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Romantic *Phenomenopoiesis*: On Meena Alexander's Poetic Selves

De-ontologizing Da-sein

In her first book, *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism*, poet and philosopher Meena Alexander proposes an ingenious method of *assujettissement*—one in which the roots and tendrils of a poetic self draw nourishment from the phenomenal contents of the human sensorium, the most basic epistemic portal. Taking as her problem the lived body, Alexander begins her career with a problem to which she will always return: “Without consciousness which unfolds in inner time and is recreated through memory, what is the self?” (11). Eschewing the “noumenon” or “*ding an sich*” altogether, and focusing instead on the phenomenon as nutritive matrix upon which identity feeds, Alexander develops an account of subject-formation thus swerves productively away from epistemological attempts to subtract what the mind adds to experience from raw experience in and of itself. Excellent driver, she also veers away from a second, more existential, pitfall: the Foucauldian tradition emphasizing freedom, volition and caprice, as epitomized by the Judith Butler of *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* and the Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*.¹ It is to Alexander's credit that, among eminent minds who are commentators of Romanticism as practice and philosophy, she alone regresses something as grand as a viable, discrete, crafted self to its humble beginnings in the *Homo sapiens* body and its gluttoned sensory channels. Comprehending that the ideal product of Romantic *poiesis* was not a poem per se, or even an “ideology,” as Jerome McGann has suggested, but rather a species of cognizance,

Alexander follows the elegant method of applying the ideas of phenomenology to international Romanticism proper, using concepts elucidated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre to explain how the body's primary incoherence can produce something as rarefied and distilled as an individuated, homeostatic, human self. This self is the wonder of Romanticism, a poem preceding all poesis and which makes poetic activity proper possible.

Yet Alexander's phenomenology is no arid, body-neutral system accounting for the clinical development of an uncharged body image, for here and elsewhere (her *Women In Romanticism*, as well as *Fault Lines*) she implicitly connects poem, self and phenomenon with gender and race themselves, as these "states" (to use William Blake's word in his apocalyptic poem *Jerusalem*) particularly qualify and polarize bodies: hence the poetic self that Dorothy Wordsworth is able (or unable) to construct in her poems and journal entries contrasts sharply with the elaborate architectural marvel that her brother William is able to design, implement and export in his own writing, while the substance-infused self of a Thomas de Quincey in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* will never be mistaken for that of a stray, anonymous Malay wandering aimlessly past Dove Cottage, as takes place at a pivotal moment in the text and, presumably, de Quincey's life.² Phenomena are not unqualified, unmarked neural blips traveling benignly down an internal information superhighway, but are themselves inextricably rooted in whichever body will give them meaning via a historical now which is the lived body's temporal host. All phenomena are ionized, inflected with value by an exterior world which codes them according to standards of taste. Consequently, there is an inherent imperialism to the practice of subject formation, a veering away from what various cultures define as the

abject, as expounded upon by Julie Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*: and so the subjectivity of an early 19th-century woman will remain qualitatively other to that of her male counterpart (Dorothy Wordsworth, “Floating Island at Hawkshead,” “Thoughts on My Sickbed”), just as those of an indigenous Indian population will never be assimilated to those of their British conquerors (E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*). Although every person in the world might experience a red flash via its occipital lobe, this flash will necessarily be given different interpretations in its many contexts, producing radically different selves and poems—much in the way that the sternly uttered words “Stop! Do you have identification?” as shouted out by Coco Fusco in her 1997 Johannesburg Biennale performance *Rights of Passage* can only be heard differently by the ears of Caucasian, African and African-American museum-goers alike. Bringing their own experiences to the Biennale, they walk through the door marked bodies. Hence there is no unqualified, pure “red patch” as formulated by an aesthete like Arthur Danto in his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* in response to the problem of modernity in the arts, no abstract, contentless, unqualified form which can only be read in terms of brute wavelength by an equally contentless, undifferentiated self. Immersed in their respective contexts, the bodies inhabiting planet Earth interpret pure form in terms of their own productive *Gestalts*, washing over even the most aluminum Donald Judd box with the heated streaming of identity.

