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Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor

I

Most readers of this essay will no doubt be familiar with the famous allegory with which Walter Benjamin begins his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. This opaque little text, written during the first years of WWII shortly before Benjamin's death, concerns the relation between historical materialism and theology. The former is figured as a chess-playing automaton in Turkish attire who is able to defeat all opponents; beneath the table, hidden by a series of mirrors, sits a hunchbacked dwarf who, as the real chess master manipulating the puppet with a series of strings, holds the place of a theology about which secular, enlightened subjects have grown ashamed. One of the difficulties presented by the allegory is, of course, that in its final self-interpretive moment, it is the puppet—historical materialism—that is endowed with intentionality, agency, and the capacity to exploit the resources of theology: "The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone *if it enlists the services of theology*, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight."[1] Some twenty years earlier, Franz Rosenzweig, a German-Jewish thinker to whom Benjamin was much indebted, wrote an allegory concerning the impact of a related shame on theology itself. The introduction to the second volume of Rosenzweig's *magnum opus, The Star of Redemption*—a work composed during and shortly after WWI—bears the title, "On the Possibility of Experiencing Miracles," and begins with the following narrative (taking a quote from Goethe's *Faust* as its point of departure):

> If miracle is really the favorite child of belief, then its father has been neglecting his paternal duties badly, at least for some time. For at least a hundred years the

[1] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1989), 253; translation modified. Subsequent references are given in the text.

> child has been nothing but a source of embarrassment to the nurse which he had ordered for it—to theology. She would have gladly been rid of it if only—well if only a degree of consideration for the father had not forbidden it during his lifetime. But time solves all problems. The old man cannot live forever. And thereupon the nurse will know what she must do with this poor little worm which can neither live nor die under its own power; she has already made the preparations.[2]

Given the conventional identification of the Enlightenment with the triumph of reason over superstition, it should come as no surprise that Rosenzweig's account of this state of affairs takes the form of a brief history of the Enlightenment, or, as he prefers, a history of a staggered *series* of enlightenment moments culminating in the embarrassment which now shadows the very word "miracle." As Rosenzweig puts it, "there is not just one enlightenment but a number of enlightenments. One after another, they periodically represent for the belief that has entered the world that knowledge with which it must contend" (*Star*, 97).

The first in this series is the triumph of philosophy over myth in antiquity, a triumph that Nietzsche would famously characterize as that of Socrates over Dionysus. The second "enlightenment" refers to the Renaissance and Reformation in which the calcified legacies of Aristotle (above all in scholasticism) were supplanted by the privileging of direct, experimental encounter with nature, on the one hand, and of spiritual experience authorized only by scripture and the strength of faith, on the other. For Rosenzweig, the eighteenth-century moment we have come to refer to as "the Enlightenment" signals the moment when the trust in the reliability of experience and the historical/scriptural record of experience itself begins, in its turn, to appear as a form of naïve belief. In each case, what at first occupies the place of knowledge over against belief comes to be retroactively posited as a groundless form of belief. As Rosenzweig summarizes this series, "the enlightenment of antiquity had directed its criticism against the dreams of mythology, that of the Renaissance against the webs of intellect [*die Gespinste der Vernunft*]. The new enlightenment directed it against the gullibility of

[2] Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 93. Subsequent references are given in the text. The German word *Wunder* is, of course, semantically much richer than the English "miracle." I will try to do justice to this richness in what follows.

experience [*die Leichtgläubigkeit der Erfahrung*]. As critique of experience," Rosenzweig concludes, "it became, slowly but surely, a historical critique" (*Star*, 98). It is only at this point, Rosenzweig insists, that miracles truly become a problem for both knowledge and faith; since miracles ultimately depend on the testimony of witnesses—the ultimate witness being the martyr—once testimony was laid open to critical historical analysis, the credibility of miracles, the very ones that fill the pages of scripture and had so long served as a support for faith, could not long survive.

At the heart of what Rosenzweig refers to as historical critique or the "historical *Weltanschauung*," is the demand, understood as the voice of reason itself, to free oneself from the weight of tradition, from the so-called truths of the past which, by virtue of their belonging to a concrete historical context and horizon of experience, can no longer make binding claims upon the present and future. "Revelation," if it can still be called that, must be an immanent feature of, must in some sense be nothing but, the self-education of human reason itself, "*mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity*," as Kant famously put it.[3] The past becomes identified with dogmatic invention, mythic projection, or at the very least, an historical specificity that places radical limits on its cultural, political, and moral relevance for the present; it is by definition subject to the suspicions and doubts of the critical faculty of reason which is now posited as the ultimate arbiter of what shall count as being authoritative for human society. As Aleida Assmann has succinctly put it, "*Aufklärung bedeutet Traditionsbruch*" ("Enlightenment means break with tradition / break-up of tradition").[4] With the historical enlightenment, then, the last vestiges of the view according to which knowing meant in some sense to *inherit* knowledge, are

[3] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" quoted in *What is Enlightenment" Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58.

[4] Aleida Assmann, *Arbeit am Nationalen Gedächtnis. Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Bildungsidee* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1993), 32. Jean-Joseph Goux has recently offered his own quite powerful genealogy of this enlightenment gesture of self-orphaning. Positing its emergence in the figure of Oedipus who confronts the Sphinx without recourse to the traditional/mythic conventions of initiatory ordeal, he locates its modern culmination in the *cogito* of Descartes: "Opposed to any genealogical position that attaches the individual to a line of succession (noble or initiatory) and that bases the existence of a subject only on its relation to an ancestral chain that it continues, the Cartesian gesture is the formidable claim of a subject who has broken away from his inheritance, proclaiming his absolute autonomy and basing his legitimacy on himself alone." Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 160-61.

expunged.[5] This liberation from the past was, Rosenzweig suggests, already well underway in German Pietism which, beginning in the latter part of the seventeenth century, had already elaborated a new concept of belief that no longer depended on the historical objectivity of miracles. This view would come to be consolidated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in a theology of *Erlebnis* that posited the *present intensity of religious feeling* as the crucial warrant of faith.

For Rosenzweig, the authentication of faith by way of religious *feeling* rather than the "heteronomy" of scriptural *testimony* was profoundly connected to another crucial tenet of the historical enlightenment: the belief in progress. In secular culture, the break with the dogmatic hold of tradition opened a new confidence in human capacities to understand and master the recalcitrance of the natural world and the social, moral, and political obstacles to a rational organization of society. "Just so, for its part," Rosenzweig writes, "the new belief fastened the present moment of the inner breakthrough of grace to the confidence of its future implementation in life…. This hope in the future realm of morality became the star to which belief hitched its world course" (*Star*, 100). The progressive movement toward the *telos* of a future kingdom of morality—*das zukünftige Reich der Sittlichkeit*—thus became the guidepost, albeit in different idioms, for knowledge as well as for belief. Both thereby opened on to the new bourgeois ideology of scientific and moral progress through *Bildung*.

The mandate of *Bildung* or self-education/cultivation, though emerging out of a new and radical valorization of present and future at the expense of the past, included, of course, an explicit demand for historical research. This research, whereby the past would be, so to speak, "surrendered to cognition" (*Star,* 99), would serve in the end to further free the present from its moorings in tradition. To this very purpose theology after 1800 became, precisely, *historical theology*. As Paul Mendes-Flohr has put it, "historical theology sought to neutralize the past, to tame it and its claims on the present, in order to secure the autonomy of the present."[6] Nietzsche's own infamous "claim" about the death

[5] One of the paradoxes of the Enlightenment is that the break with tradition needed to be *cultivated* and one form that this culture took was that of Freemasonry in which one had to be, precisely, *initiated* into the sublime mysteries revealed in this very break with the illusions of tradition.

[6] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Rosenzweig's Concept of Miracle," in *Jüdisches Denken in einer Welt ohne Gott. Festschrift für Stephane Moses,* ed. Jens Mattern, Gabriel Motzkin, Shimon Sandbank (Berlin: Verlag

of God is, ultimately, one concerning this very "dialectic of enlightenment" as a dynamic *within* Christianity itself. In Nietzsche's view, the ascetic ideal internal to Christianity eventually takes aim at God Himself, culminating in an "honest atheism" that dismantles the presuppositions of the possibility of experiencing miracles:

> *What*, in all strictness, has really *conquered* the Christian God? (…) Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness taken more and more strictly, the confessional subtlety of the Christian conscience translated and sublimated into the scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. To view nature as if it were a proof of the goodness and providence of a God; to interpret history to the glory of a divine reason, as the perpetual witness to a moral world order and moral intentions; to interpret one's own experiences, as pious men long interpreted them, as if everything were preordained, everything a sign, everything sent for salvation of the soul—that now belongs to the *past*, that has conscience *against* it…. In this way Christianity *as a dogma* was destroyed by its own morality….[7]

Perhaps the most concise summary of this state of affairs is provided by Serenus Zeitblom, the narrator of Thomas Mann's great novel, *Doktor Faustus*, a novel that was, of course, largely based on Nietzsche's own biography and the "event" of Nietzsche in European culture more generally. After joining his friend, Leverkühn, at the University of Halle where the latter was studying theology, Zeitblom quickly absorbs the sense of crisis in the theological faculty at the turn of the century:

> In its [theology's] conservative form, holding tight to revelation and traditional exegesis, it has attempted to "save" whatever elements of biblical religion could be saved; and on the other, liberal, side, theology has accepted the historical-critical methods of profane historical science and "abandoned" its most important beliefs—miracles, large portions of Christology, the physical resurrection of

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Vorwerk 8, 2000), 57. This entire essay is deeply indebted to Mendes-Flohr's discussion as well as to numerous conversations in private and in the context of a team-taught seminar at the University of Chicago in the winter quarter 2002.

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), 160-61. For a brilliant reading of this passage in the larger context of Nietzsche's elaboration of the nihilism in which it culminates, see Alenka Zupancic, *The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

> Jesus, and more besides—to scientific criticism. What sort of science is that, which has such a precarious, coerced relationship with reason and is threatened with ruin by the very compromise it makes with it? (…) In its affirmation of culture and ready compliance with the ideals of bourgeois society, it demotes religion to a function of man's humaneness and waters down the ecstatic and paradoxical elements inherent in religious genius to ethical progressiveness…. And so, it is said, although the scientific superiority of liberal theology is incontestable, its theological position is weak, for its moralism and humanism lack any insight into the demonic character of human existence.[8]

Of course, Mann's narrator quickly warns of the dangers theology runs if it seeks a way out of this impasse by incorporating the terms of so-called *Lebensphilosophie*: "The civilized mind, however—one may call it bourgeois, or simply leave it at civilized—cannot shake off the sense of something uncanny. For by its very nature, theology, once it is linked with the spirit of Life Philosophy, with irrationalism, runs the risk of becoming demonology."[9] As I understand it, Rosenzweig's project was dedicated to elaborating an entirely new conception of the "demonic"—as well of "miracle"—that would allow theology precisely to move beyond the limits of historicism without thereby succumbing to the irrationalism—the fanatical, quasi-mystical *Schwärmerei*—of any sort of *Lebensphilosophie*.[10]

To return for a moment to Benjamin's allegory, we might summarize the gist of Rosenzweig's contribution to its understanding to mean just this: a theology that has lost the concept of an in some sense miraculous intervention of another dimension into the human could never be of any use to historical materialism because it has itself already become a version of the historicist perspective that materialism was supposed to supplant (Benjamin's *Theses* are, among other things, a radical critique of historicism). This deadlock may, however, hold the key to the paradoxical moment we've already noted in Benjamin's allegory where the location of agency becomes undecidable in the relation

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[8] Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus. The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1999), 99.
[9] Ibid.
[10] One might argue, of course, that such was also the goal of Mann's hero, Adrian Leverkühn, in the realm of aesthetics, in general, and music, in particular.

between automaton and dwarf, i.e., where it becomes unclear who is really in charge of the game. The lesson of that uncertainty is, I would suggest, that if materialism is to find its orientation from theology, as Benjamin indicates, this must be a theology that has itself already turned toward materialism as its necessary supplement in a post-Enlightenment age. There must, in other words, be an ongoing exchange of properties, of activity and passivity, between the two. And indeed, this is precisely what Rosenzweig, albeit in somewhat different terms, suggests:

> for the sake of its very status as science, philosophy [historical materialism, in Benjamin's allegory] requires "theologians" to philosophize—theologians, however, now likewise in a new sense. For … the theologian whom philosophy requires for the sake of its scientific status is himself a theologian who requires philosophy—for the sake of his integrity…. They are dependent on each other and so generate jointly a new type, be it philosopher or theologian, situated between theology and philosophy. (*Star*,106)

This interstitial space is the locus of what Rosenzweig came to understand as the "new thinking."[11]

For Rosenzweig, philosophy can enter into this new relationship with theology only if it can hold the place of the "materialist" dimension which had been neglected in liberal theology, namely the dimension of *creation*:

> Thus creation has once more to be placed next to the experience of revelation in the full gravity of its substantiality [*in vollem Schwergewicht ihrer Gegenständlichkeit*]. More than this: the only connection which hope is able to establish between revelation and redemption, and which today is felt to be the essential core of belief, is the trust in the coming of an ethical kingdom of eventual redemption; revelation itself, together with its involvement in and foundation upon this trust, *must once more be built into the concept of creation*…. Here, then, lies the point from which philosophy can begin to reconstruct the whole edifice of theology. It was creation which theology neglected in the

[11] Rosenzweig used this term in an essay of the same name which he wrote to clarify certain points made in the *Star*. See "The New Thinking," in *Franz Rosenzweig. Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000).

> nineteenth century in its obsession with the idea of a vitally present revelation. And precisely creation is now the gate through which philosophy enters into the house of theology. (*Star*, 103; emphasis mine)

II

Rosenzweig's understanding of such a philosophy of creation (or perhaps better: *creatureliness*)—which I am here attempting to link to Benjamin's conception of historical *materialism*—must be understood against the background of what he characterizes as the fundamentally *semiotic* structure of miracles. "A miracle," as Rosenzweig puts it in the *Star*, "is essentially a 'sign'" [*Das Wunder ist wesentlich 'Zeichen'*; trans. modified]. While today one can only imagine a miracle as a breach of natural law of some sort, "for the consciousness of erstwhile humanity," Rosenzweig writes, "miracle was based on an entirely different circumstance, namely, on its having been predicted, not on its deviation from the course of nature as this had previously been fixed by law." As Rosenzweig succinctly puts it, "*Miracle and prophecy belong together*" (*Star*, 95; my emphasis). In the first instance, Rosenzweig is thinking here of the efforts made by both Judaism and Christianity to anchor the ultimate miracle—that of revelation—in prior "predictions" or signs. "To lend the character of a portent to their miracles of revelation is … of supreme importance both to Scripture and to the New Testament. The former does so through the promise to the patriarchs, the latter through the prophecies of the prophets" (*Star*, 96; one of Rosenzweig's many claims about Islam is that the Koran is not organized around this semiotic structure of prefiguration and fulfillment[12]). The crucial distinction here is, thus, between *prophecy* and *sorcery*:

> [S]orcery and portent [*Zeichen*] lie on different planes…. The magician turns on the course of the world in active intervention…. He attacks God's providence and seeks by audacity, guile, or coercion to extort from it what is unforeseen and unforeseeable by it, what is willed by his own will. The prophet, on the other

[12] "Mohammed came upon the idea of revelation and took it over as such a find is wont to be taken over, that is, without generating it out of its presuppositions. The Koran is a 'Talmud' not based on a 'Bible,' a 'New' Testament not based on an 'Old' Testament. Islam has only revelation, not prophecy. In it, therefore, the miracle of revelation is not a 'sign,' it is not the revelation of divine providence, active in creation, as a 'plan of salvation.' Rather the Koran is a miracle in itself, and thus a magical miracle" (*Star*, 116).

