too much here about it because it would be going down another tangent but there's been some really interesting figures like Genet. If you go back and you read *Le Balcon*, or something like Ionesco. If you read *Les Chaises* and so on, I mean, these are absolutely saturated and political theology. For those of you who don't know the play, in the case of *Le Balcon* in Genet, the balcony is it's a brothel. And it's a place where people go and they're given the opportunity to dress up as people, so it's a kind of role-playing brothel and it has numerous studios in it, but the studios are all like an archive of political theology. You can dress up as Saint Sebastian, and you can dress up as a nun, or you can dress up as a pope. You can even dress up as Jesus so it's all like a strange sort craft. A kind of political theological sexualism that is the secret inventory of Political theology.

And the really interesting thing about it, it's all about the clothes, it's all about the ornamental, the appearance, the theater of political theology. They don't actually want to be a real Bishop. They don't want to wield any real power; they just want to look like one. And the interesting thing is this, this play appears the 1950s. At the same time there's a bunch of really fascinating work, political scholarly work on precisely this dimension of the symbolics of sovereignty.

Not only Kantorowicz but also people like Percy Ernst Schramm, you know his work, he calls them the symbols of power. He does these wonderful analyses of crowns and robes and scepters, and all this kind of stuff. So, what I'm interested in is the theatrical of power, but the theatrical power is not simply the veneer or the external surface or skin that would conceal some kind of realpolitik beneath. But it's something essential to the operation of sovereignty itself.

You know Jay, and I think James the first says in his book, that to be a sovereign is to be on stage. It's that you're always on stage, even when you're alone you're still on stage. There you are a political actor and of course Hobbes and Machiavelli and lots of people will speak about the relationship between political action and dramatic action too. So that's kind of what I'm interested in, it's not tangential to unbearable life, but there are some parallels there.

Roger Green: Thank you, Kieryn you have a question?

Kieryn Wurts: Just a very short question on this "Theater of Sovereignty" project. Do you engage with Jean Baudrillard work on the spectacle of war? I think there's also a really an interesting conversation for this moment. Of course it's a different kind of he doesn't want with them, it is a lot with the image and the stage but not more technological metaphors than this class is more classical ones. But do you work with that and these kinds of ideas like, the Iraq war never happened, and what we do with the spectacle of conflict and violence.

Arthur Bradley: I don't actually, not for any grand theoretical reason. I mean, I remember when I was a PhD students a long time ago. I remember when that book came out and close to a great deal of fuss and was itself, although it's a book about erasure was itself kind of systematically erased and that its argument was actually introduced in the media, and it was just used as at the time. This is way before your time but people who are my age will remember this and it was kind of ridiculed in the same way that people like Agamben have been ridiculed recently over covid-19 as an example of, "here's another crazy French philosopher just saying something crazy or contrarian." It's obviously a very important engagement in the media, the media theater of war. Yeah, I don't engage with it, maybe I should have, thanks.

Jared Lacy: I have a question.

Roger Green: Go ahead sure.

Jared Lacy: I was wondering if you could talk about invisibility as a liberatory avenue in the sense that that which is invisible is so from the perspective of being engulfed in sovereignty and the real that it builds for itself that you talk about at the end of your book. It seems that there's some kind of ecological resonance there. Where one could make that invisible visible by trying to move past the life/non-life distinction to get past the power of sovereignty to decide what exists and what doesn't.

Arthur Bradley: Could you say a little bit more about the ecological.

Jared Lacy: yeah, I was thinking about this in terms of Patrick's question of indigenous issues about not having a concept of inanimate objects and once that's the case then you can decide what exists and what doesn't from a sovereign perspective because life isn't the basis of existence

Arthur Bradley: That's great, there's been a lot of interesting work recently on animism and debates around animism. Descola and people like that which I find really interesting. It's not something I know an awful lot about. I also still want to hold on to invisibility, I quite like the trope of invisibility as a form of a political position and, obviously, in in recent years invisibility has taken on a certain kind of currency in in political theory with the invisible Committee, and the Luther Blessed Movement in Italy, and also the movements like Anonymous and so on.

There's a wonderful German artist called Hito Steyerl who's done a great installation, which you can watch on YouTube called "How Not to be Seen" and it's a series of kind of both comic and half serious explorations of how to become invisible. Some of which are wonderful and fantastic, in the sense of "be a superhero," "have an invisibility cloak." And some of which are utterly mundane in which she says, "be a woman over 50." You know, congratulations, you are now invisible, and this kind of thing. It's a really wonderful playful exploration of the different ways in which we can be politically invisible both for better or worse. So yeah, I really liked her work.

