Dispossession: The Performative in the Political

Judith Butler
and
Athena Athanasiou

polity

2013

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The logic of dispossession and the matter of the human (after the critique of metaphysics of substance)

AA: In general, dispossession speaks to how human bodies become materialized and de-materialized through histories of slavery, colonization, apartheid, capitalist alienation, immigration and asylum politics, post-colonial liberal multiculturalism, gender and sexual normativity, securitarian governmentality, and humanitarian reason.

It might be helpful to consider that in the proper sense of the word, if such a thing exists, "dispossession" originally referred to practices of land encroachment. Colonial and racist assumptions have been historically mobilized to justify and naturalize the misrecognition, appropriation, and occupation of indigenous lands in colonial and postcolonial settler contexts – such as in

the case of the dispossession of indigenous people and the occupation of Palestinian lands and resources by the Israeli state. In such contexts, either by means of national monoculturalism, liberal multicultural (mis)recognition, biopiracy, and reification of "cultural diversity," or apartheid, such as the separation wall in Palestine, dispossession works as an authoritative and often paternalistic apparatus of controlling and appropriating the spatiality, mobility, affectivity, potentiality, and relationality of (neo-)colonized subjects. In such contexts, "dispossession" offers language to express experiences of uprootedness, occupation, destruction of homes and social bonds, incitation to "authentic" self-identities, humanitarian victimization, unlivability, and struggles for self-determination.[1]

The formation of prevailing assumptions about what constitutes land as colonial settler space, sovereign nation-state territory, or bourgeois private property lies at the heart of the history of western modern human subjectivity. In today's global market economy of neoliberal capitalism and "debtocracy," dispossession signifies the violent appropriation of labor and the wearing out of laboring and non-laboring bodies. This has manifested in the current politics of economic precarity in the form of temporary, low-paying, and insecure jobs, in combination with cuts to welfare provision and expropriation of public education and health institutions. International financial institutions prescribe to indebted countries measures of austerity (such as cutting public expenditures) as prerequisites for loans. Through neoliberal austerity measures, the governments of European nation-states protect market sovereignty and banks while attacking the lowest-paid workers, the

unemployed, the urban poor, and the impoverished urban middle classes. Common, collective, and public assets are converted into private property rights. This redistributive politics is relevant to what David Harvey has described as the neoliberal drive toward "accumulation by dispossession."[2] In neoliberal frames of privatization, financialization, and management of crises, jobs are being taken away, hopes are obliterated, and bodies are instrumentalized and worn out. But new life forms and forms of subjectivity are also being produced (that is, human life turned into capital), as "debt" becomes a fundamental technology of biopolitical governmentality – a political and moral economy of life itself. This is, in fact, the original meaning of "economy": the allotment and management of the *oikos* (the house, the household) as the site par excellence of human capital. This etymology is very suggestive of the current shift taking place in the domain of power, from the rule of law and the production of the ordinary to measures of crisis-management and therapeutic decrees of emergency (which, in turn, inculcate another order of ordinariness).

In such contexts of knowledge, power, and subjectivity, it is worth rethinking democracy, citizenship, and collective agency by means of developing new political strategies that engage the dispossession of indebtedness as a crucial moment in the histories of liberal western governmentality. Land and property ownership has surely been at the heart of the onto-epistemologies of subject formation in the histories of the western, white, male, colonizing, capitalist, property-owning, sovereign human subject. The definition of the ownership of one's body as property is also a founding moment of

liberalism. However, certain bodies – paradigmatically the bodies of slaves – are excluded from this classic definition of the biopolitical, which forges a constitutive connection between life, ownership, and liberty. In the political imaginary of (post)colonial capitalist western modernity and its claims of universal humanity, being and having are constituted as ontologically imbricated with each other: being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of proper human being.

JB: Yes, but perhaps we have to be careful about how we differentiate these particular histories. After all, there may be many political imaginaries of "the West," and "the West" is surely also a function of a political imaginary itself. But you are suggesting, rightly, that property relations have come to structure and control our moral concepts of personhood, self-belonging, agency, and self-identity. Perhaps you approach through a slightly different language the problem of self-sufficiency that I suggest above. For you, it seems, this relation of a self to itself is described as "self-presence" and is itself implicated in a metaphysics of presence. I wonder whether presence can be distinguished from self-identity and even self-sufficiency. If we are, for instance, "present" to one another, we may be dispossessed by that very presence. Is this at least a possibility for you? It seems to me that there is a presence implied by the idea of bodily exposure, which can become the occasion of subjugation or acknowledgement. The coercive exposure of bodies at checkpoints or other sites of intensified surveillance can be one instance of the former. The body must arrive, present itself for

inspection, and move only according to the motion and speed required by the soldier or the machine (or the soldier–machine hybrid). We can say that at these instances the person who must pass through the checkpoint is "present" in a way that is bound up with subjugation. But similarly, when acts of resistance happen at the checkpoint, when bodies show up or move through in ways that are not allowed, or when communities form on either side to limit and counter military practices, a kind of presence occurs. How do we think about these more ordinary forms of being or making present in light of the metaphysical category of presence that you work with here?