> hand, unveils, as he foresees it, what is willed by providence. What would be sorcery in the hands of the magician, becomes portent in the mouth of the prophet. And by pronouncing the portent, the prophet proves the dominion of providence which the magician denies. He proves it, for how would it be possible to foresee the future if it were not 'provided'? And therefore it is incumbent to outdo the heathen miracle, to supplant its spell, which carries out the command of man's own might, with the portent which demonstrates God's providence. (*Star*, 95)

The distinction between magical and providential miracle, between sorcery and sign-event, plays a crucial role in the so-called "waters of Meribah" episode recounted in Numbers 20. There, one will recall, Moses and Aaron are, once more, faced with the rebellious lament of the Israelites who complain of the hardships of their wanderings: "'And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to drink.'" Moses and Aaron withdraw from the assembly and supplicate God who thereupon tells Moses: "'Take the rod and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle.'" What Moses does, however, amounts to a rupture of this arc of promise and fulfillment; instead of bearing witness to the providential sign of God, he performs, instead, a purely magical miracle: "And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?' And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice, and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle." It is against this background that we can understand the otherwise perplexing extremity of God's punishment: "And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly in the land which I have given them.'"[13]

[13] Robert Paul has noted yet another significant feature of this episode. Emphasizing the symbolic dimension of the children of Israel's thirst, Paul comments: "At the waters of Meribah, Moses disobeys the paternal injunction to speak, to use language, and reverts to a preoedipal demand for the breast and its withheld bounty. It is thus for a symbolic incestuous infraction of the oedipal law of the father that Moses is punished." The "regression" from sign to sorcery is correlated here with one from oedipal to preoedipal

Now it was precisely this semiotic understanding of revelatory miracle (in contrast to "pagan" magic) that led Rosenzweig to his genealogy of the historical world-view in the first place, to the claim, that is, that the emergence of a fundamental distrust in and critique of historical testimony had been the ultimate cause of the embarrassment attending to miracles in modernity. With the historical enlightenment, the very coordination of prediction and fulfillment that forms the semiotic structure of providence –including the thought that our coming was in some sense expected on this earth--begins to falter. As Mendes-Flohr has put it, "this critique … would undermine the various religious traditions that are founded on the testimony borne by those who actually witnessed the miracles—the original eyewitnesses—and by those who believed in 'the credibility of those who had transmitted the miracle to them…' The transmission of the witness is embodied in a religious tradition—its teachings as well as rites—and *it is that witness that ultimately endows that tradition with its auctoritas* (my emphasis)." In modernity, Rosenzweig suggests, it can only be philosophy—or as I read Benjamin, a certain understanding of historical materialism—that can reconstitute the semiotic structure of miracles according to which, as Rosenzweig puts it, "prediction, the expectation of a miracle, always remains the actually constitutive factor, while the miracle itself is but the factor of realization" (*Star*, 96). Here, again, Mendes-Flohr:

> Eclipsed by the historical enlightenment, the witness of the past which had endowed miracle with the objective power of knowledge was no longer available. It is, alas, irretrievably lost in the rubble of time created by historicism. If miracle is, nonetheless, to be salvaged from these ruins, Rosenzweig contends, it would be necessary to furnish a credible substitute for the witness of the past. The crucial dimension of the prophecy of miracle, witnessed in the past by Scripture, will be supplied by philosophy, or rather the "new thinking"….[14]

What I am proposing, however, is that the new thinking does not so much eliminate the function of the witness as compel us to rethink the very nature of the past, the nature of historical testimony itself. What is at stake in the intersticial space between theology and philosophy—in the "new thinking"—is not so much a dismissal of the "witness of the

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modes of demand/desire and satisfaction. See Robert Paul, *Moses and Civilization. The Meaning Behind Freud's Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 106.

[14] Mendes-Flohr, "Rosenzweig's Concept of Miracle," 56; 58.

past" as a new conceptualization of the nature of that which registers itself in historical experience, a rethinking of that which in such experience, in its dense, "creaturely" materiality, *calls out* toward the future, constitutes—"temporalizes"—the dimension of futurity as *a mode of response* to a peculiar sort of *ex-citation* transmitted by the past.[15] But this is a past that has, so to speak, never achieved ontological consistency, that in some sense *has not yet been* but remains stuck in a spectral, proto-cosmic dimension. Philosophy—or the "new thinking"--becomes the elaboration of the logic of such excitations the historical truth of which can come to serve as a new locus of prophecy in modernity.[16] Thinking becomes a mode of attunement to a peculiar sort of address or apostrophe—to a *signifying stress*—immanent to our creaturely life. To use a Heideggerian locution, our *thrownness* into the world does not simply mean that we always find ourselves in the midst of a social formation that we did not choose (our language, our family, our society, our class, our gender…); it means, more importantly, that this social formation in which we find ourselves immersed is *itself* permeated by inconsistency and incompleteness, is itself haunted by a lack by which we are, in some peculiar way, addressed, "ex-cited," to which we are in some fashion *answerable*. The anxiety correlative to our thrownness—our *Geworfenheit*—pertains not simply to the fact that we can never fully grasp the reality into which we are born—we are forever deprived of the God's-eye view of it--but rather that reality is never fully identical with itself, *is fissured by lack.*[17]

This structure of temporality—or better, temporalization—is, of course, at the very center of Benjamin's reflections in his *Theses*. The crucial argument there is that the

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[15] One needs to hear/read "excitation" in its derivation from *ex-citare*, a calling out or summoning forth.
[16] With the term "historical truth" I am alluding to *Moses and Monotheism* in which Freud argues that the Jewish tradition bears witness to a traumatic past pertaining to the inaugural violence of its origins, a violence that did not take place at the level of a verifiable event. The crucial point is that for Freud, the Jewish tradition is marked by a sort of stain or torsion testifying to a dimension of unassimilable truth. For a detailed discussion of Freud's Moses-book, see my "Freud's Moses and the Ethics of Nomotropic Desire," in *October* 88 (Spring 1999), 3-42.
[17] Rosenzweig characterizes creation precisely as a lack of being: "[E]xistence (*Dasein*) is in need, not merely of renewal of its existence, but also, as a whole of existence, in need of—Being. For what existence lacks is Being, unconditional and universal Being. In its universality, overflowing with all the phenomena of the instant, existence longs for Being in order to gain a stability and veracity which its own being cannot provide…. Its creatureliness presses under the wings of a Being such as would endow it with stability and veracity" (*Star*, 121).

past makes a claim on the present and future precisely insofar as that past is marked by a certain *void* or *lack of being* which persists into the present:

> The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. That past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. (*Theses*, 254)

In Benjamin's work, the registration of that claim takes the form of what he famously referred to as a "dialectical image." In the file of materials dealing with the method of the so-called *Arcades Project*, Benjamin included a series of variations of the formulations that would eventually be published as the *Theses*. One finds there Benjamin's idiosyncratic formulation of what Rosenzweig characterized as the fundamentally semiotic structure of miracle:

> It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural [*bildlich*]. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.[18]

Earlier in the same section of notes Benjamin characterizes the "historical index" of an object or image as precisely its readability in a determinate historical situation or moment of crisis:

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[18] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 463.

> For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding "to legibility" constitutes a specific critical point in the movement of their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time.[19]

It is precisely such an *eventful synchronicity* that constitutes what Benjamin portrays as an awakening to a new kind of answerability in ethical and political life. That such moments of awakening can and do occur is, both Rosenzweig and Benjamin suggest, the form in which the experience of miracle persists into modernity. What this has to do with "materialism" we shall see in the following.

III

To get a better feel for this structure of temporalization and the ethical and political transformations it entails, I'd like to return a work I discussed some years ago in a rather different context. There I suggested that Christa Wolf's important novel about coming of age during the Nazi period, *A Model Childhood*, was in large measure organized around the development of what we might call, with Benjamin, a weak "Messianic" power on the part of the narrator as she comes to acquire a capacity to read the symptoms plaguing the members of her family (herself included).[20] What the narrator discovers is that such symptoms—headaches, anxiety attacks, a sudden pallor, fits of rage—form a sort of *virtual archive*. What is registered there are not so much forgotten deeds, but rather forgotten *failures* to act. In the course of the novel, Wolf suggests that such failures can, at least in part, be understood as failures to suspend the force of the social bond—call it the dominant ideology--inhibiting acts of solidarity with society's "others." One of the central metaphors in the novel for such archives is a paleontological one:

> Why, then, stir up settled, stabilized rock formations in order to hit on a possible encapsulated organism, a fossil. The delicately veined wings of a fly in a piece of

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[19] Ibid., 462-63.

[20] I first discussed Wolf's novel in my *Stranded Objects. Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

> amber. The fleeting track of a bird in once spongy sediments, hardened and immortalized by propitious stratification. To become a paleontologist. To learn to deal with petrified remains, to read from calcified imprints about the existence of early living forms which one can no longer observe.[21]

In the novel, these symptoms become legible—or as Benjamin puts it, readable in the now of their recognizability--as indices of missed opportunities to intervene on behalf of the oppressed during the Nazi regime, even missed opportunities for empathy with the victims.[22] The novel suggests that adaptation to the social reality of everyday life during the Nazi period involved the formation of pockets of congealed moral and social energies manifest as psychic perturbations, as a symptomatic torsion of one's being in the world, as, precisely, what I have called *signifying stress*. Miracles happen when, upon registering their "historical truth," we are able to act, to intervene into these symptoms and enter the space of possibilities opened thereby.[23]

One way we might think about such acts is in relation to the problem of guilt and responsibility. Miracles happen when we find ourselves able to suspend a pattern—a *Kindheitsmuster*, as Wolf might say--whereby one "culpabilizes" the Other or, in more Nietzschean terms, cultivates *ressentiment*, with respect to a fundamental dysfunction or crisis within social reality. As Slavoj Zizek has put it apropos of the *Kristallnacht* pogroms, one of the central points of reference in Wolf's novel, "the furious rage of such an outburst of violence makes it a symptom—the defense-formation covering up the void of the failure to intervene effectively in the social crisis."[24] In Wolf's novel, the narrator

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[21] Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, trans. Ursule Molinaro, Hedwig Rappolt (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 151.

[22] Benjamin defines one of his basic historical concepts this way: "Catastrophe: to have missed the opportunity" (*Arcades*, 474).

[23] I think that this is what Slavoj Zizek had in mind in his own commentary on Benjamin's *Theses*: "The actual revolutionary situation is *not* a kind of 'return of the repressed'—rather, the returns of the repressed, the 'symptoms', are the past failed revolutionary attempts, forgotten, excluded from the frame of the reigning historical tradition, whereas the actual revolutionary situation presents an attempt to 'unfold' the symptom, to 'redeem'—that is, realize in the Symbolic—these past failed attempts which 'will have been' only through their repetition, at which point they become retroactively what they already were." Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 141. I am suggesting that symptoms register not only past failed revolutionary attempts but, more modestly, past failures to respond to calls for action or even for empathy on behalf of those *whose suffering belongs to the form of life of which one is a part*. They hold the place of something that is *there*, that *insists* in our life, though it has never achieved full ontological consistency.

[24] Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 23.

chronicles her own symptom-formation with respect to the *Kristallnacht* in rather more personal, though still closely related, terms:

> Nelly couldn't help it: the charred building made her sad. But *she didn't know that she was feeling sad* [my emphasis], because she wasn't supposed to feel sad. She had long ago begun to cheat herself out of her true feelings…. Gone, forever gone, is the beautiful, free correlation between emotions and events…. It wouldn't have taken much for Nelly to have succumbed to an improper emotion: compassion. But healthy German common sense built a barrier against it: anxiety.

And as the narrator quickly adds, "Perhaps there should be at least an intimation of the difficulties in matters of 'compassion,' also regarding compassion toward one's own person, the difficulties experienced by a person who was forced as a child to turn compassion for the weak and the losers into hate and anxiety."[25] The crucial thought in all of this is that such failures/defense-formations persist as a peculiar sort of stress in the individual and collective lives of those in some way linked to them. It is the signs/symptoms of such stress that await, as it were, the "miraculous" now of their recognizability.

IV

At this point I'd like to attend more closely to the nature of this stress that for Benjamin serves as the crucial historical index for any materialist engagement with history and that for Rosenzweig provides the basis for rethinking the fundamental monotheistic concepts: creation, revelation, redemption. As I have suggested, Rosenzweig and Benjamin seem to agree that in modernity *miracles do happen* and that their happening must be understood as some sort of opening or unfolding of the semiotic energies condensed in such stress. What is, I think, misleading about some of Benjamin's formulations is that it can appear as if these semiotic energies merely stood in for a nameable, determinate possibility, i.e., one with a specifiable representational content, that was blocked from actualization. But this would result merely in a sort of negative

[25] Wolf, *Patterns*, 161; translation modified.

historicism; instead of worrying about "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*," what objectively happened at some moment in the past, we would be concerned with, as it were, equally datable and objective *non-happenings* inscribed in the virtual—yet nonetheless fully legible--archive of individual and collective symptoms.

The mistake would be to think of the signifying stress at issue here along the lines of Freud's original conception of the seduction theory. According to that first theory of the etiology of hysteria, symptoms are produced through the repression of a determinate and, as it were, datable experience of premature "sexualization" in childhood—the *trauma* of sexual abuse at the hands of an adult (and, thus, the trauma of one's own, if I might put it that way, overwhelming passivity). Freud would revise this theory to allow for the etiology of neurotic symptoms on the basis not simply of external events intruding upon an essentially passive subject but of *psychic* events connected to the birth of sexuality in the human child. These events pertain ultimately—and here I am reading Freud in light of Lacanian and post-Lacanian theory--to the encounter with the enigma of parental desire. The revised theory shares with the first the notion that what is traumatic is, ultimately, the overproximity to the mysterious desire of the other. The difference is that in the later theory such overproximity assumes a certain structural value and need not have been acted out in any egregious manner; the fundamentally disorienting encounter with the other's desire is now seen to be *constitutive* of what we understand as human subjectivity. This revision did not, of course, prevent Freud from attempting to locate *this* encounter in historical time, to date the psychic event—the *primal scene*--out of which the singular subjectivity of his various analysands emerged. Perhaps the most notable example of Freud's efforts in this direction is his attempt to reconstruct the scene of parental intercourse that the Wolf Man ostensibly witnessed as a child. Freud is still committed here to the importance of the original eye-witness in the laying down of the expectation—in the form of symptoms—of the miracle of the analytic intervention and cure.