If, indeed, subjectivity and selfhood are produced as such, then it is no wonder that the one genre which can best describe and demonstrate the workings of poetic selfhood is none other than the memoir, a genre inhabited by the Alexander of *Fault Lines* and *Manhattan Music*, but also by the Dorothy Wordsworth of the *Alfoxden* and

Grasmere Journals, the Thomas de Quincey of the *Confessions*, and even the Germaine de Staël of *De l'Allemagne*, for whom cultural and personal histories merge through *Innerlichkeit* (Inwardness). Ultimately, Romanticism is a recollective process through which the workings of memory reveal the added dimension of past phenomena and their traces, and as such begs the question of a personal temporal continuum as put forth by St. Augustine in his notion of an internal mechanism for perceiving the flux of time apart from any external, objective standard for measuring it. Augustine's puzzle, "the notion of a subjective consciousness inextricably related to the outer time of the world and its shared space," becomes Alexander's (12). Abjuring the arrogance and, as phrased by Keats, "egotistical sublimity" of a text like William Wordsworth's top-heavy masterpiece *The Prelude*, Alexander casts her gaze upon its more humble counterpart, the journal, opening up the possibility that even the more famous Wordsworth never strayed from this less grandiose collection of sedimented experiences.³ As a phenomenal repository, journal and its counterpart, memoir, give the poetic self a theater in which to explore publicly its own vibrations, and to connect phenomena from present and past into a coherent body image which, by virtue of its integrity, might navigate space and time, a particle under consideration in a veritable physics lab of subject propulsion.

Transcending the purely formal character of *Da-sein* developed luridly in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Alexander restores added dimensions to Being itself, reanimating ontology by inserting it into a more human context where Being loses the abstract purity of the Heideggerian subject in its habitation of World Time.⁴ Polarized, pushed and pulled, Alexander's beings live to the fullest the experience of finitude so central to Heidegger's project – yet they live it *specifically*, comprehending intuitively

that even authenticity is not always the right answer to the demands of existence. Thus although for Heidegger the authentic human being must be in an *Angst*-unto-Death in order to live in accord with its true essence, his tacit assumption is that death is forgettable – not so, for example, if one’s home address is Auschwitz.

Rejecting authentic, finite “world-time” (*Weltzeit*) in favor of what Heidegger refers to as “the vulgar concept of time,” Alexander phrases selfhood in terms of the ebbs and flows of everyday experience, the particulars of which provide the currents and channels that give beings their possibilities of movement, as well as their individual flavor and character (for example, the “gingerbread making” with which Dorothy ends the *Grasmere Journal*, or the drug-fueled opera viewings central to de Quincey’s laudanum highs). The vulgarity rejected by Heidegger as inherently inauthentic and amnesiac (they force *Da-sein* away from its true and authentic project, causing it to lose sight of death) constitute precisely the arena where beings encounter their Being in all its vitality, coarseness and immediacy. Tribute to and tributary of the everyday, the memoir records the most minute details of this journey, revealing a vivid core to what might otherwise be perceived as a banal stream of inconsequential *minutiae*. Qualified from the moment of the blastula’s first cleavage in its uterine milieu, the “being” at the heart of the “human being” enters history as marked, “interpellated” entity whose mobilities will soon be subjected to regulations and restrictions, yet also some degree of openness, afforded by future growth in the environment it will enter as thrown, “captivated” (*Verfallen*) thing.⁵ Seizing upon the Romantic era as epoch obsessed with an aesthetic selfhood of the type theorized by Richard Shusterman and Christoph Menke, Alexander identifies a particular ripeness to the Romantic self, one juxtaposed to ontologically distinct selves

encountered via the colonial and imperial project perfected by the British Empire in the early 19th century.⁶ Via the recollective path of memoir creation, these creatures define and develop the contours of their various existences with respect to a present marked by the glorious notion that the self might write itself into existence and, in doing so, inaugurate a truly modern future — one which, for Alexander, terminates in Baudelaire’s attempts to interpret a meaningless world amidst pummeled Romantic fragments.⁷