AA: It is true that I am interested in ways we could think of the forces of dispossession in late liberal contexts without retreating into the metaphysics of presence. Now, I take it that your question concerns the vexed thematics of agency. Similarly, the question for me is how we might tackle the problematic of agency by drawing on post-essentialist thought and without reiterating the terms set by liberal imaginaries and normativities. So, the fact that "presence" can never quite be disengaged from the metaphysical conceits of self-identity, self-sufficiency, and self-transparency does not mean that it is always already subsumed by these conceits. Presence, in its modality of *becoming* present to one another, can be an occasion of critical displacement. So yes, in becoming present to one another, we may be dispossessed by that very presence. In becoming present to one another, as an occasion of being both bound up with subjugation and responsive and receptive to others, we may be positioned within and against the

authoritative order of presence that produces and constrains the intelligibility of human or non-human presence. Acts of resistance will take established orders of subjection as their resource, but they are not condemned to hopelessly reproducing or enhancing these orders. "Self-presence" is an attachment to an injurious interpellation, which becomes the condition of possibility for non-normative resignifications of what matters as presence. Even though the metaphysics of presence is not something that can be evaded or thwarted at will, this does not mean that we cannot be present to one another in ways not subsumed by this order. Even though we are compelled to reiterate the norms by which we are produced as present subjects, this very reiteration poses a certain risk, for if we reinstate presence in a different, or catachrestic way, we might put our social existence at risk (that is, we risk desubjectivization). But we might also start to performatively displace and reconfigure the contours of what matters, appears, and can be assumed as one's own intelligible presence. Now, might such a catachrestic repetition that turns presence against its hegemonic modes be assumed as "one's own" by the standards of possessive and privative individualism? I don't think so. My sense is that acts of agency, as effects of performativity, cannot be assumed as "one's own." In the spirit of indeterminate performativity, however, acts of catachrestic "making present" often displace the terms (that is, including property, priority, and propriety) by which presence has attained its normative omnipresence, as it were.

Your reference to the coercive exposure of bodies at sites of intensified surveillance is certainly very suggestive in that respect. I remember, a few years ago, an

anti-occupation demonstration organized by Women in Black at the infamous Qalandiya checkpoint, a military crossing established by Israel to control the movement of people between Ramallah and the divided city of Jerusalem. People were forced to wait in the burning sun for hours in order to pass through the checkpoint and leave Ramallah for work or medical care. Four hundred Women in Black stood at the checkpoint holding anti-occupation signs, while on the Ramallah side of the checkpoint Palestinian women were chanting and trying to cross the checkpoint.

To be sure, the checkpoints work to foreclose the possibility of co-habitation, or, to put it differently, to make the relational form of dispossession impossible. But this condition of bodily enclosure and exposure can become the occasion not only of subjugation but also of resilience, courage, and struggle. So yes, there is a dialectic of presence/absence that goes on in this differentially distributed political condition of bodily exposure, whereby presence (or a presence-effect) is produced by being constantly haunted by its spectral absences or (mis)recognized presences – the inassimilable remains of its ontological horizon. The specter would refer, in this context, to the insistent and insinuating anti-ontological remains, foreclosed and yet surviving, from the normative demarcation of the self-present human. Or, to phrase it yet another way: it is the trace that remains from the other's uncanny presence as absence – her present absence. But let me clarify at this point that my summoning the lexicon of the specter here is not meant to conjure away corporeality. Not at all. In my understanding, the specter involves a return to some sort of bodily presence, be it displaced,

dismembered, enclosed, or foreclosed. As Derrida writes at the beginning of his *Specters of Marx*: "For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming specter of the spirit without at least the appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility like the disappearing of an apparition. For the ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever."[3] So when I refer to the political conditions of bodily exposure, whereby presence is constantly haunted by its spectral absences, I seek to address what it means and takes for a spectral body to make itself present. I am interested in how hauntology (to recall again Derrida's notion of haunting) might function as a critique of ontology. What possibilities for theory and practice might this shift open? How might we re-imagine performativity through this troubling of conventional categorizations of the ontological?