To return to a term I introduced earlier, according to this revised notion of seduction, the human child is *ex-cited* by enigmatic messages emanating from the parental other, messages indicating something profoundly amiss, something fundamentally lacking, in the other. As Lacan has put it,

> A lack is encountered by the subject in the Other, in the very intimation that the Other makes to him by his discourse. In the intervals of the discourse of the Other, there emerges in the experience of the child something that is radically mappable, namely, *He is saying this to me, but what does he want?* (…) The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child's *whys* reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a *Why are you telling me this?* ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire.[26]

According to this theory, the child works at translating this enigma into more or less determinate demands--demands one can comply with, reject, fail at fulfilling, feel guilty about, etc. As Jean Laplanche, the student of Lacan who has most systematically elaborated this notion of the enigmatic message, has written, the fundamental situation that gives rise to unconscious formations

> is an encounter between an individual whose psycho-somatic structures are situated predominantly at the level of need, and signifiers emanating from an adult. Those signifiers pertain to the satisfaction of the child's needs, but they also convey the purely interrogative potential of other messages—and those other messages are sexual. These enigmatic messages set the child the difficult, or even impossible, task of mastery and symbolization and the attempt to perform it inevitably leaves behind unconscious residues…. I refer to them as the source-objects of the drives.[27]

It is this never-ceasing work of symbolization and failure at symbolization, translation and failure at translation, that constitutes what I have referred to as *signifying stress*. We have here, then, something of a tragic cycle: my signifying stress is called forth—*ex-cited*--by my efforts to translate the signifying stress emanating from the other indicating, in its turn, the other's "addiction" to his/her own enigmas. Or as Laplanche has put it: "Internal alien-ness maintained, held in place by external alien-ness; external alien-ness,

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[26] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 214.
[27] Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Macey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 130.

in turn, held in place by the enigmatic relation of the other to his own internal alien…."[28]In the view I have been outlining here, a "miracle" would represent the event of a genuine break in such a fateful enchainment of unconscious transmissions.

Perhaps the most vivid literary example of what it means to be caught up in the endless work of translation and failure, to live with—or perhaps better: simply *to live*--the pressures of signifying stress, is Kafka's great (unfinished) novel dealing with enigmatic address, *The Trial*. Beginning with the fateful morning of his arrest—apparently without having done anything particular—the protagonist's entire existence becomes an attempt to discern the meaning of enigmatic communications emanating not from a parental other but rather from the rather more ominous "big Other" of a complex bureaucratic entity, the law and its various visible and invisible institutions and agents. Indeed, one of the great achievements of Kafka's novel—and this no doubt what contributes to Kafka's "canonicity"--is that it makes plausible that the familial scenario so central to psychoanalytic theory and practice is only one rather concentrated instance of a much more general dynamic pertaining to *the subject's transferential relations to symbolic power and authority*.[29] Joseph K. is forever trying to translate the inconsistencies of the legal bureaucracy into a set of demands that would allow for some sort of meaningful negotiation. Kafka's novel goes so far as to suggest that these inconsistencies are quite literally correlative to an obscene sexuality, that Joseph K.'s dilemma is indeed one of overpoximity to the *desire* of the Other. One thinks here not only of the various sexually charged women who in some fashion "belong" to the court, but also of the scene of sado-masochistic punishment Joseph K. stumbles upon in a closet at his place of business as well as K.'s discovery of pornographic materials among the books and legal documents at his initial hearing.

In his extended correspondence with Benjamin on the subject of Kafka, Gershom Scholem tried to capture what is "canonical" about the universe of Kafka's fiction by attending precisely to the nature of the signifying stress by which figures like Joseph K. are burdened. In a now famous letter of September 20, 1934, Scholem tries to clarify an earlier claim (letter of July 17, 1934) that Kafka's world is one of "revelation seen …

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[28] Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), 80.
[29] As Lacan has put it, "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere … there is transference." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 232.

from that perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness"; in the September letter he writes to his friend:

> You ask what I understand by the "nothingness of revelation"? I understand by it a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has *validity* but *no significance* [*in dem sie gilt, aber nicht bedeutet*]. A state in which the wealth of meaning is lost and what is in the process of appearing (for revelation is such a process) still does not disappear, even though it is reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak.[30]

In a beautiful reading of the Scholem-Benjamin correspondence on Kafka, Robert Alter takes Scholem's essential point to be "that the world in which we find ourselves has an ultimate, though also ultimately inscrutable, semantic power: something is always 'in the process of appearing' *from the ground of being* that imposes itself on us with the sheer force of its validity, even if it finally has no safely construable significance." According to Scholem, that is, revelation "is not merely an idea of Jewish tradition … but … an *underlying phenomenon of man's creaturely existence*."[31] Clearly, such claims belong within the orbit of what Rosenzweig called "the new thinking." The crucial difference introduced by Rosenzweig is that the miracle of revelation is constituted not simply by an inscrutable semantic power underlying man's creaturely existence—by his signifying stress—but also by our capacity to "unfold" this stress through *acts of neighbor-love*, something that perhaps lay beyond the boundaries of the Kafkan imagination.

V

The characterization of Scholem's claim as one pertaining to a semantic power arising "from the ground of being" resonates not only with Lacan's thesis concerning unconscious mental activity which is, as he noted, "ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire"; it also nicely captures a fundamental structural feature of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. The entire first volume of the *Star* is

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[30] Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940*, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevre (New York, 1989), 142.

[31] Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels. Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 110; 109; my emphasis. These sentences also very nicely capture why Rosenzweig both affirms and denies the "Jewishness" of *The Star of Redemption*. See his essay, "The New Thinking."

entitled “The Elements or The Ever-Enduring Proto-Cosmos” [*Die Elemente oder Die Immerwährende Vorwelt*] and provides a kind of logic of this “semantic power” as a dimension not only of human being but also of worldly and divine being as well (the three fundamental “elements” or regions of being). What Rosenzweig seems to mean here is that when we attempt to think each element independently, to capture what each one is in abstraction from its relations to the other regions of being--in its pure tautological self-sameness (man is man, world is world, God is God)--what we encounter are not the elements in their ultimate reality but rather, to use a Lacanian locution, the “Real” of each element, the specific way in which our access to knowledge is voided. In the first part of the *Star* Rosenzweig tries to get us to brush up against that on account of which each element enjoys its irreducibility to anything else without thereby being knowable (w*hatever* God might be, for example, we at least “know” that God is *not* simply a species of human or worldly being). It is in this sense that Rosenzweig was able to refer to his method in the *Star* as an “absolute empiricism,” an attunement to the “’substances’ of thinking, within the actual, nonobjective, and nonsubstantial experience.” [32]

With respect to human being, Rosenzweig suggests that what is irreducible there pertains to a constitutive, rather than merely contingent, dimension of *trauma*. And it is clear from the very first lines of the *Star* that this trauma that, paradoxically, makes us something *more* than just a piece of the world, *more* than a link in the “great chain of Being,” is a function of our finitude, our subjection to death. For Rosenzweig, we acquire our singular density as human beings—Heidegger would say as *Dasein*--only by way of

[32] Rosenzweig, “The New Thinking,”138; 120. Earlier in the essay, Rosenzweig rehearses the various ways in which Western philosophy engaged in and failed at such projects of reduction (of one region of being to another): “As ever, the possibilities of the ‘reduction’ of each one to the other are untiringly permutated, [possibilities] that, seen in large, seem to characterize the three epochs of European philosophy—cosmological antiquity, the theological Middle Ages, [and] anthropological modernity” (115). Rosenzweig argues that each of these attempts at reduction is generated by the very form of the question at the heart of this philosophical tradition, the “what is it really?” question. Thus in modernity, when subjectivity occupies the center stage, “philosophy takes reduction in general to be something so self-evident that if she takes the trouble to burn … a heretic, she accuses him only of a prohibited method of reduction, roasting him either as a ‘crass materialist’ who has said: everything is world, or as an ‘ecstatic mystic’ who has said: everything is God. That someone would not at all want to say: everything ‘is’…, does not enter into her mind. But, in the ‘what-is?’ question directed at everything, lies the entire error of the answers” (116). Ultimately, Rosenzweig claims, “Experience, no matter how deeply it may penetrate, discovers only the human in man, only worldliness in the world, only divinity in God. And only in God divinity, only in the world worldliness, and only in man the human” (116-17).

anxiety in the face of our own and, ultimately unknowable, mortality (our death is not a natural fact to be known but a "facticity" to be borne). The absolute nullity that borders mortal life *intrudes* into our being as a strange sort of surplus vitality that has no proper place in the world, that can't be put to work, be fully absorbed by a project.

Rosenzweig develops this thought under the heading of what he refers to as the *metaethical self* which he distinguishes from the concept of the "personality." The personality signifies what is *generic* about a person, that is, everything about a person that can be subsumed under a concept, that can be subordinated to some sort of universal or genus. For Rosenzweig, the paradigm of this subsumption is sexual reproduction: "Natural birth was … the birth of individuality; in progeniture it died its way back into the genus" (70). In sexual reproduction, that is, our individuality is given over to the immortal life of the species that persists by way of the cycle of generation and corruption. Rosenzweig abbreviates this subsumption by the equation B=A, signifying the entrance of what is particular, individual, distinctive [*das Besondere*], into the general or universal [*das Allgemeine*]:

> Many predications are possible about personality, as many as about individuality. As individual predications they all follow the scheme B=A, the scheme in which *all the predications about the world and its parts* are conceptualized. Personality is always defined as an individual in its relation to other individuals and to a Universal. (69; my emphasis).

But as he quickly adds, "There are no derivative predications about the self, only the one, original B=B" (69).The self, that is, signifies *the part that is no part* (of a whole), a non-relational excess which is out-of-joint with respect to the generality of any classification or identification, any form of teleological absorption by a larger purpose.

Because the self pertains to that which in some sense persists beyond an individual's integration into the life of the genus, "we should," Rosenzweig writes, "be led to the inadequacy of the ideas of individuality and personality for comprehending human life"(*Star*, 70-71). Rosenzweig circumscribes what remains/insists beyond these ideas by means of the concepts of *character* and *defiance*; the self signifies nothing but the defiant persistence of one's character, its *demonic self-sameness*. This is what Rosenzweig tries to capture by the tautology, B=B: a distinctive insistence on pure

distinctiveness.[33] This leads him to the thought of the second birth and second death as constitutive features of human existence:

> Character, and therefore the self which bases itself on it, is not the talent which the celestials placed in the crib of the young citizen of the earth "already at birth" as his share of the commonweal of mankind [*am gemeinsamen Menschheitsgut*]. Quite the contrary: the day of the natural birth is the great day of destiny for individuality, because on it the fate of the distinctive [*das Schicksal des Besonderen*] is determined by the share in the universal [*den Anteil am Allgemeinen*]; for the self, this day is covered in darkness. The birthday of the self is not the same as the birthday of the personality. For the self, the character, too, has its birthday: one day it is there. It is not true that character "becomes," that it "forms." One day it assaults man like an armed man and takes possession of all the wealth of his property…. Until that day, man is a piece of the world even before his own consciousness…. The self breaks in and at one blow robs him of all the goods and chattel which he presumed to possess. He becomes quite poor, has only himself, knows only himself, is known to no one, for no one exists by he. The self is solitary man in the hardest sense of the word: the personality is the "political animal." (*Star*, 71)

Though this language might indicate a tendency similar to the one we noted in Freud, that is, a belief that the traumatic intrusion of selfhood into the human animal—our becoming *subject*—is a "datable" event in historical time, Rosenzweig for the most part exhibits no special preoccupation with "primal scenes." The paradox for both Freud and Rosenzweig is that something that has a *structural* status, is constitutive for being a human subject, also has the quality of an *event*—here contingency and necessity, eventfulness and essence, coincide. Indeed, the term "primal scene" may best be understood as naming just

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[33] "True, ethos is content for this self and the self is the character. But it is not defined by this its content; it is not the self by virtue of the fact that it is this particular character. Rather it is already self by virtue of the fact that it has a character, any character, at all. Thus personality is personality by virtue of its firm interconnection with a definite individuality, but the self is self merely by its holding fast to its character at all. In other words, the self 'has' its character" (72). In his commentary on Schelling's *Weltalter*, the most important philosophical precursor to Rosenzweig's project, Zizek puts it this way: "That which, in me, resists the blissful submergence in the Good is … not my inert biological nature but the very kernel of my *spiritual* selfhood, the awareness that, beyond all particular physical and psychical features, I am 'me' a unique *person*, an absolutely singular point of spiritual self-reference." Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder. An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 59.

such a coincidence. Rosenzweig's language makes absolutely clear that his concern here is with what Freud characterized as the emergence of *Triebschicksal*, the drive destiny that *amplifies* the creaturely life of human beings, endows this life, to return to a term introduced earlier, with a *demonic* aspect:

> Thus the self is born on a definite day…. It is the day on which the personality, the individual, dies the death of entering the genus [i.e., in progeniture]…. This speechless, sightless, introverted *daimon* assaults man first in the guise of *Eros,* and thence accompanies him through life until the moment when he removes his disguise and reveals himself as *Thanatos*. This is the second, and, if you will, the more secret birthday of the self, just as it is the second, and, if you will, the first patent day of death for individuality….. Whatever of the self becomes visible to us lies between these two births of the *daimon*. (*Star*, 71-72)

At one level Rosenzweig is simply noting here that the birth of human sexuality is fundamentally linked to intimations of mortality; in sexed reproduction we become most directly confronted with the fact that our death was "provided for," that our species-existence is correlative to our death, that our germ cells—or at least half of them—must split off from the mortal soma cells. But Rosenzweig is, I believe, also thinking about what we earlier characterized as a sort of "general seduction theory" (Laplanche's term) according to which the body/psyche of the child is from the start of life penetrated by enigmatic messages emanating from (the unconscious of) its caregivers and authority figures. Indeed, it is only on the basis of such enigmas that human sexuality proper gets off the ground. What is generally thought to be most animal-like about us—our sexuality—is, on this view, precisely where we are most out-of-joint with respect to any merely animal nature.[34] We might say that whereas instincts *orient*, our drive destiny, which emerges on the basis of our seduction by enigmatic signifiers—our "second birthday"--*disorients*, leading us along utterly and often painfully eccentric paths and detours. We are "driven," we have "drive destinies," because we find ourselves, at some level of our being, addicted to an always idiosyncratic series of enigmatic signifiers

[34] As Jonathan Lear has recently put it, "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that there is nothing about human life we hold less in common with animals than our sexuality. We can imagine a bird happening to make a nest out of a lady's shoe; we cannot imagine her getting excited about it." Lear, *Therapeutic Action. An Earnest Plea for Irony* (New York: The Other Press, 2003), 150.

pertaining to the desire of the "big Others" in our lives. This also means that the most intimate kernel of our being is also what is most tightly linked to Otherness, though this link gets laid down *below the level of intentionality*.[35] In Rosenzweig's view, it is precisely our drivenness that has a rightful claim to immortality. Thus, apropos of the hero of Attic tragedy who, in his view, first gives visible shape and form to the metaethical self, Rosenzweig writes, "the tragic hero does not actually die after all. Death only cuts him off, as it were, from the temporal features of individuality. Character transmitted into heroic self is immortal" (*Star*, 79). And with immortality, Rosenzweig continues,

> we touch on an ultimate yearning of the self. Personality does not demand immortality for itself, but the self does. Personality is satisfied with the eternity of the relations into which it enters and in which it is absorbed. *The self has no relations,* cannot enter into any, remains ever itself. Thus it is conscious of being eternal; *its immortality amounts to an inability to die*. All ancient doctrines of immortality come down to this inability of the disengaged self to die. Theoretically, the only difficulty consists in finding a natural bearer of this inability to die, a "something" that cannot die. (*Star*, 79; my emphasis).