The Nausea of Plenitude

Within the economy of personalities populating Meena Alexander’s phenomenological Wonderland both in *The Poetic Self* and *Women in Romanticism*, Romantic types proliferate, amassing on either side of a gender divide which is also the barrier between marine and land realms. Here, “amphibious” women, like Dorothy Wordsworth or Mary Shelley, mimic the logic of the “Floating Island”: at times submerged in water, at others stepping forth from the foam to invade a male continent, Alexander’s Romantic women “exist” their fluctuations in the way that, for Sartre, I “exist” my facticity. Balanced against the egotistically non-sublime figure of Dorothy Wordsworth and the “monstrous” figure of Mary Shelley, through whom vitalism continues to haunt the human race, a plethora of terrestrial male figures crystallize, all of them grand, larger than life, cosmic, if only because they have formed themselves with one eye focused on eternity and a second focused on fame. While these men produce verse, they primarily produce themselves, sprucing up poesis with personalities that rival poems as Romantic objects *par excellence*. Genealogically connected with later figures

who live out many of their promises to posterity — Baudelaire is the master of this category — Alexander unites Romanticism and Aestheticism with a land bridge allowing multidirectional migrations. For her, Romanticism finds itself alienated in the Symbolism of Baudelaire: “Baudelaire’s Symbolist construct is achieved by denying the harmony of eye and object of the normative mode of Romanticism. In order to create a self, the eye must consume the perceived world in a manner inconceivable to Wordsworth...In place of the elements of the perceived world the mind must substitute its own created objects which are then used to forge the large edifice of selfhood” (205). Ultimately, though, for Romanticism proper and “alienated” Romanticism of Baudelaire or Sartre, all roads converge on phenomenology, a philosophically and poetically privileged zone where “self” and “world” smash into one another. As with the collision of land masses and the genesis of subcontinents and mountain ranges, these two plates crash head-on, creating an interface where reversals mark new geological configurations (a sea floor becomes a summit, earth is submerged beneath earth).

So much an inspired reading of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Alexander’s *The Poetic Self* regresses poiesis to its foundational stew: the disconnected plasma of sensations flowing into and out of a burgeoning consciousness (or any consciousness, for that matter, even that of the vegetative). This rich broth bathes consciousness in a tidal flow of stimulation, both showing the world to it (Heidegger’s *apophansis*) and making it knowable to the world.⁸ Yet following Sartre and not Heidegger, Alexander makes the strange and beautiful choice of allying Romantic practice not to a system in which any “I” is founded upon a prior “We” (Heidegger), but rather one in which objects effect scissiparity upon pre-reflective subjects, thereby catapulting them outside the safe

Cartesian shell (Sartre).⁹ The Heideggerian subject does not know the traumas and tribulations of the Sartrean subject, for whom displacements, reverse flows and blockages all mark consciousness and make it a more variegated terrain than Heidegger's remarkably solid and stationary subject, for whom Angst masks the minute-by-minute anxieties faced by all subjects. Alexander's choice of Sartre makes perfect sense, given her Romantic preoccupation with dangerous subjectivities and skewed minds. Though "existential," the subject as defined within Heidegger's system surfaces are profoundly rational, an Enlightenment relic whose modernity becomes its awareness that human life is group consciousness become individual consciousness. For Alexander, the self is an entity in crisis—and not the theoretical Angst by which the Heideggerian subject comes to know its mortality. As with Sartre, to exist is to experience a pain perforated with philosophical value and meaning, a fact Alexander retains throughout *The Poetic Self*, and which infuses her work through the present with a precariousness, a peril, a charm.

At the heart of Sartre's existential rubric lies the notion that life conceals a primary *nausée* which is the post-reflective consciousness' most basic attitude toward Being in its gross multiplicity and irrepressible fecundity: "Unlike Merleau-Ponty, Sartre does not consider the possibility of an inwardness existing, not as an 'estomac' drawing objects into it, but as a perspective on to the historic world. Sartre's ardent opposition to a substantial ego seems to have led him to confuse an immutable and substantial ego with the poetic self which crystallizes the value intrinsic to an individual consciousness" (241). Though not retaining Sartre's basic Xeno- and "object"-phobias, she gravitates toward his concept of superfluity-induced nausea in order to trace it back from "concept" to bodily experience, from philosophical or even "Noematic" construct (Husserl) to lived sensation