So I am not sure whether presence can be ever distinguished from, or divested of, the canonical metaphysical guises of self-identity and self-sufficiency once and for all. But it can never be totally subsumed by them either. To articulate this double bind is also, I would argue, to pose the question of radicalizing performativity, and therefore to pose a question that must be left in suspense. Self-identity carries the genealogical burden of a metaphysics of presence, but, at the same time, it is not determined by the burden of the histories in which it has been entrenched. Being dispossessed by the other's presence and by our own presence to the other is the only way to be present to one another. So being present to one another takes place at the limits of one's own self-sufficiency and self-knowability, in the wake of the endless finitude of the human. In order to be present

to one another (but also to be absent to, or missed by, another), we are called to take over, and occasionally to give away, the norms through which we are established as selves and others. We are necessarily implicated in the desires and the anxieties of presence and propriation. But we are also capable of expropriating the limitations and injuries prescribed by them. The problem then remains of how to seek out the impossible and yet necessary possibility of being present to one another, "fully there," in ways not assimilated or submitted to the ontological presuppositions of normative authoritarian self-presence.

The logic of appropriation and dispossession, whether it be colonial or neocolonial, capitalist, and neoliberal, endures by reproducing a metaphysics of presence in the form of the violence inherent in improper, expropriated, and dispossessed subjectivities. In fact, dispossession emerges as a crucial force of ontopological modes of preconfigured bodies, subjectivities, communities, identities, truths, and political economies of life. Taking cue from Derrida's notion of "ontopology," which links the ontological value of being to a certain determined *topos*, locality, or territory,[4] we might track the ways in which dispossession carries within it regulatory practices related to the conditions of situatedness, displacement, and emplacement, practices that produce and constrain human intelligibility. This means that the logic of dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place, through normative matrices but also through situated practices of raciality, gender, sexuality, intimacy, able-bodiedness, economy, and citizenship. It produces dispossessed subjectivities, rendering them subhuman or hauntingly all-too-human,

binding them within calculable self-same identities, and putting them in their proper place – the only spatial condition of being that they can possibly occupy, namely one of perennial occupation as non-being and non-having. So a metaphysics of presence is mapped onto particular bodies, selves, and lives as absence, obliteration, and unarchivable spectrality.

JB: Can you explain more about how you see a subject grounded in the metaphysics of presence dominating, regulating, or constituting those whose proper place is non-being? I am thinking here about "non-being" as it relates, say, to the idea of "social death" (Patterson),[5] or those who are left to die through negligence (Mbembe),[6] or those who live with a higher risk of mortality (Gilmore).[7] I am wondering about how those whose "proper place is non-being" might be described in terms of precarity, or whether that term works in another way.

AA: In designating the politically induced condition in which certain people and groups of people become differentially exposed to injury, violence, poverty, indebtedness, and death, "precarity" describes exactly the lives of those whose "proper place is non-being." This is indeed related to socially assigned disposability (a condition which proves fundamental to the neoliberal regime) as well as to various modalities of valuelessness, such as social death, abandonment, impoverishment, state and individual racism, fascism, homophobia, sexual assault, militarism, malnutrition, industrial accidents, workplace injuries, privatization, and liberal governmentalization of aversion and empathy. Achille

Mbembe's insistence on the link between sovereignty and exposure to death is relevant here. As a global modality of power that subjects populations to conditions that ascribe them the status of living dead, "necropolitics" determines who can be wasted and who cannot; it distinguishes those who are disposable from those who are not; and it does so in both spectacular and quotidian ways, insistently and insinuatingly.[8] In such contexts, the power of dispossession works by rendering certain subjects, communities, or populations unintelligible, by eviscerating for them the conditions of possibility for life and the "human" itself. The violent logic of dispossession seeks to reassert the propriety of both spatiality and subjectivity as it bodies forth displaced and displaceable subjectivities, as it challenges them to take their proper place instead of taking place. But where and how do the lives of those whose "proper place is non-being" take place after the critique of the metaphysics of substance? How is the "substance" of these lives produced?

JB: I appreciate your conception of "assigned disposability," since it highlights this characteristic of neoliberal regimes to allocate disposability and precarity. This is especially important to remember if we want to understand the difference between precarity as an existential category that is presumed to be equally shared, and precarity as a condition of induced inequality and destitution. The latter is a way of exploiting an existential condition, since precarity, understood as a vulnerability to injury and loss, can never be reversed (this I tend to call precariousness), and yet the differential ways of allocating precarity, of assigning disposability, are

clearly aims and effects of neoliberal forms of social and economic life.

And yet, I am wondering whether "the human" would be characterized by you as a being who can take place (assume a place, and also, in some sense, "happen"), and whether this mode of happening emerges when – or through those acts by which – a collectivity refuses to stay in a proper place. It seems that for the human to emerge in your terms, the proper must be displaced. But how would that work if we are thinking about those who are territorially dispossessed? They are compelled to leave their proper place, and in those cases, staying in place is precisely an act of resistance.