Rosenzweig's "post-metaphysical" gesture is to refuse this preoccupation with finding a natural bearer of the drive (say, a soul-substance), of this quasi-semantic power emerging from "the ground of being," from what Rosenzweig refers to as the *Vorwelt* or "proto-cosmos."

VI

Benjamin, who not only knew Rosenzweig's *Star* but also especially valued its first volume, evoked the notion of the *Vorwelt* in his important essay on Kafka. There Benjamin refers to the "protocosmic forces [*vorweltliche Gewalten*] that dominated Kafka's creativeness, forces which, to be sure, may justifiably be regarded as belonging to our world as well." As we've noted, Kafka's protagonists are forever trying to get clear about a message in which an enigmatic and unnerving surplus of validity beyond meaning persists as a chronic signifying stress "curving" the space in which they move.

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[35] I am deeply grateful to Irad Kimhi for helping me to fully appreciate this paradox.

Their inability to interpret or translate the enigma, to stabilize its meaning in a legible call with which to identify, in a demand one can comply with or refuse, is what ultimately serves to draw them all the more powerfully into the ban of the Law, Castle, etc. (this thought will become more important in what follows: a certain hindrance to our institutional inscription/subjection serves as a support of our affective attachment to this very subjection). Later in the same essay—and indeed just after a brief reference to Rosenzweig's *Star*--Benjamin offers a reading of another series of Kafkan figures, figures whose being is distorted by a sort of cringe, as if the stress we have been addressing had taken on direct, bodily form and density:

> Odradek is the form which things assume in oblivion. They are distorted. The "cares of family man," which no one can identify, are distorted; the bug, of which we know all too well that it represents Gregor Samsa, is distorted; the big animal, half lamb, half kitten, for which "the butcher's knife" might be "a release" is distorted. These Kafka figures are connected by a long series of figures with the prototype of distortion, the hunchback. Among the images in Kafka's stories, none is more frequent than that of the man who bows his head far down on his chest: the fatigue of the court officials, the noise affecting the doormen in the hotel, the low ceiling facing the visitors in the gallery. In the *Penal Colony* those in power use an archaic apparatus which engraves letters with curlicues on the backs of guilty men….

Suggesting that what is at stake in any miracle is precisely an intervention into the peculiar burdens of these uncanny "neighbors," Benjamin writes about the hunchback himself that "he will disappear with the coming of the Messiah, of whom a great rabbi once said that he did not wish to change the world by force, but would only make a slight adjustment in it."[36]

Benjamin's evocation of the hunchback strongly resonates with Primo Levi's description of the so-called *Muselmann,* the figure who represents, for Levi, the paradox of the complete—and impossible--*witness* to the truth of the death camps: "They crowd my memory with their faceless presence, and if I could enclose all the evil of our time in

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[36] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1989), 128 (translation modified); 133-34.

one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought is to be seen." [37] The Muselmann is, it would seem, the figure whose being has been fully reduced to the substance of a "cringe," whose existence has been reduced to its pure, protocosmic being, who is *there*, yet no longer "in the world." What remains, that is, at this zero-degree of social existence, in this zone between symbolic and real death, is not pure biological life but rather something like the direct embodiment of signifying stress—the becoming flesh of the "state of emergency" of socio-symbolic meaning.

We are faced here with the topological paradox of a figure who is *included* within the sphere of political existence by virtue of his radical *exclusion*, whose *presence* within the order of the human is paid for by his deprivation of any symbolic *representation*. In his recent work, Giorgio Agamben has analyzed this paradoxical figure under the heading of the *homo sacer*, a term he appropriates from early Roman texts and which marks someone as being subject to murder without the prospect of punishment but who is nonetheless excluded from any form of ritual sacrifice . According to a text by Pompeius Festus, "it is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide…. This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred."[38] To return once more to Kafka, one might think here of Gregor Samsa whose status as a *homo sacer* is supported by the etymological resonances of the words Kafka uses--*ungeheuere(s) Ungeziefer* ("monstrous vermin")--to introduce Gregor's transformation in the famous first sentence of the story. "'*Ungeheuer*'," as Stanley Corngold has emphasized, "connotes the creature who has no place in the family; '*Ungeziefer*,' the unclean animal unsuited for sacrifice, the creature without a place in God's order."[39]

For Agamben, the crucial point is that the typological peculiarity constitutive of the figure of the *homo sacer* directly mirrors a comparable peculiarity at the heart of political sovereignty. At least according to one important tradition of political thought,

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[37] Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz. The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. Stuart Wolf (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 90.
[38] Cited in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 71. Subsequent references are given in the text.
[39] Stanley Corngold, "Introduction," *The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka*, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam, 1986), xix.

the very concept of sovereignty includes the dimension of the "state of exception," the sovereign's right to suspend the law in conditions that threaten the order of the state. That is to say that the sovereign, this embodiment of state law, has the *legal right to suspend law*. The sovereign is, then, in some peculiar sense both inside and outside the law. According to Agamben, the *homo sacer* is the figure who stands in absolute intimacy with this dimension of sovereignty; he is utterly exposed to the state of exception/emergency immanent to the law, an exposure Agamben characterizes as a "ban":

> He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (28-29)

Interestingly, Agamben, too, suggest that there is a kind of *testimony* preserved in the figure of such exposure; the *homo sacer* is a kind of *impossible witness,* utterly consumed—"drowned," as Levi says--by the truth to which he testifies:

> Once brought back to his proper place beyond both penal law and sacrifice, *homo sacer* presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and *preserves the memory* [my emphasis] of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted…. The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment. (83)[40]

To return to our initial problem—the problem of miracle—in the present context we might say that miracles happen when and where this impossible, mad "testimony" can be unfolded.

But this also suggests that miracle, for both Benjamin and Rosenzweig, means just the opposite of what the modern theorist of the state of exception, Carl Schmitt, posits as its meaning. In his book, *Political Theology*, Schmitt suggests that the state of exception—the *Ausnahmezustand*—"has for jurisprudence an analogous meaning to that

[40] Such a "memory" corresponds to what Freud tried to capture with his notion of "historical truth."

of miracle for theology."[41] And indeed, Schmitt argues that the notion of the state of exception suffered a parallel fate to the one we traced with regard to miracle, a fate that, for Schmitt, ultimately impoverishes the liberal theory of the state just as the disappearance of miracle impoverished liberal theology:

> For the idea of the modern constitutional state [*Rechtsstaat*] attains predominance along with deism, with a theology and metaphysics, that is, that just as much banishes miracle from the world (along with any sort of interruption of natural laws—the exception that belongs to the very concept of miracle) as it does the direct intervention of the sovereign into the governing rule of law. The rationalism of the Enlightenment repudiates the state of exception in every form. (43)

My argument here has been, however, that for both Rosenzweig and Benjamin a miracle signifies not the state of exception—the state that has become the norm in the Kafkan universe--but rather its interruption, an intervention into this peculiar topological knot--the outlaw dimension internal to law--that serves to sustain the symbolic function of sovereignty. Rosenzweig's and Benjamin's thinking about miracle must, thus, be seen as critiques of political theology, but as critiques which gain their force from the resources of theology (understood as a form of "new thinking"). But what might such a suspension look like? What does it mean to suspend what is, ultimately, itself a sort of suspension (of law by way of the state of exception)?

V

The first thing to notice is that Agamben's characterization of the sovereign exception and its effects very closely resembles the psychoanalytic understanding of the (punitive) superego, a psychic agency that does not so much represent the "rule of law" internalized by a subject as a set of impossible demands holding the place of a void, of the missing foundations of such rule. The superego, on this view, does not so much represent the psychic agency of interpellation that endows us with a symbolic mandate in the world as the *signifying stress leftover from such an operation*. Here we might recall

[41] Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993), 43 (my translation).

Althusser's famous allegory apropos of ideological interpellation. According to Althusser, ideology takes hold of a subject—successfully interpellates an individual into a subject—at the very moment when this individual recognizes himself in a "master's" call, much as when a man turns toward a police officer who has hailed him on the street. "Assuming the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street," Althusser writes, "the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)…. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellating of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing."[42] If we let Rosenzweig's formula for the predications about the world and its parts, B=A, stand for any instance of successful interpellation—the individual recognizes himself as having a part within the totality in the name of which he has been hailed—then B=B will signify what in the individual "contracts" from the interpellation and the identification established through it. B=B registers, we might say, not so much the master's call as the impact of his *voice*, that which in the act of hailing occupies the uncanny zone between corporeal event and event of meaning (the voice is always *more* than the body from which it emanates and *less* than the meaning it materially supports).[43] The self, in Rosenzweig's sense, is born when this "vocal object" finds an initial organization in fantasy, when the uncanny *externality* of the Other's voice congeals as an *intimate* locus of persistent solicitation or ex-citation.[44]

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[42] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174-75. We find a now classical literary version of the scene of interpellation at the end of *The Trial* when Josef K. hears himself addressed by the chaplain in the cathedral: "K. hesitated and stared at the floor in front of him. For the time being he was still free, he could still walk on and get out through one of the small dark wooden doors that stood close before him. To do so would simply mean that he hadn't understood or that he indeed had understood but for that very reason paid no heed to it. Should he turn around, however, he would be caught, for then he would have confessed that he had well understood, that he really was the one who was called and that he would follow." Franz Kafka, *Der Process* (Fischer: Frankfurt a.M., 1998), 221-22 (my translation).

[43] Here I am deeply indebted to the work of Mladen Dolar.

[44] In an essay on Freud's Rat Man case, Jonathan Lear has offered the following scenario for understanding the birth of that patient's metaethical self around the formation of a punishing—and binding--superegoic voice, a process that yields another exemplar of *das bucklicht Männlein* or hunchback: "Melanie Klein has argued that the earliest internalizations occur via phantasies of physical incorporation. In good-enough circumstances, the comfort, reassurance, and satisfaction which the child receives at the breast is taken in with the mother's milk. That is, the milk itself becomes a concrete vehicle of meaning. Goodness is the meaning of the milk…. Similarly, the child may begin to form a superego around a prohibitive utterance: for the Rat Child, it may have been the voice of the father saying, "Don't do that!" The utterance is itself the physical movement of meaning. The father's tongue has set the air around it vibrating, and a prohibitive

This "extimate" bit of fantasy out of which the agency of the superego is constructed, this *congealed excitation*, is, I am suggesting, the *matter* or *materiality* at the heart of the neighbor, the excess that makes the neighbor irreducible to the "political animal." The paradox, however, is that it is for the most part this very dimension that seals our fate *as* political animals, that keeps us affectively—we might say: superegoically--*attached* to the constrained space of a determinate social formation. A "miracle" would thus signal the intervention into and suspension of this dimension of superego attachment. As Zizek has put it apropos of the notion of *homo sacer*:

> The distinction between those who are included in the legal order and *Homo sacer* is not simply horizontal, a distinction between two groups of people, but more and also the "vertical" distinction between two (superimposed) ways of how the *same* people can be treated—briefly: on the level of Law, we are treated as citizens, legal subjects, while on the level of its obscene superego supplement, of this empty unconditional law, we are treated as *Homo sacer*. Perhaps, then, the best motto for today's analysis of ideology is the line quoted by Freud at the beginning of his *Interpretation of Dreams: Archeronta movebo*—if you cannot change the explicit set of ideological rules, you can try to change the underlying set of obscene unwritten rules [i.e., dimension of superego demands].

And as Zizek illustrates in a telling example, such an act can indeed display the quality of a miracle. Speaking of the group of Israeli reservists who refused to serve in the occupied territories in the winter of 2002, Zizek writes:

> The point is not the cruel arbitrary treatment as such, but, rather, that Palestinians in the occupied territories are reduced to the status of *Homo sacer*, the object of disciplinary measures and/or even humanitarian help, but not full citizens. And

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meaning informs that vibrating air. That meaning reaches the Rat Child's ear via its concrete vehicle and triggers a chain of neurological reactions. One outcome is that the Rat Child can hear his father; another is that he can hear the prohibitive voice over and over 'inside his head.' The Rat Child experiences his own rage as tremendously powerful; and one way to deal with the anxiety it arouses is, in phantasy, to move it over to invest the father's voice. This isn't a thought or a judgment; it is the nonrational, phantastic movement of content. However, though the phantasy-movement of content is not itself rational, it may acquire a dynamic, intrapsychic function. Rage gains some expression, phantastically expressed over there, in the voice of the father, and it is used intrapsychically to inhibit outbursts of rage. And so the movement of meaning in phantasy helps to shape intrapsychic structure. The Rat Child begins to live a life which is to be understood in significant part as *an extended cringe* before the voice of the Rat Dad." Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded. Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 99 (my emphasis).

> what the *refuseniks* accomplished is the passage from *Homo sacer* to "neighbor": they treat the Palestinians not as "equal full citizens" but as *neighbors* in the strict Judeo-Christian sense.

For Zizek, this passage represents the ethical moment/act at its purest:

> It is here, in such acts, that—as Saint Paul would have put it—there actually are no longer Jews or Palestinians, full members of the polity and *Homo sacer*…. We should be unashamedly Platonic here: this 'No!' designates the miraculous moment in which eternal Justice momentarily appears in the temporal sphere of empirical reality.[45]

It should be clear that we are here at the furthest possible remove from the Schmittian notion of the sovereign exception. Or rather, we are at a point of the most profound proximity, but it is the proximity of disease and cure.