and live option (William James). What enraptures Alexander is the possibility that any self, be it the grandiose self of a Romantic poet or the forbidden self of an immured colonial prisoner, must traverse a constitutive discomfort or uneasiness which no dose of Dramamine can quell. Every situation distorts its participants, something known to Sartre, but also to the Franz Fanon of the *The Wretched of the Earth*. For example, in the situation belonging to the “master” and “slave” of Hegel’s most famous thought experiment (“Lordship and Bondage,” *Phenomenology of Spirit*), master and slave are equally deformed by the violence of their mutual context—just as for Fanon, exploiter and exploited alike suffer mental illness produced by the hinged realities of domination and dominion, or for Alexander “arrival” comes to constitute the shock by which we discover that we are the proverbial Barbarians, that self is always Other.¹⁰ Traversing *Ipséité*, or the Circuit of Selfness, the subject forms a unity with the world, like it or not—a relatedness preceding the Cartesian Cogito and made known to the perceiving self only after it has fallen into reason and has begun to think itself into existence, making the ontic ontological. This unity is not the cohesiveness of Heidegger’s “they-self” (*das Man*) which ends up rhyming with the very type of “ego” described by Freud in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego*: i.e., a discrete subjectivity whose precondition of existence is a larger social entity from which it forcefully detaches. For Alexander, as for Sartre, *das Man* is a far more troublesome concept, and is certainly not the ground of individuality. Hence the machinations of poetic selfhood are not geared at extruding a smaller subjectivity from a larger subjectivity, nor from transcending an amnesia stamped on individual reality by a more pervasive group meta-reality (Heidegger’s *Verfallen*, with its tripartite structure of curiosity, ambiguity, and Idle Talk). Rather, the poetic self as

envisioned by Alexander is a very material creation by which one self comes to assert its selfness, generally through the medium of memory, its primordial matrix and source of caloric satiation.

For Alexander, Sartre's continual attention to the horrors of immanence also figures prominently in her analysis of how poetic selves are formed. In Sartre's *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, the too-much-ness of existence, which is always *de trop*, overwhelms subjectivity, presenting it with items so jammed with existence that they startle the self into recognizing its very insubstantiality. For in the final toll, selfhood is nil, a zero stuffed only with other zeroes. Thriving on this nullity, which is the only essence it will ever know, the self sees itself confronted by a class of beings which taunt it in and of their fabulous ontological density. The corresponding emotional timbre for this arrangement of objects and persons approximating objects is nausea: the fundamental vomitousness and disorientation of a non-They self thrown upon the mercy of the world. Following Sartre, Alexander incorporates the self's pastness into her schema, although here she reverses Sartre's polarities. Hence while for Sartre my past is dragged along by my present as a secondary facticity I can never elude, though I constantly try to do so, for Alexander my pastness defines my presentness and my futurity in more productive ways, becoming the very substrate of my individuality as revealed by the act of recollection: the ultimate Romantic preoccupation, demonstrated most poignantly by the architectonics of William Wordsworth. For the Wordsworth of *The Prelude*, "The act of recovering the past and creating a true poetic self comes about through the interpenetration of the two voices, the voice of the present mediating consciousness and the voice of the embodied self of time past. The narrative unfolds through the gradual growth of self-knowledge in

both voices as centres of intense values and realms of intense disorder are redispersed onto a new order” (74). Inspiring its own variety of vertigo, the time-immersed self both duplicates and dissolves, healing its “cleft” consciousness through the recuperative activity of memory (144). Time transforms human consciousness into an Alpine system of peaks and ravines, producing a second type of nausea, one not discussed by Sartre, something closer to a temporal sublime through which the self comes to see itself as thoroughly historical.

If Sartre’s nausea marks a boundary between incommensurable modes of being—*l’Être Pour Soi, l’Être en Soi*—then for Alexander, what is most meaningful is the poetic, even the political, outcome of that juncture. Comprehending that existence is very much a nauseating affair, Alexander merely drains Sartre’s queasiness of its negative quality, making it the occasion of aesthetic joy. In fact, the problem for Alexander will not so much be the confrontation of empty selfness with saturated thingness, but what Sartre describes in Book X of *Being and Nothingness*: the internecine battle between one Pour Soi and another in their struggle for power.¹¹ While for Sartre, this struggle accompanies each and every encounter between one reflective Cogito and another, Alexander studies special cases of Otherness: colonial rifts (Britain versus India), inter-species conflict (Dr. Frankenstein versus “The Monster”), In the final analysis, Alexander does not posit a fundamental shady character to intersubjectivity, taking Sartre’s logic of the Gaze and examining its application to the boundary situations and extremes of the human condition. Still, the poetic self is the product of strife, a creation which must be wrenched from a larger world, perhaps even from a larger subjectivity, in order for its individual character to have existential value: for example, the extrusion of an aesthetic self from a more total,