AA: Of course. This is why I use the "refusal to stay in one's proper place" to signal acts of radical reterritorialization, which might certainly include remaining in specific places. I summon possibilities of being "elsewhere" in order to suggest that subjection is never fixed and final, even though it "takes place" on such localized and territorialized planes as nation-state, workplace, private property, kinship, nuclear family, and self-centered subjectivity. It is arguably impossible to think of "staying in place" or "refusing to move" as an act of resistance without recalling Rosa Parks, the African-American civil rights activist, who, on December 1, 1955, refused to conform to the bus driver's order that she give up her seat for a white passenger. In times of racial segregation, in Montgomery, Alabama, the first four rows of bus seats were reserved for white passengers, while black people were allowed only in "colored" sections, in the rear of the bus. Parks writes, in her autobiography:

> People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.[9]

So, not giving up one's seat, as an act of civil disobedience, is an enactment of refusal to stay in, or to move to, one's assigned proper place. In this sense, staying in place may require some movement, or displacement. It is an act of ascribing a place to oneself within the social. What interests me in this extraordinary moment of defiance is the intertwined bodily and spatial quality of not-giving-up as not-giving-in. The intertwined bodily and territorial forces of dispossession play out in the exposure of bodies-in-place, which can become the occasion of subjugation, surveillance, and interpellation. It can also become the occasion of situated acts of resistance, resilience, and confrontation with the matrices of dispossession, through appropriating the ownership of one's body from these oppressive matrices. Acted upon, and yet acting, bodies-in-place and bodies-out-of-place at once embody and displace the conditions of intelligible embodiment and agency.

But I think that the facile equation of agency with the capacity to move needs to be problematized also from the perspective of disability studies. Such a reductive construal of agency as moving, mobilizing, or standing up privileges mobility and thus reiterates the presumption that agency belongs properly to certain regimes of bodily morphology and recognizability. It is important to ask ourselves: What other possibilities and

articulations of political agency does the conceptualization of agency in such linear, kinetic, and phonocentric ways work to foreclose?

Those territorially dispossessed of their land refuse to stay in their assigned "proper place" (that is, in the place of displacement imposed by imperial sovereignty) precisely by staying in place, or claiming the right to stay in place, and demanding their proprietary rights in land. At the same time, one must be very careful to critically grasp and problematize liberal multicultural pretensions which assert "staying in place" as a cultural essence, or essential ground, of being "properly" native. Isn't this incitation to the proper (that is, customary, "traditional," assimilable, and governable) self-identity of alterity effectively an instance of colonialist epistemic violence?

JB: Surely colonial violence can work both ways, by depriving an indigenous population of their land, and yet restricting the mobility of that population to the very land they no longer own. Certainly occupied Palestine is a case in point, but so, too, are any number of refugee camps that detain and immobilize at the same time as they dispossess a population. I think you may be referring to the tactic on the part of European metropoles to claim that North African and Middle Eastern immigrants do not belong to European "land." The idea that immigrants should "go back to their land" (a refrain that has been used by racists in the United States against African-Americans who are told to return to Africa) suggests allegiance to the notion of the "autochthonous," which means belonging to the chthonic, or the earthly site. As you know, the Chthonic gods were those who

belonged to the earth and defended its powers. But now, throughout Europe, we hear about the autochthonic, referring to European citizens who are precisely not immigrants. The autochthonic are importantly not the same as the indigenous. The effort to return immigrants to their proper "nations" belongs to this nationalist logic. So we have to think about these two different tactics, and how they work together: restricting a population to a land of which they have been dispossessed and refusing the entry into the European metropole of those who are presumed to belong to another land. One can see how these two modalities of colonial power work together to produce the situation in which the targeted population belongs, finally, to no land, a situation that embodies one clear impasse of dispossession.

AA: Your point about the idea of the "autochthonous" is very important. We should refuse the idea that claiming the right to "stay put" is about "traditional" stasis. As the right-to-the-city movements show, claiming a place is not merely about gaining access to what already exists but rather about transforming place. We could, and we should, also consider here the social movements of displaced and landless farmers (El Movimiento Sin Tierra – the Landless Peasant Movement) and the struggles of indigenous people against water privatization in Bolivia; the struggles for recuperation of land rights and against the multinational oil companies' devastation of indigenous lands in Ecuador; or the protests of the Ogoni and other people of Niger Delta against the destruction of their lands by oil companies.

Political resistance to the violence of dispossession in colonial settler regimes such as Australia and Canada

can also be viewed productively through the prism of colonially embedded notions of belonging and unbelonging. Australian Indigenous people's experience and sense of place and belonging are bound up with the dispossession of the land and the denial of indigenous rights. Indigenous people's uprooting, removal to reserves and spatial containment, forced adoptions, and placement in institutions were all enabled and justified by the discursive formation that imagined Australia as an uninhabited land prior to the original dispossession, the notion that it belonged to no one before the invasion of white British settlers in 1788. The juridical doctrine of Terra Nullius (no man's land, wasteland) rendered Indigenous people strangers and homeless, neither belonging nor owning.[10] This wasteland rationale is deployed also as a technique of land appropriation and occupation in the colonial settler context of Palestine, where the Minister of Agriculture is empowered to take over lands not being cultivated, including those of displaced Palestinians.[11]