VI

Fidelity to what opens at such moments, the labor of sustaining such a break *within* the order of the everyday, of going on with what interrupts our ordinary goings on—this is what it means to remain true to the trajectory of what Rosenzweig calls the "star of redemption." In light of Rosenzweig's work we would nonetheless want to modify the claim regarding the Pauline dimension of this labor identified by Zizek. The first modification would be to exchange "Israelis" for "Jews" in the above passage. The second, more properly Rosenzweigian claim, would be that the possibility of such a "Pauline" suspension is itself held open by the Jewish insistence on always already *anticipating* this eternal realm of Justice. For Rosenzweig, this insistence takes shape in the liturgical time established in and through the rituals and practices of Jewish life which together serve to sustain a gap between the flow of historical time—the time of the "nations"—and that of the "remnant of Israel." We might say that it is precisely in this gap that the gesture of the *refuseniks* transpires.

The difficulty of grasping Rozenzweig's peculiar understanding of the Jewish community as one oriented by a fundamental gap has led one Rosenzweig scholar to what I take to be a potentially serious misunderstanding of Rosenzweig's originality. In his

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[45] Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 32; *116.*

otherwise compelling comparative reading of Rosenzweig and Heidegger, Peter Gordon argues that the recent trend in Rosenzweig scholarship to read Rosenzweig in light of Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of radical alterity—a reading suggested, in part, by Levinas's own expressed debt to his predecessor's work—misses the point of Rosenzweig's "holism." What Gordon means is that for Rosenzweig the Jewish people represent an "irreducible unit of redemptive meaning" whose internal uniformity does not leave room for alterity at all:

> Ethics for Rosenzweig is forged from structures of familiarity rather than alterity. Here Rosenzweig's ideas concerning the priority of holistic, communal bonds sets him dramatically at odds with new developments in contemporary Jewish ethics, especially those of Levinas. Indeed, it seems misleading to call Rosenzweig's ideas "ethical" in the customary sense…. For Rosenzweig, the community is a unified and organic structure, not a collective of discrete individuals. Beginning with religiously dissociated selves cut off from the social and historical world, *The Star* develops a holistic theory of human groups but for this same reason prohibits any sustained understanding of truly "public" life.

Gordon goes on to compare Rosenzweig's "holism" to that of Heidegger for whom "to live in an intelligible world at all requires that we live within hermeneutical horizons, those shared forms of life that comprise the fundamentally social phenomena of language, history, and people."[46]

What Gordon misses here is that, as I've already noted, even for Heidegger to find ourselves always already in the midst of life does not simply mean that we always find ourselves in the midst of a social formation and space of meaning that we did not choose (our language, our family, our society, our class, our gender…); it means, more importantly, that this social formation in which we find ourselves immersed is *itself* permeated by inconsistency and incompleteness, is itself punctuated by a lack by which we are, in some peculiar way, addressed, "ex-cited," and for which we are in some fashion *responsible*. In Levinas's terms, this responsibility is what becomes manifest—*revealed*--in the face of the other who *thereby becomes my neighbor*. To put it simply, for

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[46] Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger. Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 199; 201; 202.

Gordon, belonging to a community is a matter of a part-whole logic in which an item finds its meaning only within the context of an historically determined matrix of relations, against the backdrop of an "hermeneutical horizon." But Rozenzweig's "new thinking" is not simply a species of hermeneutic holism, which would, ultimately, remain within the logic of the B=A. His more radical claim pertaining to Judaism is that it opens the possibility of community on the basis of a shared orientation with respect to a non-relational remainder/excess, to the signifying stress that every "normal" community attempts to gentrify by way of some sort of simulated "holism." Rosenzweig's point is not that the Jews are the only people to achieve a proper holism (or even one just like that of other people qua national, cultural, or ethnic formation) but rather that they are "the one people" to have structured a form of life around, precisely, what disrupts the life of "the nations." Historicity, for Rosenzweig, pertains not to the succession of one space of social meaning by another—the merely "natural history" of the rise and fall of nations and empires--but rather to moments of uncoupling—of *Exodus*--from the fantasmatic "holism" of epochal or cultural totalities. And as we have seen, this uncoupling pertains to the possibility of the passage from *homo sacer* to *neighbor*. Indeed, this is precisely what makes the gesture of the *refuseniks* so radical. It recalls Jews to remember the distinction between any possible "holism" of the Israeli nation and the logic of community of the Jewish "nation." To put it in a formula, *holism and holiness never simply overlap*. In Rosenzweig's view, the Jews as a people persevere not simply on one side or the other of this distinction but rather precisely within this non-coincidence, this non-overlapping. If there is a unity to the Jewish people, it is a very strange one owing to this unique topology, one that is, I am suggesting, structured in *response* to the topological peculiarities of the couple: sovereign exception/*homo sacer*."[47]

[47] Rosenzweig attempts to articulate this singular topology in a number of ways. In one passage, for example, we read: "The very difference of an individual people from other peoples establishes its connection with them. There are two sides to every boundary. By setting separating borders for ourselves, we border on something else. By being an individual people, a nation becomes a people among others. To close oneself off is to come close to another. *But this does not hold when a people refuses to be merely an individual people and wants to be 'the one people.'* Under these circumstances it must not close itself off within borders, but include within itself such borders as would, through their double function, tend to make it one individual people among others. And the same is true of its God, man, and world. These three must likewise not be distinguished from those of others; their distinction must be included within its own borders" (*Star*, 305-06; my emphasis).

How then are we to understand the passages from the *Star* cited by Gordon which suggest a certain righteousness and even violence in the self-understanding of all communities and *above all* those that understand themselves as bearers of redemptive energies.[48] The passages in question pertain to the status of the first-person plural pronoun, the "We," in Rosenzweig's discussion of redemption in the third section of the second volume of the *Star*. There Rosenzweig writes of the necessity of a judgment or verdict to be enunciated by the community "charged" with redemptive energies against all the others, a verdict of a "We" against a "You."

In these sections, Rosenzweig is concerned with the discursive dimension of the constitution of community/solidarity and posits the polyphonic choral chant of congregational thanksgiving –a thanksgiving that is fundamentally *anticipatory*—as its crucial linguistic/performative locus. Choral singing is posited here as a model of what it means to anticipate *now* the becoming-neighbor of the other who thereby comes to represent all the world for me. "Where … someone or something has become neighbor to a soul, there a piece of the world has become something which it was not previously: soul" (*Star*, 235). And later: "The effect of the love of 'neighbor' is that 'Anyone' and 'all the world' … belong together…. [W]hoever be momentarily my neighbor represents all the world for me in full validity" (*Star*, 236). In the chant of the chorus, we are all, as it were, brought into the circle of this ensouling proximity, a proximity that does not, however, depend on any positive features of its "members"; being-neighbor in this sense does not imply resemblance, familiarity, likeness but rather a kind of shared resoluteness sustained, in large measure, by certain kinds of linguistic and social practices (rather than

[48] In his book, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), Jan Assmann argues that it is only with monotheism that we encounter the phenomenon of a "counter-religion," that is, a religious formation that posits a distinction between *true* and *false* religion. Before that, the boundaries between polytheistic—or as Assmann prefers, *cosmotheistic*--cults were in principle open, the names of gods *translatable* from cult to cult because of a shared evidentiary base in nature, i.e., in cosmic phenomena. Translatability is, in such a universe, grounded in and guaranteed by ultimate reference to *nature*. Monotheism, by contrast, because grounded in (revealed) *scripture*, tends to erect a rigid boundary between true religion and everything else, now rejected as "paganism": "Whereas polytheism, or rather 'cosmotheism,' rendered different cultures mutually transparent and compatible, the new counter-religion blocked intercultural translatability. *False gods cannot be translated*" (3; my emphasis). According to Assmann, this rupture in patterns and possibilities of cultural translation and, thus, of a genuine cultural pluralism--a rupture that has been codified in the West as the *Mosaic* distinction between Israel in truth and Egypt in error--must be understood as a profound historical trauma, and indeed as one that continues to haunt the West in the guise of violence against racial and cultural "others."

merely individual intentions or states of mind). The "We" is not simply an aggregation of individuals, but nor is it some sort of group identity or tolerant universalism (posited as being higher or more encompassing than our individual/cultural/ethnic/sexual differences). It is, rather, a form of *militant fidelity* with respect to the testimony borne by the *homo sacer*.

This testimony does not pertain, however, to what is "most human" in all of us once we subtract all our social predicates, to our "sacred" humanity beyond individual and cultural differences; if that were the case then the work of redemption would be nothing but a kind of charitable, humanitarian assistance program. As we have seen, the testimony immanent to the locus of the *homo sacer* pertains to the signifying stress produced by way of the "exceptional" operations of sovereignty. It is against this background, I am arguing, that we need to understand the meaning of the judgment that is born of the "We." As Rosenzweig puts it,

> The We encompasses everything it can grasp and reach or at least sight. But what it can no longer reach nor sight, that it must eject from its bright, melodious circle into the dread cold of the Nought: for the sake of its own exclusive-inclusive unity, it must say to it: Ye. (237)

And as Rosenzweig adds, "Yes, the Ye is dreadful. It is the judgment." But the crucial point here is that this judgment does not pertain to any positive content of this "Ye"; it is not that what belongs to the "we" is in any way endowed with special attributes or talents. What is at issue here is more a *subjective stance* (with respect to the operations of sovereignty), a stance that must itself, however, be sustained by practices that thereby delimit a paradoxical *boundary* of those who remain faithful a radical *opening*:

> The We cannot avoid this sitting in judgment, for only with this judgment does it give a definite content to the totality of its We. This content nevertheless is not distinctive; it subtracts nothing from the totality of the We. For the judgment does not distinguish a distinct content as against the We, no other content, that is, than the Nought. (237)[49]

[49] Zupancic has correlated the logic of ethical consistency with the Nietzschean concept of forgetting in which "the point is not simply that the capacity to forget, or the 'ahistorical condition,' is the condition of 'great deeds' or 'events.' On the contrary: it is the pure surplus of passion or love (for something) that brings about this closure of memory, this 'ahistorical condition.' In other words, it is not that we have first

VII

The delimitation of the "We" is produced not out of the fabric of a distinct content allowing for group identification in the usual sense but rather on the basis of what Alain Badiou has called "ethical consistency." Badiou develops this notion in conjunction with a larger argument about the ways in which human subjects undergo tears in the fabric of their lives, tears that, in principle, allow not simply for new choices of objects of desire but rather for the radical restructuring of the coordinates of desire, for genuine changes of direction in life. Ethical consistency will mean something like the creation of new fabric *out of a tear*. Although Badiou's primary examples come from the domains of art, science, love, and politics, the theological background of this theory of "truth processes"—his name for such sudden tears or ruptures and the processes of their elaboration—is clear throughout and made explicit in his work on St. Paul whose letters produced, for Badiou, a formal model of the temporality of the truth-event. Indeed, we might say that for the three contemporary thinkers I have been in dialogue with throughout this essay—Zizek, Agamben, and now Badiou—the wizened dwarf beneath the chess table in Benjamin's allegory is none other than Paul (I will return to Paul's "contemporaneity" in the following).

Badiou's thought is related to the Heideggerian notion of "authenticity" according to which our immersion in the practices and opinions of the social world we inhabit—in what Heidegger calls "das Man"—is structurally susceptible to a disruption that "compels us to decide a new way of being." [50] Such disruptions effectuate a transformation of the *animal* that I was into the *subject* I am to become:

> If there is no ethics "in general," that is because there is no abstract Subject, who would adopt it as his shield. There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject—or rather, to enter into the

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to close ourselves within a defined horizon in order then to be able to accomplish something. The closure takes place with the very … opening toward something…. Nietzsche's point is that if this surplus passion engages us 'in the midst of life,' instead of mortifying us, it does so via its inducement of forgetting" (*Shortest Shadow*, 59). Zupancic's larger point is that in the absence of such a passion we become subject to the absolute closure of the reality principle and the concomitant disappearance of the space of creativity, which together define modern nihilism (as the ethics of the "last man").

[50] Alain Badiou, *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 41. Subsequent references are given in the text.

> composing of a subject. That is to say that at a given moment, everything he is—his body, his abilities—is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path. This is when the human animal is convoked [*requis*] to be the immortal that he was not yet. (40)

Badiou goes on to give examples from the domains of politics, love, science, and art to indicate what can count as such "truth-events": "the French Revolution of 1792, the meeting of Heloise and Abelard, Galileo's creation of physics, Haydn's invention of the classical musical style" (41). Each such event generates within our animal inertia or mere perseverance in being a "vital disorganization" that can become the source of a radically new kind of subjective stance in the world or, at the very least, within the spheres at issue:

> Every pursuit of an interest has success as its only source of legitimacy. On the other hand, if I 'fall in love' (the word 'fall' indicates disorganization in the walk of life), or if I am seized by the sleepless fury of a thought, or if some radical political engagement proves incompatible with every immediate principle of interest—then I find myself compelled to measure life, my life as a socialized human animal, against something other than itself. And this above all when, beyond the joyful or enthusiastic clarity of the seizing, it becomes a matter of finding out if, and how, I am to continue along the path of vital disorganization, thereby granting to this primordial disorganization a secondary and paradoxical organization, that very organization which we have called 'ethical consistency'. (60)

The paradox Badiou invokes here is even more complex than may at first appear, indeed, more complex than he himself at times allows. For the "vital disorganization" inaugurated by a "truth-event" happens not simply to an animal pursuing its predatory interests but one whose animal life has already been amplified—one might even say disrupted, disorganized--by what Freud referred to as *Triebschicksal* or "drive destiny." What Badiou seems to lose sight of here is, in a word, nothing less than the difference between animal instinct and human drive. As I put it earlier, there is nothing that differentiates us more from animal life than precisely that dimension that has traditionally been characterized as the locus of our animality—our drives. To put it in the terms laid

out by Rosenzweig, the human drive for "self-preservation" to which Badiou refers ultimately pertains neither simply to animal life nor to the personality (Badiou collapses these into the formulation "socialized human animal"; this is precisely what Rosenzweig abbreviates by the equation B=A), but rather to the *metaethical* self (B=B). The new "ethical consistency" that emerges by way of a truth-event has as its ground not simply this socialized human animal, i.e., a mere perseverance in being, a predatory pursuit of interests, but the metaethical "substance" that already exceeds such life (from within). Man is, in a word, the creature whose creatureliness has been *amplified* by a death-driven singularity that makes him more than creature or rather: *more creaturely* than any other part of creation.