“integrated” self, as happens in Kierkegaard’s three stages.¹² The poetic self does not have to exist—and so it must will itself into existence, drawing upon fantastic reserves of memory in order to live what Sartre referred to as *temporal ekstasis*: in other words, a temporal unity founded upon dis-unity, a presentness suspended between a dubious futurity and an unalterable pastness frozen in its particularity. For Sartre, only nausea seals time, revealing to me the unfoundedness of my existence, as well as the urgency of traversing my unique *Ipséité*. For Alexander, memory provides the cement holding in place a temporality flying apart at the seams, unifying consciousness through the attention it lavishes upon the relics that consciousness has left behind on both sides of its envelope of flesh. Like the Merleau-Ponty of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Alexander holds her gaze firmly on “the flesh,” identifying it as phenomenological portal through which a self and a world can view one another, thereby making a text like Dorothy Wordsworth “Thoughts on my Sickbed” explode with viscosity: separating two realities which it conjoins by the very act of keeping them apart, the flesh coats poetic selves with the very opposite of Teflon, allowing everything to stick to them in the project of “memorization.”

Dissolving “The Situation”

Taking Sartre’s “situation” in hand, Alexander regresses the genitive (“my” situation) to the pronominal (“me”/“I”), affecting the self’s reabsorption of the elements Sartre identifies as belonging to the situation, or this world uniquely mine, yet available to assessment by others. For Sartre, I do not own my coordinates: I am them, I live them,

they live through me. My situation encompasses all that qualifies my subjectivity, determining the outcome of the dialectic of the gaze: “We must be careful however to remember that the Other is a qualified object for me only to the extent that I can be one for him...What decides in each case the type of objectivation of the Other and of his qualities is both my situation in the world and his situation: that is, the instrumental complexes which we have each organized and the various *thises* which appear to each one of us on the ground of the world” (“The Look,” 392). Fundamentally, I am “ashamed of what I am” before the Other (301), largely as a result of the qualities which modify and inflect my being; these dominate my Gestalt, emerging as aberrant figure on a ground of normalcy (my Jewish nose, my gay wiggle, my melanin content). While this view is poetic in its own right, it does the disservice of implying that an unqualified being enters the world, only to bind itself *a posteriori* to a situation not of its making. Once again, the problem of a *ding an sich* presents itself: can “accidents” of race, gender and position be subtracted from consciousness? Is their unity solely through the couple “self-situation?” As Alexander proves theoretically and aesthetically, my situation does not so much belong to me as pervade my existence thoroughly: I cannot “own” or “exist” what I am. Thus even for Alexander, Romantic men and women find themselves reflected upon in different works, perhaps because they are different creatures entirely. In *The Poetic Self*, Alexander identifies a central schism in Sartre’s phenomenology: the split of a detached subject trying desperately to touch a world revealed as exterior to it. Since “the construction of the poetic self depends on the interpreted order of a personal space,” the Roquentin of *Nausea* can only “satirize” Anny’s need to “frame moments by recreating them within an interpreted space” (16). Significantly, the split between a perceiving

subject and a receding world appears in Alexander's work, for example her formulation "the Cleft Self" which she applies to William Wordsworth, yet ultimately one is left with the sense that, indeed, self and world have somehow made contact. This connection could very well be the work of memory, which heals the cleft experienced by the self in the present tense. Hence memory becomes phenomenally therapeutic, erasing the self's present agony and replacing it with the gloss of past experience recollected in tranquility. Thus Alexander does not so much refute Sartre as correct him, demonstrating that while life in the present might make it seem as if self and world are radically disjoined, recollection proves otherwise, smoothing out the rough edges where consciousness touches object. Through memory, the lived body re-experiences an alienated present in a more fluid past, whose temporal vertices make possible smooth curves and polygons. Thus in *Nausea*, Anny's "perfect moments" and "privileged situations" are not as insidious as Roquentin intimates, as it is through them that she is able to construct a self ontologically unavailable to him: a solid, grounded self rooted in memories of the lived body.