JB: Yes, but let us remember that land confiscation happens there all the time, whether or not entitled by specific provisions in the law. In fact, the distinction between legal and illegal land confiscation is finally not a very important one, since the legal means are as unjust and illegitimate as the illegal ones.[12] When Netanyahu refers to the settlements in the West Bank as evidence of a "land dispute," he imagines two parties, equal in power, who are submitting their conflicting claims to some neutral arbiter. But Israel is at once the colonial occupier, the maker and arbiter of the rule of law, which means that the rule of law is implicated in the colonial

project itself. So though there are on occasion "good decisions" that emerge from Israeli courts, the scene is still one of extraordinary inequality. It is also why efforts at co-existence that do not fundamentally challenge the colonial structure end up ratifying and extending that structure, even offering an alibi for colonialism's "humane" versions.

AA: Yes. Ongoing (post)colonial subjection and dispossession are further legitimated, normalized, and regulated through, and in the name of, discourses of reconciliation, which work to represent Indigenous peoples as silent sufferers.[13] So dispossession, as a way of separating people from means of survival, is not only a problem of land deprivation but also a problem of subjective and epistemic violence; or, put another way, a problem of discursive and affective appropriation, with crucially gendered and sexualized implications. This appropriation of corporeal and affective spaces, which is imbricated with the social construction of victimhood, is a critical aspect of (post)colonial dispossession and its mechanisms of normalization. Veena Das's analysis of the ways in which the discourse of suffering was deployed as a legitimating trope which worked to reduce the suffering of victims to silence and passivity in the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster in India provides an illuminating example of this representational economy of dispossession, domination, victimhood, and alienation.[14]

In order to gain access to the genealogy of the proper(tied) subject, we have to turn to the structure of dispossession that organizes contemporaneous forms of colonialism, slavery, racial and gender violence.[15] In

European colonies, property ownership was a prerequisite for proper political subjectivity and citizenship, but was also, at the same time, attached to race and gender requirements – that is, whiteness and maleness – that signified proper (and propertied) civilized human subjectivity. Subjectifying and simultaneously desubjectifying and dispossessing violence (as in the genealogies of colonialism and the slave trade, but also the new imperialism and the neoliberal international order, and their gendered implications) emerged as a prerequisite for (property-owning, white, male) subjectivity; such a subjectivity is constituted through, and inhabited by, processes of desubjectifying others, rendering them usable, employable, but then eventually into waste matter, or of no use: always available, always expendable. Processes of disposability – as well as the spectral traces of endurance, the struggles against it, and the political potentialities emerging within it – lie at the heart of ongoing colonially and postcolonially embedded notions of the self-contained, proper(tied), liberal subject.[16]

So a question that arises here, regarding the epistemic violence inherent in matrices of dispossession and disposability, could be articulated thus: How might claims for the recognition of rights to land and resources, necessarily inscribed as they are in colonially embedded epistemologies of sovereignty, territory, and property ownership, simultaneously work to decolonize the apparatus of property and to unsettle the colonial conceit of proper and propertied human subjectivity?[17] The challenge is to advance new idioms for contemporary critical agency by radically questioning the persistent racialized and sexualized onto-epistemologies of self-contained and property-owning subjectivity. In the background of

this problematic lie certain questions related to critical thought and agonistic politics: How are normative notions of humanity (and non-human animality) inscribed in attempts at restoring subjects to humanity, and how are they re-inscribed and troubled? What is at stake in employing epistemic regimes of ontologization in our critical discourses in order to question late liberal processes of desubjectivation and exhaustion?

JB: I take it we agree that we have to think about dispossession as one way that subjects are radically deinstituted, as a mode of subjugation that has to be opposed. At the same time, it seems we are both wondering whether "possession" is the name of the countermovement. Surely reclaiming stolen lands is crucial for many indigenous people's movements, and yet that is something different from defining the subject as one who possesses itself and its object world, and whose relations with others are defined by possession and its instrumentalities. The movement to reclaim land is one that involves people working together, recognizing a common mode of subjugation, and disputing forms of individualism that would produce "exceptions" and "heroes." So if a certain kind of political mobilization, even one against land dispossession, is based on an idea of social interdependency, or on modes of ownership that sometimes seek recourse to sovereignty (as the political movements in Hawaii do), this suggests that land reclamations work with and against traditional notions of sovereignty.