Badiou's theory does, however, have a place for this intermediate area between perseverance in being, on the one hand, and truth-events, on the other. Though Badiou is for the most part much more concerned with the problem of fidelity (the work that is done to *sustain* the break with the norms of an historical situation), he does indicate that a break emerges only insofar as such norms are themselves articulated around a *void*:

> You might then ask what it is that makes the connection between the event and that "for which" it is an event. This connection is the void of the earlier situation. What does this mean? It means that at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void [*vide*], around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question. (68)

In his *Ethics*, Badiou gives two examples of such a "situated void," one from the realm of art and one from politics: "Thus at the heart of the baroque style at its virtuoso saturation lay the absence [*vide*] (as decisive as it was unnoticed) of a genuine conception of musical architectonics. The Haydn-event occurs as a kind of musical 'naming' of this absence [*vide*]" (68). And further:

> Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name "proletariat," the central void of early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat—being entirely dispossessed, and absent from the political stage—is *that around which is organized* the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. (69; my emphasis)

As Badiou sums up: "the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event" (69). And as he emphasizes elsewhere, what he refers to here as a "situated void" has the status of what we have more generally come to understand as a *symptom*.[51] Our "thrownness," to use the Heideggerian term again, generates anxiety not so much because we can never master the wealth of meanings in which we always already find ourselves, i.e., because we are not the authors of the social roles we are compelled to assume, but rather because these roles are in turn never fully identical with themselves, are inconsistent/incomplete, haunted by a void. What this means, of course, is that what Badiou refers to as our life as a socialized human animal is already sustained, in its very animal normality, by the singular way in which each of us comes to be "ex-cited" by such voids and defends against knowing anything about it (this is what I earlier referred to as "significant stress"). We are thereby back at Laplanche's concise formulation of the situation of the child with respect to its caregivers/authority figures: "Internal alien-ness maintained, held in place by external alien-ness; external alien-ness, in turn, held in place by the enigmatic relation of the other to his own internal alien…"[52] The socialized human animal that we are is, so to speak, always already bent over, locked into some sort of cringe. What Badiou refers to as the "vital disorganization" generated by a truth-event thus signifies a disruption of this symptomatic cringe already constraining/intensifying our life. If we think of a symptom as being a locus of some sort of disorganization, than the "vital disorganization" at issue in a truth event must be understood in this reflexive sense as a disorganization of a disorganization already at the heart of our "animal life."

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[51] Badiou speaks of the "symptomal torsion of being." Cited in Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 131. Zizek nicely summarizes the symptomal reading of the "situated void": "The texture of Knowledge is, by definition, always total—that is, for Knowledge of Being, there is no excess; excess and lack of a situation are visible only from the standpoint of the Event, not from the standpoint of the knowing servants of the State. From within this standpoint, of course, one sees 'problems,' but they are automatically reduced to 'local,' marginal difficulties, to contingent errors—what Truth does is to reveal that (what Knowledge misperceives as) marginal malfunctionings and points of failure are a structural necessity. Crucial for the Event is thus the elevation of an empirical obstacle into a transcendental limitation. With regard to the *ancien régime*, what the Truth-Event reveals is how injustices are not marginal malfunctionings but pertain to the very structure of the system which is in its essence, as such, 'corrupt.' Such an entity—which, misperceived by the system as a local 'abnormality,' effectively condenses the global 'abnormality' of the system as such, in its entirety—is what, in the Freudo-Marxist tradition, is called the *symptom*…" (131).

[52] Laplanche, *Otherness*, 80.

VIII

Certainly one of the most striking examples of what it means to be seized by a truth-event and to organize one's life in fidelity to it was provided by Rosenzweig himself who gave up a promising career as an academic in order to sustain, in his work as a teacher, organizer, translator, and community leader, the break he experienced in an especially concentrated fashion during a Yom Kippur service in a Berlin synagogue in 1913. This was the moment he definitively decided to give up plans for conversion and to remain a Jew. In a now famous letter written to his mentor Friedrich Meinecke seven years later in which he turned down the latter's offer of an assistantship in Berlin, Rosenzweig explained his decision as the result of his new commitment to Judaism. As Rosenzweig tells it, this commitment emerged in the context of a breakdown: "In 1913 something happened to me for which *collapse* [*Zusammenbruch*] is the only fitting name. I suddenly found myself on a heap of wreckage, or rather I realized that the road I was then pursuing was flanked by unrealities." [53] Of the academic road he had been traveling—Badiou would call this the life of the socialized human animal--Rosenzweig writes that it "was the very road defined for me by my talent, and my talent only. I began to sense how meaningless such a subjection to the rule of one's talent was and what abject servitude of the self it involved." Rosenzweig's collapse and recovery in 1913 transpired, as he puts it, in relation to a force—a "dark drive"--that allowed him to suspend such subjection: "The one thing I wish to make clear is that scholarship [*Wissenschaft*] no longer holds the center of my attention, and that my life has fallen under the rule of a 'dark drive' which I'm aware that I merely *name* by calling it 'my Judaism'." One of the effects of this "rule" was, as Rosenzweig puts it, that he was now "more firmly rooted in the earth" than he had been when he wrote his dissertation, *Hegel and the State*, under Meinecke's supervision. One aspect of this new rootedness—Badiou would speak of one's "seizure by a truth-process"--was an enhanced capacity to find value in the mundane details of everyday life, details that were now linked to a "truth process": "The small—at times exceedingly small—thing called [by Goethe] 'demand of the day' [*Forderung des Tages*] which is made upon me in my position at Frankfurt, I mean the nerve-wracking, picayune, and at the same time very necessary struggles with

[53] Cited in *Franz Rosenzweig. His Life and Thought,* ed. Nahum Glatzer (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 95.

people and conditions, have now become the real core of my existence—and I love this form of existence despite the inevitable annoyance that goes with it."[54] Finally, Rosenzweig links this transformation to one pertaining to the very substance of his attentiveness to and curiosity about the world; his language furthermore suggests that it was made possible by, or perhaps more accurately, was coterminus with a passage through and beyond a certain *fantasmatic* dimension:

> Cognition is autonomous; it refuses to have any *answers* foisted on it from the outside. Yet it suffers without protest having certain *questions* prescribed to it from the outside (and it is here that my heresy regarding the unwritten law of the university originates). Not every question seems to me worth asking. Scientific curiosity and omnivorous aesthetic appetite mean equally little to me today, though I was once under the spell of both, particularly the latter. Now I only inquire when I find myself *inquired of*. Inquired of, that is, by *men* [*Menschen*] rather than by scholars. There is a man in each scholar, a man who inquires and stands in need of answers. I am anxious to answer the scholar *qua* man but not the representative of a certain discipline, that insatiable, ever inquisitive phantom which *like a vampire* drains him whom it possesses of his humanity. I hate that phantom as I do all phantoms. Its questions are meaningless to me.[55]

Rosenzweig's words concord with the claim made above, namely that our life as a socialized human animal is, at its heart, sustained by a peculiar sort of hauntedness, by a congealed excitation that we might call, following Rosenzweig's lead here, a phantom-like *undeadness.* Seizure by a truth event thus implies, among other things, a suspension, a deanimation of, this undeadness, its being rendered inoperative.[56]

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[54] Ibid., 95; 96. In Badiou's terms, Rosenzweig is describing what it means to adhere to the ethic of a truth: "'Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption" (47).

[55] Ibid., 96-97 (my emphasis).

[56] One must not conflate such a "deanimation" with the narcoticization of the will that Nietzsche associated with some forms of nihilism. The point here is precisely to break out of the oscillation between an active and passive nihilism—between undeadness and narcoticization—that together comprise the full picture of modern nihilism. Zupancic has lucidly summarized this oscillation in the following terms: "There is, on the one hand, the imperative or the need for excitement, the need to be in touch with the 'Real,' to 'feel life' as vividly as possible, to feel awake—the imperative or need in which Nietzsche recognizes the core of the ascetic ideal. This imperative, precisely as an imperative, holds us in a kind of mortifying grip, a paralysis that can very well take the form of some intense activity while still remaining that: a paralysis. On the other hand (and in response to this), there is passive nihilism as a defense that operates by mortifying this

IX

Badiou offers a quite compelling presentation of this dynamic of "deanimation" in his book on Saint Paul.[57] Badiou positions his reflections on Paul as a challenge to the multiculturalist consensus of contemporary thought and culture, a consensus that he sees as being an integral part of the neo-liberal understanding of the "progress" associated with processes of globalization. Badiou sees the tendency toward ever more subtle modes of identifying individuals and groups--a tendency often linked with grievances and claims to victim status (black, lesbian, single-parent…)—in much the same way that Foucault understood the proliferation of sexualities: as an expansion of the field by which power is able to invest human life with certain kinds of meaning, knowledge, and value. The "deterritorialization" of populations into diverse minority identities is seen here as the very means by which capital spreads its logic of general equivalence throughout the globe, configuring the world precisely as world-market:

> Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market. The capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and cultural logic of communities and minorities form an articulated whole. (10-11)

In Rosenzweigian terms, multiculturalist politics and market capitalism conspire to articulate a global system in which every "B" can enter into the sphere of general equivalence, "A." This would represent a triumph of what Rosenzweig characterizes as "the world in the form of the third person" in which all "singularity" is ultimately identifiable/marketable by means of its predicates (Badiou speaks of "identitarian singularity" [11]). [58] Against this background, Badiou proposes Paul as a radical alternative, as the militant proponent of a uniquely subjective—and yet somehow

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excitement itself. In other words, one kind of mortification (the one that takes the path of surplus excitement) is regulated or moderated by another kind. The 'will to Nothingness' is combined with the 'narcoticization' of the will—exciting stimulant combines with sedating tranquilizer" (Zupancic, *Shortest Shadow*, 67).

[57] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Subsequent references will be made in the text.

[58] Rosenzweig, "'*Urzelle*' to the *Star of Redemption*," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 60.

materialist--rupture with this world system that exhibits the formal features of the closed cosmos of antiquity (as readers of the *Star* know, Greek antiquity formed the paradigm for Rosenzweig's understanding of the world in the form of the third person). About the Pauline break with that world, Badiou writes that

> "the world" that Paul declares has been crucified with Jesus is the Greek cosmos, the reassuring totality that allots places and orders thought to consent to those places, and that it is consequently a question of letting in the vital rights of the infinite and the untotalizable event…. (71)

Paul's great achievement, in Badiou's eyes, was to have articulated the procedures for and virtues appropriate to the composition of a subjectivity correlative to "that uncountable infinity constituted by a singular human life" (10), a subjectivity thereby in excess of the predicative particularity of any sort of cultural identity.

At the heart of Badiou's understanding of Paul is the thought that Paul introduced into the world of late antiquity a distinct form of discourse that positioned and engaged the human subject in a radically different way than the reigning discursive links of that world. In contrast to the discourse of the *wise man*—the Greek discourse concerning man's proper place in the order of the natural totality of the cosmos—and that of the *prophet*—the Jewish discourse concerning the decipherment of exceptional signs and the fulfillment of providential miracles--Paul's discourse was that of the *apostle*. What distinguishes the apostle from both wise man and prophet is, according to Badiou, a refusal of the ambition to mastery proper to the other subjective figures, "whether it be through direct mastery of the totality (Greek wisdom), or through mastery of a literal tradition and the deciphering of signs (Jewish ritualism and prophetism)" (42). Paul's project, Badiou argues,

> is to show that a universal logic of salvation cannot be reconciled with any law, be it one that ties thought to the cosmos, or one that fixes the effects of an exceptional election. It is impossible that the starting point be the Whole, but just as impossible that it be an exception to the Whole. Neither totality nor sign will do. One must proceed from the event as such, which is a-cosmic and illegal, refusing integration into any totality and signaling nothing. (42)

For Badiou this amounts to the claim that both Greek and Jewish discourses are discourses of the Father whereas the new discourse is that of the son, "equidistant from Jewish prophecy and the Greek logos" (43); indeed, the new discourse is one that "can only be accomplished through a sort of decline of the figure of the Master" or Father (43), a decline captured in such passages as the famous statement of 1Corinthians 4:13: "We have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things."[59] It is, on this view, only at the site of such predicative disqualification, such utter phallic ruination, testifying to the vanity of every identification and symbolic investiture--every B=A--that the possibility of a genuinely new beginning—the life of the *son*--becomes realizable. The Christ-event, which for Paul has little to do with any sort of moral teaching (the figure of Jesus is almost entirely absent from Paul's letters) but is rather concentrated in the gift of new life signaled in the declaration, "Christ is resurrected," is, as Badiou claims, "heterogeneous to the law, pure excess over every prescription, grace without concept or appropriate rite…. The pure event can be reconciled neither with the natural Whole nor with the imperative of the letter" (57).

It should be clear that what is at stake in this version of Paul is nothing other than the pure possibility of a life uncoupled from the figure of law, whether it be the law of cosmic totality or that delimiting the exceptional ethical sphere and substance of a community. The formula for such an uncoupling is the "not … but" of Romans 6:14: "for you are not under law, but under grace": "For the 'not' is the potential dissolution of closed particularities (whose name is 'law'), while the 'but' indicates the task, the faithful labor, in which the subjects of the process opened by the event (whose name is 'grace') are the coworkers" (64). The very emptiness or formalism of this gesture/gift of evental grace allows Badiou to place the Pauline notion of the son in proximity to the Nietzschean thought of the Overman as a figure of pure affirmation of life beyond any guilty attachment to law. This formalism notwithstanding, it is crucial that the *site* of such grace be grasped in its special sort of material density. This density is provided, in Paul's writings, by the thought of death understood as the obstacle to such an affirmation.

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[59] References from Paul's letters are taken from *The Writings of St. Paul*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972). Such a decline is, Badiou suggests, correlative to the subjective destitution Lacan associated with the position of the analyst as the key to the working through of the transference (the positing of the analyst as Master, as subject supposed to know).

Perhaps Badiou's most important achievement in his essay on Paul is to emphasize that for Paul death does not so much signify a biological terminus as a certain subjective stance or path, a way of dying to life within life—in a word, a form of nihilism. Indeed, what Paul understands by death, which he links to the way of the flesh and of sin, would seem to correspond quite closely to what I have referred to as *undeadness*.[60] "Resurrection" thereby designates precisely the possibility of some sort of deanimation of this peculiar sort of death-in-life that both intensifies and constrains human existence. The crucial point for Badiou is that it is exactly from this point, that is, from this uncanny site of undeadness, that the upsurge of life signified by the Christ-event first becomes possible. That is the meaning of the claim that "death is the construction of the evental site" (70).