Roger Green: I think that the visible and invisible discussion amplifies this project on theatrics that you're thinking about. One of the reasons why I think it's important to keep that gesture alive in this conversation is because other you know famous philosophers Alan Badiou and Simon Critchley do is, not maybe operating so much in political theology, but they have both written books about the poets of the modern age and they focus it focused on people like Stevenson who is a very, very quiet and silent poet, and that moment in the 1950s, the post war

moment where Heidegger is very much returning to poetry and cantorial. It's of course in the States by this time but there is this sort of exhaustive moment war torn annihilation, this return to aesthetics that I'm very fascinated with, especially the theatricality.

This, of course, might my indigenous friends when we're at a Four Directions March a few months ago here in Denver and it was very quiet and unseen and the city is all light lit up and we've marched a few miles to this little park where there's a ceremony going on and my indigenous colleagues are insistent that this is not theater. This is not performance. Because so much of anthropology has cast their ideations about indigenous people in terms of the language of performance.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, you are right to mention Badiou. You know there's a great line where in a piece he wrote about Foucault he says, I only ever used to run into Michelle at the theater because we both like this theater. That was that was what they had in common and, of course, as you will know, the there is quite a long tradition of Rancière, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, like all these writers who have either been theatre practitioners like Lacoue-Labarthe was himself a practitioner, and also written about the politics of theatre and theatre as politics.
One of the things that interests me is years ago about 40 years ago there was a guy called Barish who wrote a book called *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, and it was the development of the critique of theater in politics and culture from the 17th century to today where the theater effectively, you know it's under the Puritans it was banned but the theatrical became a byword for everything that politics wasn't, or shouldn't be, you know, political theory. One of the things I try and argue is that political theory defines itself very much against theory. You know theory, and this is the theory is partial theory is situated theory is sorry theater is partial theater is interested theater is situated political theory is allegedly at least none of these things. It's the view from nowhere, It's not a particular perspective upon these problems. I'm going to try and challenge that I think political theory, political sciences itself, I don't think it's a particularly complicated or controversial thing to say. It's not the view from nowhere, it's very much the view from somewhere. I think the development of the discipline of international relations itself, you know you could go so far as to say that it is the discourse of imperialism colonialism.

It is, to go back to Foucault and knowledge and power it's the knowledge form of that knowledge-power equation. In modernity the development of these disciplines and, of course, if you go back to Plato and even go back to Plato's cave, it's a kind of theater right. It's like you were sitting there watching a bunch of people watching film occupied puppets on a on a screen. So

it's at the very beginning of this thing called political theory, you have a miniature sort of puppet theater, marionette theater, at the very beginning.

Roger Green: Tom Grimwood would have a question.

Tom Grimwood: Hi Arthur, good to see you. I'm trying not to dwell on the theatrical book, because in a way that's the next one. But of course, what I always find interesting about the theater is the kind of treatment of it in the 18th and 19th century. When it was this damn of gossip and in equity and you know it was very much a lower class thing and it's got me thinking about the issue of Asia and to what extent I'm trying to think how to choose my words here, to what extent that idea of erasing life is a fantasy of political sovereignty compared to use the certain because, why not, what is it? It's a strategic fantasy but tactically you could see you can erase things tactically. You can erase things in that everyday gossip fueled everyday interaction or is that an impossible thing to note.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, that's great, I really like that. The metaphor that Certeau uses as you know is *la perruque*, the wig, as a form of invisibility. That tactical in visibility is calling in sick when you're not really sick to not go to work that day. Wearing a wig to cover up your bald and this why don't you know, whatever it's these and it's very interesting. It's these moments of tactical disguise or camouflage or something like that.
I mean, I think you know, to try and build a bridge between what I was doing in *Unbearable Life* and this stuff what we're talking about in relation to theatre is that they're two sides of the same project in a way, which is a sort of exercising political phenomenology which is Rancière famously talks about the distribution of a sensible, okay so politics is an aesthetic phenomena, not just in the sense of real theater and real novels but in the content sense of sensible experience itself and that politics is an exercise in arranging, distributing, and choreographing what is, counts as sensible experience and what doesn't.

So what appears and what disappears, what is a raised on what is brought sharply into focus. So I guess unbearable life is very much about the shade. And the new project is more about the light, but the two things there's like you know, an Italian if anyone knows their art history tiara school Oh, is this wonderful Italian word of the play of light and shade that go together. These are very much part of the same project and rendering something visible you are almost by definition rendering something else invisible. By making something appear you're distancing or marginalizing, or are disappearing something else.