AA: I would add that this understanding of the crucial ways in which dispossession inhabits the vicissitudes

and critical possibilities of subjectivation, desubjectivation, and dehumanization offers a useful insight into how dispossession persists beyond the colony and the postcolony. In the context of neoliberal forms of capital – combined with tightened migration policies and the abjection of stateless people, *sans papiers*, "illegal" immigrants – bodies (that is, human capital) are becoming increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for. At the same time they are individuated and subjectivated through subtler and reflexive biopolitical techniques of self-formation, self-care, self-fashioning, and self-governance.[18] To be sure, these techniques of power, just like resources and vulnerability, are differently and unevenly distributed among different bodies – differently racialized and gendered bodies. Under the auspices of neoliberal governance, the global biopolitical administration of life and death is reinvented, revitalized, and reconfigured. This is evidenced in the war on terror, economic disparities and exhaustion, the normalization of poverty and precarity in contexts of capitalist crisis-management, racism, policing of migration, and ongoing regimes of colonial occupation.

Nonetheless, let me offer a caveat regarding the ways in which neoliberal governmentality invests in the matter of the human. I don't think it would be accurate to argue that what shapes our particular neoliberal phase is an "anachronistic" configuration of power centered on death rather than life. Contemporary forms of liberal governance have not been merely regressing to earlier, negative, non-humanistic, and injurious forces. Nor should we invoke the repressive hypothesis in order to challenge late liberalism and its excesses. Rather than

narratives of periodization marked by the reductive logic of progress and regress, I would suggest that we work once again toward a non-linear critique of contemporary formations of power and modes of constitution of subjectivities that accounts for the contemporaneous and inseparable manifestations of desubjectivation and subjectivation, dehumanization and humanization: "letting live" and "making die," "making live" and "letting die," to use Foucault's rhetorical terms of analysis of state racism in *Society Must Be Defended*.[19] Against a reductive reading of Foucault's genealogy of biopolitics, which tends to bracket or downplay one modality of power in favor of another (for example, "positive" versus "negative"), we need to account for and critically engage the integral co-implication and coevalness of "repressive" and "productive" formations of governing the self and others. To be sure, liberal colonial power has depended on the constitution of subjectivities and affective attachments. We know this from numerous critical thinkers, from Fanon to Ann Stoler; the latter has insightfully traced the critical role played by structures of intimacy in creating racialized and sexualized categories of imperial governance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indonesia.[20] And contemporary neoliberal power, in all its repressive, subjugating, brutal, and thanatopolitical force of profit extraction, has not lost its performative bio-productivity in capacitating modes of living subjectivity as well as in inculcating normative fantasies and truth-effects of the "good life" in self-owned subjects (a life defined, for instance, by property ownership, commodity fetishism, consumer excitement, securitarian regimes, national belonging, bourgeois self-fashioning,

and biopolitical normalcy). Rather, neoliberal governmentality of the present moment invests – politically, psychically, and economically – in the production and management of forms of life: it "makes live," in inculcating modes of one's fashioning of one's "own" life, while shattering and economically depleting certain livelihoods, foreclosing them, rendering them disposable and perishable. This politico-affective dynamic of (de) subjectivation through constantly producing, governing, and thwarting aspirations seems to be foundational to late liberal "economies of abandonment," to invoke Elizabeth Povinelli's term.[21] In this view it might be useful to raise, again and again, the question what such critical exercise would mean for apprehending the political in our political present of (neo)liberal governmental technologies of the self. What would such engagement with today's reconfigurations of biopolitical governance mean for progressive critical thought and politics in late liberalism, in the wake of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements? What could the present become from the scene of the performative politics of survival and alternative forms of life?

Such racialized and sexualized colonially inscribed forms of power involved in the property–propriety economies of the modern subject and place produce incommensurate onto-epistemologies of humanness and non-humanness, possession and dispossession, livability and unlivability. When it comes to "the human," the matter that must be addressed constantly and forcefully is the differential allocation of humanness: the perpetually shifting and variably positioned boundary between those who are rendered properly human and those who are not, those who are entitled to a long life and those

relegated to slow death. The human cannot be presumed, then. The point here is not to introduce a distinction or temporal spacing between a pre-existing, original and inherent humanness which only later comes to take form through being variably allocated under contingent power configurations. Rather, the point is that the human has no "proper" place to take outside social situatedness and allocation, including the exposure to the possibility of being undone. The human is always the event of its multiple exposures – both within its relatedness to others and within its exposure to the normative forces that arrange the social, political, and cultural matrices of humanness. The eventness of the human includes also gestures that displace the proper of the human, that is, its presumed self-evidence as a predicate to a man with property and propriety. Such gestures motivate questions such as: To whom does the human belong, or who owns the human? Who or what holds the place of the human? Whose humanity is dispossessed? What are the ellipses through which the human takes place? What kind of human is constituted as inhuman or less than human? These are questions that expose the ways in which "the human" has historically become a default mechanism for upholding the intersecting matrices of colonial expansion, phallocentrism, heteronormativity, and possessive individualism. They are, at the same time, questions that, inadvertently or not, and inevitably or not, reiterate the link between the human and ownership. (To whom does the human *belong*? And who *owns* the human?)