We might note at this point another important parallel between this understanding of Paul and Rosenzweig's project. In volume two of the *Star*, in a section forming the transition between Book One and Book Two (the former addressing "Creation or the Ever-Enduring Base of Things," the latter "Revelation or The Ever-Renewed Birth of the Soul") and itself entitled "The Prophecy of Miracle," Rosenzweig offers a commentary on Genesis 1: 31. Rosenzweig notes—and here he joins a larger tradition of Rabbinic exegesis—that it is only at this point in the Biblical narration of beginnings, that is, after the creation of man, that God uses for the first time the comparative form by proclaiming creation to be "*very* good":

> Within the general Yea of creation, bearing everything individual on its broad back, an area is set apart which is affirmed differently, which is "very" affirmed. Unlike anything else in creation, it thus points beyond creation. This 'very' heralds a supercreation [*eine Überschöpfung*] within creation itself, something more than worldly within the worldly, something other than life which yet belongs to life and only to life, which was created with life as its ultimate, and which yet first lets life surmise a fulfillment beyond life: this "very" is death. The created death of the creature portends the revelation of a life which is above the

[60] Rosenzweig speaks of "tragically immobile vitality" [*tragisch starre Lebendigkeit*] (*Star*, 230) and Benjamin of "immobilized restlessness" [*erstarrte Unruhe*] (*Arcades Project*, J55 a, 4).

> creaturely level. For each created thing, death is *the very consummator of its entire materiality*. (*Star*, 155; my emphasis)

For both Paul and Rosenzweig, the consummation of creaturely materiality enjoys its supreme density in the death-driven singularity of human being forming, precisely, the very *matter of the neighbor*, that is, the very thing—we should perhaps write: Thing--to which the love that emerges in and through the messianic gift is addressed.[61] We should say, then, that the socialized human animal only becomes susceptible to the force of truth because his very animality or creatureliness has been heightened by the impact of an anxiety-filled encounter with a void.

As Badiou emphasizes, in Paul's writings, the key name of death is the Law. The most famous and difficult passage in Paul's letters linking death and law is no doubt Romans 7 from which I will quote at length:

> Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

Paul continues along this path of paradoxical formulations by claiming, in effect, that *death first comes alive* through the law:

> What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said "You shall not covet." But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me

[61] I am alluding here, of course, to Freud's remark in his *Project* concerning the thingness of the neighbor, a remark taken up by Lacan to great profit. Speaking of the perceptual experience of another human being—"ein *Nebenmensch*," the human being next to me, my neighbor—Freud writes: "And so the complex of the neighbor divides into two constituent parts the first of which *impresses* [*imponiert*; my emphasis] through the constancy of its composition [*durch konstantes Gefüge*], its persistence as a *Thing* [*Ding*], while the other is *understood* by means of memory-work…." Freud, *Gesammelte Werke, Nachtragsband: Texte aus den Jahren 1885-1938* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 426-27 (my translation).

> and by it killed me…. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Finally, Paul seems to offer a solution to this set of paradoxes by suggesting that one differentiate between different registers, levels, or dimensions of law: the law articulated in commandment and what he calls the "law in my members":

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but the sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.

As Badiou rightly notes apropos of these passages, we are offered here nothing short of a theory of unconscious mental activity (the laws of which dwell "in my members") as generated by the *seductions of law*: "Paul's fundamental thesis is that the law, and only the law, endows desire with an autonomy sufficient for the subject of this desire, from the perspective of that autonomy, to come to occupy the place of the dead" (79). Badiou underlines here the exact same admixture of uncanny animation and constriction that we have been attending to under a variety of headings throughout this essay: "The law is what *gives life* to desire. But in so doing, it *constrains* the subject so that he wants to follow only the path of death" (79; my emphasis). We are back, in other words, at the Freudian notion of the *drive destiny* that both intensifies and constrains life:

> What is sin exactly? It is not desire as such, for if it were one would not understand its link to the law and death. *Sin is the life of desire as autonomy, as automatism*. The law is required in order to unleash the automatic life of desire, the automatism of repetition. For only the law *fixes* the object of desire, binding

> desire to it regardless of the subject's "will." It is this objectal automatism of desire, inconceivable without the law, that assigns the subject to the carnal path of death. (79)

It is, in a word, the fixity of drive destiny manifest in the compulsion to repeat that is at issue in Paul's understanding of the "flesh," "sin," and "death." The glad tidings of the Christ-event are just this: it is possible, thanks to grace, to unplug from this destiny, to change direction/destination in a radical way.

X

Against the background of such an understanding, the strict separation of the discourse of the prophet and that of the apostle can no longer be rigorously sustained. That, at least, is the wager of Rosenzweig's effort to restore, on the basis of the "new thinking," the relevance of the concept of miracle which, according to Badiou, strictly speaking belongs to the discourse of prophecy alone. Rosenzweig's whole point is, of course, that under conditions of modernity the semiotic structure of miracle would have to be reconceived along the very lines that Badiou presents as the essential features of the discourse of the apostle. That is to say, what can now occupy the place of prophecy is precisely the construction of the evental site understood as our "protocosmic being," the drive destiny framing/fixing our possibilities of desire, the way in which one is characterologically (dis)oriented in the world. Once again, the signs that are at issue in the semiotic structure of miracle are *symptoms*, which are, in turn, the ways in which the subject registers/represses--"cringes" around--the voids in the historical situation into which he is thrown. Badiou's claim that death is the construction of the evental site means just that our death-driven singularity is the very point at which the possibility of new possibilities can emerge. As Badiou writes, "resurrection … comes forth *out from* the power of death, not through its negation" (73). In the *Star*, Rosenzweig puts it this way:

> What then was the *daimon*, the character as distinct from the personality? Personality was an innate disposition, character something which suddenly overcame a man. Character, then, was no disposition: vis-à-vis the broad diversity of dispositions it was, rather, a dividing line or, better, a direction [*Richtung*].

> Once man is possessed by his *daimon*, he has received "direction" for his whole life. His will is now destined to run in this direction which directs him once and for all. By receiving direction he is in truth already corrected [*gerichtet*]. For that which is subject to correction in man [*dem Gericht unterliegt*], his essential will, is already fixed once and for all in its direction. (*Star*, 213).

This translation only vaguely captures the series of puns at work in the cluster of terms: direction, correction, to direct. For in German, the word "gerichtet," translated here as "corrected," also means *judged* and even resonates with the word for execution (*Hinrichtung*). Direction and law, destiny and judgment, are obviously deeply intertwined here; this entanglement forms, of course, the central target of Paul's polemic against the Law. To put it somewhat differently, *drive destiny* and *superego* belong together. But Rosenzweig quickly adds to this passage concerning the fixity of our fundamental world-orientation the following: "Fixed, that is, unless there occur the one thing that can interrupt this once-and-for all again, and invalidate the correction [*Gericht*] along with the direction [*Richtung*]: the inner conversion [*die innere Umkehr*]."[62]

Now what is crucial for both Paul and Rosenzweig—for the discourse of the apostle and the "new thinking"—is that the construction of the evental site in no way automatically produces the miracle of awakening to new life. As Badiou puts it,

> death is an operation that immanentizes the evental site, while resurrection is the event as such…. Resurrection is neither a sublation, nor an overcoming of death. They are two distinct functions, whose articulation contains no necessity. For the event's sudden emergence never follows from the existence of an evental site.

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[62] In a new book, Jonathan Lear addresses precisely this possibility of *Umkehr* in conjunction with the notion of the transference and its working through. Apropos of a case presentation involving a woman whose fundamental direction in life was organized around disappointment—who had been, as it were, sentenced to a life of disappointment--he indicates what successful therapeutic action would involve. It would require, he writes, "a moment in which the world itself shifts: there is, as it were, a possibility for new possibilities. This 'possibility for new possibilities' is not an ordinary possibility, like all the others, only new. The fact that Ms. C. inhabited a world meant that she lived amidst what for her were all the possibilities there were. For her, there simply was no possibility of experiencing, say, a promotion as a success rather than as a disappointment. One cannot simply add that possibility to Ms. C.'s world piecemeal, as though everything else about her can remain the same, only now it is possible for her to experience promotion as a success. Rather, the order of possibilities itself has to shift so that now success becomes an intelligible and welcome aspect of life. The possibility for new possibilities is not an addition of a special possibility to the world; it is an alteration in the world of possibilities." Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action. An Earnest Plea for Irony* (New York: The Other Press, 2003), 204.

> Although it requires conditions of immanence, that sudden emergence nevertheless remains of the order of grace. (71)

The emergence of new life, the possibility of new possibilities, is not a dialectical outcome of the material itself, i.e., of the dense materiality of undeadness. To put it in psychoanalytic terms, the hard kernel of symptoms does not dissolve simply by way of construction/interpretation. Even more to the point, there is really no such thing as "self-analysis"; one cannot give to oneself the possibility of new possibilities. Something must *happen*, something beyond one's own control, calculations, and labor, something that comes from the locus of the Other. To recall Rosenzweig's account of the "new thinking," it is not just that theology requires philosophy, now understood as the construction of the evental site; philosophy needs theology, understood as the insistence on the autonomous, non-dialectical, place of the grace-event. To put it again in psychoanalytic terms, the mapping of unconscious mental activity—think of Freud's "self-analysis" in the *Interpretation of Dreams*—does not in and of itself generate the cure.

In Rosenzweig's understanding, the event of "inner conversion" transpires under the impact of divine love, a love directed precisely at that bit of demonic self-sameness that Rosenzweig called the metaethical self (B=B). It is not enough to separate out the self from the personality, to isolate, as it were, the workings of the automatism of desire—what I have been calling "drive destiny"—as the key to the "symptomal torsion" within the sphere of one's multiple identifications (B=A); this separating *out*—this is the work of "materialist" analysis--can only become a separating *from* by way of the evental supplement of divine love. What Rosenzweig means here is, I would suggest, that divine love is the singular force that first allows us *to uncouple the drive from its destiny*, from its *Richtung/Gerichtetsein*. And if I understand Badiou correctly, this is precisely what he takes Paul to have proposed under the sign of "resurrection." To return to Rosenzweig's discussion of the tragic self, we might say that *eternity* opens for human existence precisely there where the *immortality* of drive destiny is interrupted: where immortality was, there eternity shall be.

For both Paul and Rosenzweig, then, divine love must be clearly distinguished from any sort of oblatory love, a love understood as selfless devotion and surrender. For

Rosenzweig, such love is ultimately love in the third person, love understood as the giving of one's individuality over to a higher unity, cause, ideal, totality, love as immersion of self into some sort of greater, more beautiful whole or universal (for Rosenzweig, Goethe was the modern master of such love as a principle of artistic activity and form of life). "Against such love," Rosenzweig writes,

> stands the other that rises out of the event, that is out of the most particular (thing) there is [*dem Allerbesondersten was es gibt*]. This particular goes step by step from one particular to the next particular, from one neighbor to the next neighbor, and denies love to the furthest until it can be love of neighbor. The concept of order of this world is thus not the universal [*das Allgemeine*], neither the *arche* nor the *telos*, neither the natural nor the historical unity, but rather the singular, the event, *not beginning or end, but center of the world*.[63]

For Badiou, such love is the only true basis of universality, one based not on predicates, on cultural identities forming closed particularities, but precisely on "that uncountable infinity constituted by a singular human life" (10). In Rosenzweig's terms, such universality is nothing but the infinite dissemination of the capacity for neighbor-love. Only because the loving word of God has gone out to the metaethical self, "only that leads B=B beyond itself, and only in this *event* that has occurred to it can it think another B=B, to which the same has occurred, a neighbor, that is like You. It discovers the other, not from its own *essence* and its heart's pure regions, but rather from the *occurrence* that has occurred to him and from his heart's deafness."[64]

Apropos of Romans 13 where Paul famously reduces all the Biblical commandments to the single one, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"Badiou argues that such a reduction of the multiplicity of commandments to a "single, affirmative, and nonobjectal maxim" is required in order that "the infinity of desire through the transgression of the prohibition" (89) not be released anew. Everything we have been saying here suggests that the commandment to love the neighbor is perhaps the most "objectal" maxim there is, for it directs our minds, indeed our entire being, toward that which is most object-like, most thing-like about the other, the dense and resistant

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[63] Rosenzweig, "*Urzelle,*" 56-57.
[64] Ibid., 63.

materiality of her drive destiny. Indeed, it is Badiou's tendency to lose site of this peculiar materiality of the neighbor that allows him to conclude his otherwise compelling commentary on Paul with a universalism of sameness:

> Thought becomes universal only by addressing itself to all others, and it effectuates itself as power through this address. But the moment all, including the solitary militant, are counted according to the universal, it follows that what takes place is the subsumption of the Other by the Same. Paul demonstrates in detail how a universal thought, proceeding on the basis of the worldly proliferation of alterities (the Jew, the Greek, women, men, slaves, free men, and so on), *produces* a Sameness and an Equality…. The production of equality and the casting off, in thought, of differences are the material signs of the universal. (109)

XII

It is precisely this conception of universalism that is the object of Giorgio Agamben's critique in his own recent study of Saint Paul. In the present context, what is especially interesting about Agamben's work is his insistence on the link between Paul's conception of the Christ-event and Benjamin's messianism as elaborated, above all, in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. The idea that the dwarf-theologian in Benjamin's famous allegory is none other than Saint Paul becomes fully explicit here. In a seminar on Paul held shortly before his death, Jacob Taubes had already argued that Benjamin's early text, "Theologisch-Politisches Fragment,"was to be understood as a commentary on Romans 8 and 13. Following Taubes's lead, Agamben proposes an even tighter conceptual and philological connection between the *Theses* and Paul.[65]

Agamben notes the various ways in which Benjamin directly appropriates Paul's terminology (by way of the Luther translation) and suggests that in the *Theses* Benjamin engaged in the practice of unmarked citation he had proposed as the methodological principle of his *Arcades Project*. Thus Benjamin's famous invocation of a "weak Messianic force"[*eine schwache messianische Kraft*] which we cited earlier, is read as an

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[65] See Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus,* ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1995). The following discussion of Agamben is based on the French translation of his book on Paul, *Le temps qui reste,* trans. Judith Revel (Paris: Bibliothèque Rivages, 2000). Subsequent references are given in the text.

allusion to 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10, where Paul speaks of the messianic power finding its fulfillment in weakness (Luther's translation reads: *denn meine Kraft ist in den Schwachen mächtig*). More importantly, Agamben compellingly argues that Benjamin's otherwise enigmatic conception of *image*, of *Bild*, as it is deployed in the *Theses* as well as in the *Arcades Project*, finds its original source in Paul's understanding of typological relations which represent, in turn, a version of the semiotic structure of miracle we have been elaborating throughout this essay. In each case, a moment of the past is recognized as the *typos* of the messianic present, indeed, this very instance and instant of recognition is what constitutes the present *as* messianic. As Agamben puts it, "the messianic *kairos* is precisely nothing but this very [typological] relation" (221). The crucial difference between the "old thinking" and the "new thinking" concerning such typological relations (or rather, the difference between such typological relations and the construction of dialectical images), is that in the new thinking the element of the past that is at issue has the structural status of *trauma*, a past that in some sense never fully took place and so continues to insist in the present precisely as drive destiny, the symptomal torsion of one's being in the world, one's relation to and capacity to use the object-world. Under conditions of modernity, the first element of the semiotic structure of miracle is, as Rosenzweig has argued, played not by an eye-witness to an event in the past (registered in and cultivated by scriptural tradition) but rather by the peculiar sort of testimony borne by the symptom.[66]

It is only against this background that one can understand Benjamin's critique of Horkheimer's claim regarding the "completeness" of history. In a letter to Benjamin from 1937, Horkheimer wrote that "the determination of incompleteness is idealistic if completeness is not comprised within it. Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain…. If one takes the lack of closure entirely seriously, one must believe in the Last Judgment…." Benjamin's response to this view reads as follows:

> The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance

[66] In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud collapses, in a sense, the old and new thinking by arguing that precisely in and through the scriptural tradition maintained in liturgical practices the Jews transmit a testimony of trauma with regard to their own ethnogenesis. For a discussion of Freud's views, see my "Freud's Moses and the Ethics of Nomotropic Desire," in *October* 88 (Spring 1999), 3-42. Freud's method here suggests, perhaps, that the "new thinking" can never be a simple overcoming of the "old thinking."