Perhaps Wordsworthian "Spots of Time" work in the same way, bringing a past lived body to a present lived body so that it might reanimate them via internal dialogue. Here, "pastness" is not a Sartrean shadow haunting a present self projecting itself toward possibilities which seek to exclude that pastness and its actualities, but is rather the source of the self's poetic and aesthetic strength. "Poems" are past-tense before their ink even dries, always eluding the present they seek to grasp through the words they toss ambiguously at an ebbing world. Inhering in the body, memory unites self and world through the poem of existence as well as the physical poem whose lines lyrically process

an unfolding reality. Through lyricism, the poetic self inaugurates a conversation using the medium of memory, which reveals interpenetrations between poem and phenomenon, neither of which is *a priori* with respect to the other. In effect, the two are coincident entities, occurring with one another in an intense simultaneity which, like Sartre's concept of "instantaneousness," cannot be mapped on any temporal number line. What best heals the self's cleft, a split deepened by apparently non-intersecting temporal axes united only by the self which lives them, remembers them, and projects its flesh toward fresh moments, is what I term *phenomenopoiesis*, or the act of creating self and poem simultaneously through apprehension and appreciation of the phenomenon, as elucidated by Alexander.

Although phenomenopoiesis is also jointly an epistemology and an ontology, it is more critically the way through which a self can poeticize its ego, a sublime construct which cannot be removed from the human experience without culminating in a world of hostile subjects and indifferent objects, both of which threaten subjectivity at each moment of its unfolding. "Knowing" the world is not as important as living it through the flesh; similarly, the "being" of "Being" is not as productive as the poetic ramifications beings exert upon an attached subject inhabiting a particular domestic, social order. Through memory, a present self feels its pastness wash over it, living through the interference patterns this encounter generates. The inwardness of Romanticism, triumph of Hegel and de Stael alike, only leads to a cul-de-sac when it is considered from the perspective afforded by "art history," *Geist*, or some other totalizing principal. Examined phenomenally, and in its respective instant, *Innerlichkeit* represents simply the modernization of selfhood. As Alexander notes, it is initially the disappearance of the

divine which causes the self to immerse itself in worldliness. The “mythic view of history” which results allows de Stael to “accord a supreme spiritual function to the aesthetic constructs of the Romantics.” Like Hegel, de Stael “views Romanticism as the state of humanity brought into being when divinity has fled the natural world;” through its poetic acts, “Romantic man creates a poetry expressive of his need for a spiritual world, a world where soul and sense, the finite and the infinite, are in harmony” (26). While this harmoniousness might find itself realized through the work of William Wordsworth, complications arise for later poets like Baudelaire, for whom Symbolism constitutes a last-ditch effort to infuse a chaotic jumble of outer referents with some semblance of meaning. They arise even more acutely for a philosopher like Sartre, whose reevaluation of phenomenology in both philosophical and literary venues equally leads selfhood toward an abyss separating it not only from external objects and subjects inhering in a “world,” but supremely from its own ego, whose solidity somehow tyrannizes an otherwise open present. All in all, Meena Alexander’s pro-ego stance makes such clefts untenable. For her, they simply cannot hold, as their existence makes the work of memory impossible, thereby destroying any possibility of poeticizing selfhood. Perhaps de Stael’s Romanticism provides the most accurate description of poetic selfhood, a fact not lost on a poet in search of a female Romantic legacy and historiography. Combining de Stael’s Romanticism with St. Augustine’s highly personal, intuitive and individual internal time consciousness, Meena Alexander embarks on an illustrious project: that of maintaining the exigencies and intricacies of *Innerlichkeit* while finding a way to transcend them in the creation of an ego poetic, phenomenally aware and material.

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¹ In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler pays close attention to the “radical democracy” proposed by Laclau and Mouffe, specifically in the chapter “Arguing with the Real.” As lovely as these theories may be – and they are aesthetically magnificent – it still remains unclear to me just how democratic radical democracy actually is. To me, the real place to look for radical organizations of bodies is a place like the documentary film *Paris Is Burning*, to which Butler surprisingly gives only a cursory treatment (“Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion”). Seeing only snatching (appropriation) and reversing (subversion), Butler misses the opportunity to examine freedom in the extreme situation of the Ball. The negative public response to Butler’s misspelling of “Banjee” (she spells it “Bangee”) is rooted in the feeling that the specifics of Ball culture, where she could very well have searched for “freedom” or “radical democracy,” are never considered.

² For Blake, “state” does become a problematic concept vis-à-vis race, as demonstrated by his poem “The Little Black Boy” in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Here, the downtrodden black child mistakes race as dispensible, a “cloud” which will evaporate in an atemporal afterlife: “For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear/ The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice/ Saying, 'Come out from the grove, my love and care/ And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice'” (17-20). Sartre makes a similar mistake in his relegation of race to “situation.” Although the situation is “mine,” it is not necessarily coincident with “me,” as the final section of this essay elucidates.