So, reckoning the human involves addressing the norms by which intelligibility as human is conferred: an intelligibility without which the human must remain out

of place, on the far side of being and becoming. At the same time, the univocal category of the human is perpetually troubled and haunted by the quivering humanity of those living, differing, sexing, mattering, touched and touching otherwise, elsewhere.

JB: You mean to say that any version of the "human" is haunted by a disavowed loss, and no version of the human can fully overcome this disavowal?

AA: Yes. This does not imply, however, a call to broaden the coercive monologism of "the human" by including its previously excluded or dis-appropriated surplus, but rather a challenge to the normative terms by which the human is established through producing disavowed losses and avowed excesses. Although they are normatively represented in terms of taxonomic exteriority, such losses and excesses are fundamentally internal to the authoritative abstraction of the human in functioning as its condition of possibility. They assume either the form of discursive production of the inhuman or the form of discursive ellipsis from representable, imaginable, and recognizable humanness. I am thinking, for example, of Adorno's conception of the inhuman as necessary for the human.[22] In either case, the violation of a life that has been discursively figured as inhuman, or that has been omitted from human discursivity, or that has been conditionally included as an uncannily authentic human, is not perceived as violation. Address and redress of this violence cannot find a place in the world as it is. In this sense, if "the human" can ever take place (assume a place, but also "happen") in terms of radical and subversive resignification, this taking

place might happen through the human refusing to stay in its proper place. Thus the "ontopology" of the human has a bearing on the question of mattering, that is, on the question of the differential (de)constitution and (de) valuation of human matter and humans that matter. So rather than a rehabilitation of the humanist subject in the form of liberal tolerance or assimilatory inclusion of ready-made identities, the political potential of this critique, if there is any, would be to subvert those norms and open the human to radical rearticulations of humanness.

JB: I am following you here, but I am hesitating. Is there not a tension between an avowed excess and a disavowed loss (the mark of melancholy)? Are these two different ways of describing what gets placed or produced outside the boundary of the human something that then "exceeds" its boundaries and so installs and maintains those boundaries from the outside? Are we talking about a loss that cannot be avowed, or are we talking about an excess that is itself a radicalization of the experience of loss, one that becomes a form of avowal, if not a labor of avowal? Is this what happens, for instance, when the barbarian, the monster, or the animal takes to the street?

I follow you in adding the animal to our discussions for several reasons: it seems to me that the animal has the status of being both inside and outside the human form; it also seems that there is a street politics for the animal (consider the fate of street cats in Rome); finally, to pursue these questions it appears that we have to struggle against those versions of the human that assume the animal as its opposite, and to instead propose a

claim for human animality. This last seems very important not only in order to rethink the materialist basis of the human, but also because we cannot understand human life without understanding that its modes are connected up with other forms of life by which it is distinguished and with which it is continuous. If we are moving toward a relational view, then it would follow that the human not only has a relation to animals (conceived as the other), but is itself implicated in its own animality. That animality is its own and not yet its own, which is why both animality and life constitute and exceed whatever we call the human. The point is not to find the right typology, but to understand where typological thinking falls apart. The human animal might be one way of naming that collapse of typological distinction.

I would agree as well that as much as we are trying to criticize the "proper" of the "properly human," we are also trying to know in what way the loss of what is properly one's own is crucial for any understanding of misappropriation (of land, of goods, of labor), or even of stealing and expulsion. The challenge of the proper shows, in part, that the human and the animal are linked, and that other forms of linkage and connection are part of any mobilization against political and economic dispossession. So we have to continue to ask about that profound pull or temptation to counter the dispossession of human beings with more robust ideas of human possession. When we treat the problem as if it were a simple dialectical reversal, we cannot ask another set of questions: Who and what is excluded from the "human," and how has the category of the "human" come to be formed against the background of

the abject or the disavowed?[23] In other words, how has the human been formed and maintained on the condition of a set of dispossessions?

AA: I take your point about the tension between a disavowed loss and an avowed excess. I would just say, in a very sketchy way, that if the former refers to that which gets abjected or foreclosed from the human, the latter denotes forms of life that are conferred recognition as human according to the established norms of recognizability, on the condition of and at the cost of conforming to these norms. If disavowed loss refers to what gets placed outside the boundary of the human, avowed excess might be taken to describe what is produced in a way of exclusionary inclusion; such beings remain superfluous, in a way, and yet they get slyly and conditionally interpellated in the all-too-intelligible categories of the normative human. But, of course, these occasions do not refer to a fixed, ontological distinction. What gets produced outside the boundary of the human can "exceed" its boundaries and so maintain or trouble those boundaries from the outside.