Tom Grimwood: Right.

Kieryn Wurts: Another question, I guess, I hate to ask you to give spoilers for your next project. You don't have to answer

this, but in the theater of sovereignty what role does the audience play for you? Because I think in this play of light and dark, and who's seen and who's not seen, that's really important. Like what is on stage for the audience and politics and theater is really important, this conversation reminded me of *The Kingdom and the Glory* Agamben's discourse he talks about this politics of acclimation in that in these conversations between Carl Schmitt and the Christian theologian that name. But yeah, what is the audience? What is their relationship to sovereignty?

Arthur Bradley: Great question I wish I could give you a spoiler alert, but I haven't quite got that far yet so I'd be spoiling it for myself as well. I mean the way in which the project is working at the moment is actually I'm telling this I'm trying to tell a story in six or seven different scenes and in each one I'm focusing. On I'm not focusing on a particular writer or particular text I'm actually focusing on the history of a particular prop or property, you know the word prop on stage comes from comes from property. And so I have a chapter on chairs, I have a chapter on clothes, I have a chapter on anointing oils. I have a chapter on puppet shows.

So, it's quite it's quite eclectic So if you thought you know if you thought on bearable life was if that was a little bit too playful for you, then the next one is you know, unfortunately. Even more so the question of the audience is an absolutely wonderful on the only way I can answer this is actually as. You know, one of the great gestures of modern theatre obviously and Brecht and Ionesco and so on is the alienation breaking the fourth wall all these where the audience is effectively put on stage yeah and there's a wonderful moment right at the end of. Georgia and as play the bulk on the balcony which, as I said, it's set in a brothel okay.

And a brothel in the midst of a revolution so revolution is happening outside and inside everyone is dressing up as political leaders, you know it's an absolute you know masterpiece if you haven't read it, you know, take a take a look at it. But the final scene of the balcony is when the Madame of the brothel the brothel keepers this woman called earmark.
And she breaks the fourth wall by turning to the audience and saying you know I'm terribly sorry, but the balcony is now closed for the evening. So go home but we'll be back tomorrow night, you know at 730 if you want to cut if you want to come back so in a sense, everyone and the play becomes a. Paying customer right everyone, everyone is put on stage, there is no spectator, you know everyone is a participant, everyone is a fetishist. And the you know, so the metaphor of the balcony and of the role play becomes a generalized and extended to swallow up the audience as well.

Roger Green: Were you going to say something else Kieryn?

Kieryn Wurts: Thank you, that was brilliant Thank you.

Roger Green: Yeah, I'm thinking very much of Artaud in his "theater of cruelty" here and the fact that he was called uncurably mad and Foucault, of course, and delivers the 16th French post-structuralist Sir are consumed with this question of madness from which there is the discussion of sovereignty and bio-politics sort of more so, and I'm really intrigued at the intersections of have lots of late 20th century thought here.

Arthur Bradley: Sure, I mean it's really interesting in the case of DNA, as well as the only person who really identifies the political theological dimension to Tuesday is very dark in La like where he actually says that you know June is obsessed with glory like the word glory in a play it appears constantly in the balcony and the play is about nothing other than the Kingdom and the Glory it's about why does power need glory, you know why, why does the exercise of political sovereignty, political rule, need this additional supplement or dimension of glory and self-glorification and glorification vicarious glorification and so on, so yeah that's kind of where I am at the moment.

Roger Green: Yeah, takes me back to last month's critical conversation on the new polis which was on my book, but at the end, when we were kind of in the weeds of discussion. I had been trying to talk about the 1968 moment of the Levitation of the Pentagon protest, which is very theatrical and it's influenced by the living theatre and loads of influence on the States and psychedelics but comparing that to January 6 of last year. There's this impulse, where I want to say, like of course there's something way less than chanted you know.

In last year's performance at the Capitol if we're going to call it a performance. That it's not an attempt to levitate that I can't see the people from last year doing that. And, so there might be something dialectic about that, but the crossover here is that the glorification part whether we're talking about the queue and on shaman or other very theatrical figures nevertheless. Although the strategy or the agenda or something is quite different and I'm not sure how to parse all of this.

But sometimes I can come across as like, of course there was a difference, it was much more peaceful and 68 then it was that they didn't break down the doors and break into people's offices and all of that. Yes, I'm aware of the differences and the violent tendencies, but the resonance of glorification and patriotism crosses over that both groups would say that they're raising American flags or they're doing something Nationalist.