³ Of course, Alexander is not opposed to the egotistical sublime, which is necessary for every romantic producer. Even Keats, who faults William Wordsworth for having too much of one (Letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27th, 1818), is not immune. For Dorothy, the rejection of an egotistical sublime constitutes the condition of possibility of her own work. Glancing away from the sublimities of ego, she generates a counter-moment of selflessness more believable than Keats’, yet still tied to a notion of selfness. Hence she is a “floating island,” while Keats “...has no self...” and “lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated.”

⁴ “*Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care.* The phenomenal content of this meaning, drawn from the constitution of being of anticipatory resoluteness, fulfills the significance of the term temporality. We must now keep the terminological use of this expression at a distance from all the meanings of ‘future,’ ‘past,’ and ‘present’ initially urging themselves upon us from the vulgar concept of time.” However, given that “Da-sein understands itself initially and for the most part inauthentically,” perhaps the inauthentic, vulgar misapprehension of non-ecstatic time has some truth to it after all (§65, “Temporality as the Ontological Meaning of Care,” 300).

⁵ Heidegger defines the state of “Falling Prey” or *Verfallen*, as Da-sein’s fundamental proclivity to be absorbed by the things of the world. *Verfallen* represents the temptation to choose inauthenticity as mode of being, to savor social institutions like “Idle Talk” (*Gerede*) and to ignore the self’s fundamental project of heedfully taking on the burden of Angst in the face of imminent mortality.

⁶ Regarding Richard Shusterman, his *Performing Live* examines many of the complexities surrounding a lived aesthetics. His attention to rap and country music as zones where various aesthetic subjectivities are born shed light on what it means to be

this aesthetic subject (“The Fine Art of Rap,” “Affect and Authenticity in Country Musicals”). Similarly, his examination of the “Art of Living” and “Self-Styling” grant philosophical weight to the crafting of personality. Regarding Menke, I refer to his 1998 lecture “Aesthetic Subjectivity: From Baumgarten to Schlegel” (NYU Deutsches Haus).

⁷ William Wordsworth presents his version of the grotesque, a critical Romantic category, in his *The Prelude*: specifically, Book VII, which describe his anomic wanderings through the streets of London during St. Bartholomew’s Fair, a “Parliament of Monsters.” These urban creatures – albinos, tumblers, beggars – are grotesque, while pastoral sad sacks, like Margaret from the poem “The Ruined Cottage,” are “pathetic” (i.e., they evoke pathos, not revulsion).

⁸ For Heidegger, *apophainesthai* is both what allows itself to be presented, as well as what gets presented—i.e., to consciousness. It relates to *alētheia*, or “being-true,” in that the truth of what is presented lies in the act of presentation itself. Hence there is no false “phenomenology,” no untrue presentation, no use in regressing the apophantic to a pre-apophantic.

⁹ Heidegger’s “they-self” or *das Man* is Da-sein’s initial formation and represents adequately (without remainder) its average everydayness: “*The average everydayness of Da-sein can thus be determined as entangled-disclosed, thrown-projecting being-in-the-world which is concerned with its ownmost potentiality in its being together with the ‘world’ and in being-with with the others*” (§39, The Question of the Primordial Totality of the Structural Whole of Da-sein, 170).

¹⁰ See Cavafy’s Poem “Expecting the Barbarians” in the collection *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*. In this poem, “we” do not wait for the invading Barbarian horde to tear our civilization to shreds: we realize that the Barbarians we have been expecting are us. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that they helped totalize “our” society by placing it in brackets. Now that “our” society will continue, the joys of an external end are over.

¹¹ Sartre presents his Dialectic of the Gaze under the rubric “Being-for-Others” (Part III, “The Look”). For Sartre, *Mitsein*, or being-with-others, is a devalued term, and does not carry the weight which Heidegger attributes to it. For the most part, when two subjects encounter one another, there is a battle for dominion: only one can remain subject, while the other must lapse into being an object-for-a-subject. I become a part of an “instrumental complex,” one more impediment that a subject must transcend in its existential projection toward its possibles (since I have lost the battle and am not a subject, I do not have possibles, only “probabilities”).

¹² In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard divides human development into three stages: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. While each self builds on the previous and necessitates its rejection, they do not necessarily integrate into some sort of sublated whole. Rather, fixations make one a permanent Papageno (aesthetic fixation) or leap-less religious prig (ethical fixation).