It seems to me that what links these two occasions – in a relation of tension, certainly – is the radical potential that emerges from the losses, repudiations, foreclosures, and normative acknowledgements through which human intelligibility is constituted. So yes, a radicalization of the experience of loss would expose or challenge those regulative fictions that produce the unintelligible, albeit not in totalizing and teleological ways. As you put it, "Is this what happens, for instance, when the barbarian, the monster, or the animal takes to the street?" We could add: the stranger, the *sans papiers*,

the unemployed, the queer. As we struggle today, jointly and partially, in present circumstances when matters of survival are at stake, queerness, anti-racism, anti-precarity, and companion-species solidarity really matter as enactments of struggles and transformative modes of survival. In bringing up the animal and the monster, you aptly add relationality to our perspective on the human form. In order to pursue this question, we have to rethink the materiality of the human through amalgamations and reassemblages of the animate and inanimate, human and non-human, animal and human animal, life and death. Being invariably in communities with other forms of life, in social realms of co-implicated and differently embodied bodies, serves in the first place as an unsettling of the fantasy of a self-sufficient human subject; it also offers a necessary means for comprehending being-in-common, beyond communitarianism and anthropomorphism, as a condition of new possibilities for politics – a politics that involves engaging with the biopolitical condition while also revisiting the humanist premises of the (bio)political.

Notes

Preface

1 "Amfisvitontas to 'Kanoniko,' Anadiamorfonontas to Dynato: Feminismos, Queer Politiki kai Rizospastiki Aristera," in *Epitelestikotita kai Episfaleia: I Judith Butler stin Athina.*
2 *Zoe sto Orio: Dokimia gia to Soma, to Fylo kai ti Viopolitiki.*
3 *I Krisi os "Katastasi Ektaktis Anagkis": Kritikes kai Antistaseis.*
4 See Athena Athanasiou, "Technologies of Humanness, Aporias of Biopolitics, and the Cut Body of Humanity," *differences*, 14(1) (2003): 125–62.

Chapter 1 Aporetic dispossession, or the trouble with dispossession

1 C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

Chapter 2 The logic of dispossession and the matter of the human (after the critique of metaphysics of substance)

1 See Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (New York: Vintage, 1995). See also Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Child in the Broom Closet: States of Killing and Letting Die," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107(3) (2008): 509–30.
2 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

3 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 126.
4 Ibid.
5 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
6 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1) (2003): 11–40; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
7 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
8 Mbembe, "Necropolitics"; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.
9 Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York: Dial Books, 1992), p. 116.
10 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society," in Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 23–40.
11 Hussein Abu Hussein and Fiona Mackay, *Access Denied: Palestinian Land Rights in Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2003). See also Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).
12 Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
13 Stewart Motha, "Reconciliation as Domination," in Scott Veitch (ed.), *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 69–91.
14 Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
15 See also Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
16 Ranjana Khanna's introduction of the category of disposability is valuable in its critically refining Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life" through focusing on the gendered colonized subject. See Ranjana Khanna, "Disposability," *differences*, 20(1) (2009): 181–98.
17 For an insightful discussion of this problematic in light of the failures and limits of the dialectic of recognition in the Canadian context, see Brenna Bhandar, "Plasticity and Post-Colonial Recognition: 'Owning, Knowing and Being,'" *Law and Critique*, 22(3) (2011): 227–49.
18 Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Michel Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281–301.

19 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2002).
20 Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
21 Elizabeth Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
22 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1996).
23 Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Chapter 3 A caveat about the "primacy of economy"

1 See also the exchange between Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser in *New Left Review* and *Social Text* for different views on the relationship between capitalism and heterosexism: Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," *New Left Review*, 227 (January–February 1998): 33–44 (previously published in *Social Text*, 52/53 [Fall–Winter 1997]: 265–76); Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler," *New Left Review*, 228 (March–April 1998): 140–50 (previously published in *Social Text*, 52/53 [Fall–Winter 1997]: 279–89).
2 Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory and Event*, 7(1) (2003) (online journal).

Chapter 4 Sexual dispossessions

1 Leticia Sabsay, *Las normas del deseo* (Madrid: Ediciones Catedra, 2009), pp. 119–28.
2 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
3 Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
4 See also Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
5 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 91.
6 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123–51.

Chapter 5 (Trans)possessions, or bodies beyond themselves

1 Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). See also Henrietta Moore, *The Subject of Anthropology: Gender, Symbolism and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
2 The script of the film was written in 2004–5.
3 Judith Butler, "Quandaries of the Incest Taboo," in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 152–60 (p. 154).
4 Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Chapter 6 The sociality of self-poietics: Talking back to the violence of recognition

1 *Eleftherotypia*, January 25, 2009.
2 See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
3 Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997), pp. 41–82.
4 Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
5 Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

Chapter 7 Recognition and survival, or surviving recognition

1 Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 108.
2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 45–6.
3 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1994).
4 Ibid., p. 232.
5 Ibid., p. 231.
6 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
7 Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007).
8 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
9 Similarly, Patchen Markell has argued that conceptualizing sociality and social identity in terms of reciprocal recognition fortifies identity-based injustices. Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).