Arthur Bradley: You would know way more about this than me, I mean I watched the Netflix documentary or there was a you know the doc about January 6th and it was kind of

astonishing in all sorts of ways. Particularly when they occupied the Senate floor where's the senate, they didn't quite know what to do. And they were there and they just sort of wandered around and sat in the chair. You know sadhana scooters care and things like, and I remember a guard.

One of the guards comes in and says, "this is the sacred space." To which they all sort of say "yeah, you're right, don't worry we're not going to mess it up." Which is a really interesting moment. And then you think, well what on earth is going on there in terms of the language of glory as well, and at some level they are true believers in representative democracy. Even as the process of destroying it.

Roger Green: Please jump in if you have questions. I'm thinking of ways to wrap this up. Towards the end of your book you end up with Benjamin in the current book, and Benjamin has this famous dialogue with Schmitt, saying that he credits Schmitt with his conception of aesthetics that he builds *Trauerspiel* book or the origins of German chap tragic drama you credits Schmitt's work I think in the dictator or political theology, but both of them sort of crossed over the early 1920s Schmitt with this aesthetic conception, but, of course, coming from a completely different political and Jewish, as well positionality even if it be so called secular Jewish. I don't know how that term really works for me so and then it that book was about 17th century theater right the so it does seem very, very relevant even to the unbearable life book, but I wonder if you maybe had some thoughts about any mean and theatricality and how this is.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, I mean Benjamin plays quite a big role in the current book for exactly the reasons that you mentioned. I mean you don't have to go along with Agamben's suggestion that there's some kind of esoteric dossier of where Schmitt and Benjamin are talking to each other and in these works literally to see that the relationship between them is incredibly rich. I mean, I guess you know I don't, I wouldn't disagree with anything that you say, but just one footnote to it would be that a text that I've been writing a chapter on, the figure of the ante-chamber in political theory and in undisciplined in drama. and so on.

So I look at Benjamin, I look at Kafka, and I look at Schiller's don Carlos, but the inspiration for it really as opposed to your essay or post war newspaper article by Carl Schmitt, which was published in *Der Spiegel* in about 1955 and it's called "In the Antechamber of Power" ("*Im Vorraum der Macht*") and it's incredibly Benjaminian without ever mentioning Benjamin. But you know everything that we normally attribute to the venue million critique of Schmitt creature Lee sovereignty to our spiel and all that kind of thing is suddenly massively present and

Schmitt and it's about Oh, this is perfect, of the sovereign who they can't do everything.

They can take all the decisions and that's why we have the figure of the courts here that's why we have the figure of the servant, the mistress, and suddenly the Court. The sovereign is surrounded by a court and once you have a court, you have plots and intrigue and all that Benjaminian stuff and it's a really a fascinating essay because it's kind of on the median very Benjamin version of Schmitt and to what extent it's compatible with the early Schmitt because interestingly Schmitt, you know, the figure of the ante-chamber occurs several times and Schmitt in the big works it's there and kind of remember which ones, so you know when the great work, so the 20s and it's always negative it's always just the ante-chamber is where they don't take decisions, the ante-chamber is the place of the debating whole. It's the talking shop, it's the place where no one does anything. But then suddenly The ante-Chamber emerges in this very different framework in the later Schmitt so you know, we should maybe we could talk more about this or.

Roger Green: This moment of Hamlet or Hecuba.

Arthur Bradley: Yeah, absolutely. But the argument is even suddenly different from Hamlet and Hecuba as well. Yeah, thank you.

Roger Green: Any carry on this conversation, but what else, anyone who hasn't spoken who's had a question and has been waiting to get in and I keep trying to look at the if you raise your hand I can't see all the time. Because I can only see four people on the screen and gauging by the silence that this is a good stopping point at least for now, but this has been a really great conversation Thank you so much, the highlight of my week.

Arthur Bradley: Highlight of my week, I want to thank you Roger, and thank everybody. I know everybody's incredibly busy with their own work and it's been great to hear a little bit about your projects as well. And please if you want to follow up on anything that we've been talking about today don't hesitate to get in touch with me and I'd be very happy to chat to you all. Thank you so much for your attention, it's been a great honor for me to have this opportunity to speak to you all about my work.

Roger Green: Very much so, likewise. Okay, everyone has a great rest of your day or night wherever you are in the world. Thanks, very much for being here. Thank you.