> [*Eingedenken*]. What science has "determined," remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete.

Benjamin then adds the following remark that returns us to the allegory of the chess player and the role of theology in the "new thinking" more generally: "That is theology; but in remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological, little as it may be granted to write it with immediately theological concepts."[67] Regarding this understanding of remembrance which, according to Agamben goes back to some early reflections shared by Scholem with his friend on the verb forms of Hebrew (where one finds the aspects of accomplished vs. unaccomplished rather than the tenses of past and future), Agamben writes that it perfectly captures the essence of the typological relation in Paul: "it is a field of tension in which the two times enter into a constellation which the apostle calls *ho nun kairos,* where the past (the complete) again finds its actuality and becomes incomplete, while the present (the incomplete) acquires a sort of completeness or fulfillment" (124).

It is also, Agamben argues, Saint Paul who stands behind Benjamin's idiosyncratic use of the term "now-time" [*Jetztzeit*]. Noting the negative connotations this term carries in, among other places, Heidegger's *Being and Time,* where "now-time" signifies precisely the flattening out of lived temporality into the empty, homogenous clock-time of modern experience, Agamben suggests that Benjamin's inversion of such connotations is performed under the auspices of Paul's notion of *ho nun kairos*, the now

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[67] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 471 [N 8, 1]. I would place Jonathan Lear's speculations on human happiness, of what it means, in psychoanalystic terms, to catch a "lucky break" in life, within this same tradition of speculation. Such breaks, are, as Lear puts it, a sort of "existential sabbath," "an occasion for opening up new possibilities, possibilities not included in any established structures." Happiness, Lear suggests, arrives when it becomes possible to appropriate the "possibilities for new possibilities" which are, as he puts it, "breaking out all the time": "But if psychoanalysis lies outside the ethical [that is: addresses the *meta*-ethical self; E.L.S.], how does it promote happiness? Here we need to go back to an older English usage of happiness in terms of happenstance: the experience of chance things working out well rather than badly. Happiness, on this interpretation, is not the ultimate goal of our teleologically organized strivings—but the ultimate ateleological moment: a chance event going well for us. Quite literally: a lucky break. Analysis puts us in a position to take advantage of certain kinds of chance occurrences: those breaks in psychological structure which are caused by too much of too much. This isn't a teleological occurrence, but a taking-advantage of the disruption of previous attempts to construct a teleology. If one thinks about it … one will see that it is in such fleeting moments that we find real happiness." Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 129.

of messianic time in which a certain *recapitulation* of the past serves to suspend the *repetition* compulsion that had so painfully narrowed the possibilities of the present.[68]

Perhaps most significant for our purposes, however, is another set of philological reflections Agamben introduces apropos of Benjamin and Paul. In one of the methodological notes he made concerning the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin used a phrase the sources of which scholars have been unable to trace. Speaking of the way in which a properly dialectical treatment of historical material reorganizes temporal structure, Benjamin writes that "the historical evidence polarizes into fore- and after-history always anew, never in the same way. And it does so at a distance from its own existence, in the present instant itself—like a line which, divided according to the Apollonian section, experiences its partition from outside itself."[69] Agamben, one of the editors of the Italian edition of Benjamin's works, argues that "Apollonian section," which has no source in Greek mythology, ought to read, instead, as "Apelles' section" (*taglio di Apelle*), referring to the fourth-century B.C. painter who, in a contest, divided a narrow line by one yet narrower and of a different color.[70] Agamben makes creative use of this notion to get at Paul's understanding of the way in which the messianic advent enters into and transforms the closed particularities of cultural, ethnic, social, and sexual identity, i.e., all differences that are legible at the level of B=A (Jew/Greek, male/female, master/slave). Rather than, as Badiou had argued, producing an element of Sameness that would serve as the basis of a genuine universality, Agamben argues that the effect of the Apelles' section or cut is to produce, instead, a unique kind of *remainder* or *remnant*. We actually find the most concise formulation of this claim on the dust jacket of Agamben's book which also makes the eminently Benjaminian gesture of suggesting that Paul has only now found his true moment of legibility/recognizability ("there is a kind of secret link … between Paul's letters and our epoch"):

> Paul is no longer the founder of a new religion, but the most demanding representative of Jewish messianism; no longer the inventor of universality, but the one who surpassed the division of peoples with a new division [i.e., an

[68] Agamben is thinking here above all of the parallels between Benjamin's 18th thesis and Ephesians 1:10. In this context, we might recall Zizek's attempt to distinguish these two kinds of repetition in his discussion of Benjaminian temporality (see above, note # 21).
[69] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 570 [N7a, 1].
[70] See the editors's notes to the *Arcades Project*, 990, n. 21.

> "Apelles' cut—E.L.S.] and who introduced it as a remainder; no longer the proclamation of a new identity and of a new vocation, but the revoking of every identity and every vocation; no longer the simple critique of the Law, but its opening toward a use beyond every system of law.

What Agamben means here is that Paul does not simply revoke the division Jew/Greek by appealing to some positive feature we might discover beneath or beyond such divisions (some sort of Sameness); Agamben's claim is, rather, that Paul divides both sides of the identitarian division such that neither side can any longer enjoy stable self-coincidence. The divisions become non-exhaustive, "not all"; they leave a *remainder*: "This means that the messianic division introduces into the large division of the nations according to the law a remainder and that the Jews and the non-Jews are, in a constitutive sense, 'not-all'" (85). Agamben adds that this "remainder" is "not something that resembles a numerical portion or a substantial positive residue…." It represents, instead, a cut into the bipolar partition between Jews and non-Jews that allows for the passage to an entirely new sort of logic of being-with, one that no longer operates on the basis of membership in bounded sets. For Agamben, the figure that holds the place of this logic (of the non-coincidence of every identity with itself) is that of the "non non-Jew," the figure who is *not not-in-the-law*. [71]

Whatever one may think of this attempt to figure the logic of the remainder, the crucial thought here is that this logic represents a sharp alternative to that of the relation of *part* to *whole* as well as to that of *exception* to *norm*. Indeed, as we already noted apropos of the Schmittian conception of the state of exception, one only arrives at the logic of the remainder—the Apelles' cut into every part-whole relation, every B=A--by working through, by traversing the fantasy of, the exception, a fantasy that is, in turn,

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[71] Although he never mentions Lacan, Agamben's understanding of the logic of "not-all" clearly recalls the former's elaboration of feminine *jouissance* as distinct from masculine, phallic *jouissance*. As Suzanne Bernard has put in her reading of Lacan's *Seminar XX* where he elaborates this distinction, "the feminine structure … is produced in relation to a 'set' that *does not* exist on the basis of an external, constitutive exception…. However, this does not mean, in turn, that the non-whole of feminine structure is simply outside of or indifferent to the order of masculine structure. Rather, she is in the phallic function *altogether* or, in Lacan's words, 'She is *not* not at all there. She is there in full.'… By being in the symbolic 'without exception' then, the feminine subject has a relation to the Other that produces another 'unlimited' form of *jouissance*. " Suzanne Bernard, "Tongues of Angels," in *Reading Seminar XX*, ed., Suzanne Bernard and Bruce Fink (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 40. See also Slavoj Zizek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 68-69.The puppet and the dwarf of Zizek's title refer, of course, to Benjamin's allegory of the chess player.

"condensed" within and as one's characterological *daimon*, B=B. As I have argued here, a "successful" interpellation, one culminating in an act of identification—a "*yes*, *that is me*"—always produces a "vocal object" that finds an initial organization in fantasy, that persists as an intimate locus of solicitation or ex-citation congealing as the *matter or materiality* at the heart of the neighbor. Though this "extimate" bit of fantasy makes us irreducible to the "socialized human animal," it is also what for the most part seals our fate *as* such animals, that keeps us affectively—superegoically--*attached* to the constrained space of the determinate social formation—the world in the form of the third person--we happen to find ourselves in. In more Pauline terms, the closed particularities of cultural sets are sustained by an automatism of transgressive desire (the path of the flesh, sin, and death) solicited by the very law that established the boundaries of those sets. But such desires are, at bottom, nothing but fantasies of exception. What allows Paul to speak both about the nullification of the law as well as its fulfillment is the fact that what he is ultimately interested in is the suspension not of the law but its fantasmatic support that *undeadens* us. It is, in a word, precisely this bit of fantasy that is the object of the Apelles' cut. The Apelles' cut is thus not so much the division of the subject into personality and (metaethical) self as it is a cut into the metaethical self itself, one that momentarily—we might just as easily say for an eternity--uncouples the *drive* from its *destiny*. Slavoj Zizek has gotten it exactly right when he makes the same point in terms of two different ways of conceiving the "state of emergency":

> It is therefore crucial to distinguish between the Jewish-Pauline "state of emergency," the suspension of the "normal" immersion in life, and the standard Bahktinian carnivalesque "state of exception" when everyday moral norms and hierarchies are suspended, and one is encouraged to indulge in transgressions: the two are opposed—that is to say, what the Pauline emergency suspends is not so much the explicit Law regulating our daily life, but, precisely, its obscene unwritten underside: when, in his series of *as if* prescriptions, Paul basically says: "obey the law as if you are not obeying it," this means precisely that *we should suspend the obscene libidinal investment in the Law, the investment on account of which the Law generates/solicits its own transgression*.[72]

[72] Slavoj Zizek, *The Puppet*, 113.

What we find in Paul is, in other words, "an engaged position of struggle, an uncanny 'interpellation' beyond ideological interpellation, an interpellation which suspends the performative force of the 'normal' ideological interpellation that compels us to accept our determinate place within the sociosymbolic edifice."[73] The Apelles' cut intervenes into our ego-life, the cluster of closed particularities that endow us with an authoritative identity and cultural intelligibility, by producing a *remnant* out of the "state of exception" that had served to keep that very ego-life going, if only in a condition of moribund inflexibility. As I have put it elsewhere, "revelation converts the 'surplus cause' of our … passionate attachments to ideological formations—our various forms of *idolatry*—into a 'remnant' of them."[74] In more Rosenzweigian terms, if the response elicited by ideological interpellation is a "*that's me*," what becomes possible by way of the "uncanny 'interpellation' beyond ideological interpellation" is the "*Here I am*" modeled forth in Abraham's response to God's address (Genesis 22:1). For Rosenzweig, the core content of such an interpellation, which signifies, for him, the "truth event" of revelation, will ultimately be the imperative to love—to love God and to manifest this love as love of neighbor. It is, Rosenzweig suggests, only such love and the language informed by it that can exceed the representational thinking that only ever produces further instances of "that's me." And as I have been emphasizing throughout this essay, the transition from "that's me" to "Here I am" can only take place by way of a different level or register of "that's me," that is, by way of a "recognition" of oneself not in the identification proposed/mandated by way of ideological interpellation but rather in its "objectal," fantasmatic leftover as elaborated in one's drive destiny.

XIII

By way of a provisional conclusion, I would like to sum up where I think these reflections lead and leave us. The first thing to say is that we seem to have reached the conclusion that Saint Paul was the first great German-Jewish thinker, equal in stature to Rosenzweig, Freud, and Benjamin! That is, of course, to say that if indeed, as Agamben claims, there is a secret link between Paul's letters and our own epoch, if Paul's letters

[73] Ibid., 112.
[74] See my *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 116.

only become, in some sense legible now, it is only because of the work done by the great German-Jewish thinkers we have been discussing here. In a sense, each one of these figures arrived, by radically divergent pathways, at the same conclusion, namely that human beings, both individually and collectively, require, to even conceive of radical shifts of direction in life—of a genuine *exodus* from deep individual and social patterns of servitude--the notion of an interpellation beyond (ideological) interpellation. Freud, of course, thought that the psychoanalytic clinic, the position or, as Lacan put it, the discourse, of the analyst, could provide the locus of such an uncanny calling that would not only not reproduce a discourse of mastery but serve to unplug the analysand from the multiple forms of servitude dwelling in her "members." Benjamin, who spent the better of part of his energies constructing the "evental site" of such an address—the notes for the *Arcades Project* provide the basis of what was to become his grandest version of such a construction—no doubt believed that only a revolutionary politics could be the source of such a calling the effectivity of which he could nonetheless only speak of in terms such as "divine violence" or "weak Messianic force." Rosenzweig, for his part, concluded that the very fact that we arrive at such an impossible notion—an interpellation beyond interpellation--in the first place, testifies to the ongoing necessity of theological thinking, that the pressure, as it were, arising from within thought to reach for such a notion, is already a mode of registering the region of being we call God and a kind of love that exceeds any sort of mere "object cathexis," i.e., a love that is no longer tied to a representation. What makes this thinking "new" is that it works at showing how this necessity emerges out of the immanent impasses of secular thought. In Rosenzweig's work, the central paradox is that it is really *secular* thought that is most deeply invested in fantasies of exception, i.e., of being "excepted" from the lot—and love--of finite human existence, and that monotheism is actually a form of therapy that allows for a genuine return to the midst of life with our neighbor.[75] We don't, in a word, need God for the sake of divine things but for the sake of proper attentiveness to secular things. We might even say that all that Rosenzweig wanted to show was that truly inhabiting the midst of life—being answerable to our neighbor and the demands of the day, *die*

[75] It is in this sense that Rosenzweig referred to monotheism as an anti-religion directed against the "religionitis" of man. See Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Reinhold Mayer, Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), vol. 1, part 2, 770-71.

Forderung des Tages--was actually a quite remarkable achievement that required some fashion of divine support—ultimately, a form of *love*--kept alive, in turn, but a certain form of life. My own sense is that it is not a matter of choosing one of these options over the others—say the Freudian over the Rosenzweigian or Benjaminian—but rather of thinking them together and trying to appreciate the ways in which each one provides a resource for deepening our grasp of the others. Rather than a form of religious thinking, I'd like to consider this to be a first, tentative step along a path of what we might more modestly call *post-secular* thinking.