Disruption : Ben Parker

In the year after Donald Trump was elected, the opinion pages of *The New York Times* were consistent in diagnosing the threat a Trump presidency bore to the republic, in essays titled "Democracy, Disrupted," "Declaration of Disruption," "The President's Self-Destructive Disruption," and "The Dangers of Disruption." What did the various authors mean by "disruption"? For Thomas Edsall, it was the loss of "traditional norms" and "institutional constraints" in the era of social media, especially the capture of the Republican Party by "outsiders" like Trump and Bannon.[1] For Peter Wehner and Greg Weiner, who both invoked Burkean conservatism, disruption was the "chaos, disarray and entropy" on display in Trump's "tumultuous acts and chaotic temperament,"[2] and his flouting of the customs of his office.[3] For Francis Fukuyama, continuing the thesis of an earlier book *The Great Disruption*, disruption referred to the drawbacks to—the risks and hiatuses accompanying—the thrust of an "unbuffered" globalized technological capitalism, to which the rise of autocratic threats to institutional liberalism is understood as so much "blowback."[4]

For these commentators in the back pages of *The New York Times*, spanning a narrow ideological range from "Never Trump" neo-conservatives to liberal scolds pining for moral constraint, the political valence of "disruption" fits entirely within the everyday meaning of the word, as a breakdown or halt in proceedings, which you find in a phrase like "service disruption." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines disruption as: "The action of rending or bursting asunder; violent dissolution of continuity; forcible severance." This same everyday usage can also be found in Hillary Clinton's memoir of the election, *What Happened*, where we learn that Bernie Sanders was not running for President "to make sure a Democrat won the White House, he got in to disrupt the Democratic Party."[5] What Clinton meant is that Sanders played spoiler: he junked up the works, and upset her plans.

A second meaning of "disruption" was in play during the Republican primary, when Jeb Bush—the pathetic once front-runner, now branded forever as "low energy" after Trump's insult campaign—attempted to promote himself as a "disrupter."[6] By invoking a buzzword from the self-promoting ideology of venture capitalists and Silicon Valley, Bush was positively aligning himself with the constant innovation and "creative destruction" demanded by a restless market. In a 2014 *New Yorker* essay, Jill Lepore traced the faddish ubiquity of this meaning of "disruption" to the theory put forward by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen in his 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma*. Lepore criticizes the "exceptionally well marketed" theory of disruption as unsupported hype, a free-market repackaging of the ideologies of "progress" or "evolution":

But among the many differences between disruption and evolution is that the advocates of disruption have an affinity for circular arguments. If an established company doesn't disrupt, it will fail, and if it fails it must be because it didn't disrupt. When a startup fails, that's a success, since epidemic failure is a hallmark of disruptive innovation . . . When an established company

succeeds, that's only because it hasn't yet failed. And, when any of these things happen, all of them are only further evidence of disruption.[7]

The logic of disruption heralded by Christensen and invoked by Bush is recognizable as the nihilism of contemporary neoliberal rhetoric. Disruption casts capital in the role of guerrilla cadre—improvisatory, unencumbered, rhizomatic. The enemy in this scenario is always the entrenched fortification of all non-capitalized aspects of social reproduction: infrastructure and public works (increasingly managed by private equity), public education (undermined by charter schools and for-profit colleges), or the attack on unions and collective bargaining (in favor of a "gig economy" of contingent workers).

The first meaning of disruption (Clinton and the "Never Trump" neoconservatives) is an undesirable external break, especially the violation of pieties and cherished norms; the second meaning (Christensen and Bush) reconceives disruption as the heedless churn of innovative subversion, in which the catastrophic waste of capitalism is simply ontologized as the fact of incessant transformation. A third meaning we could then deduce is their pseudo-dialectical synthesis, in which disruption becomes the ascendant negative moment (of entropy or misrule) that solicits a contrary, saving movement, under the guise of seeming "loss and injury"—Hegel's teleological reckoning of the costs and detours of history's contradictory self-realization.[8]

Recall, then, one of the memorably idiotic and shameful moments of the left during the election: Lacanian-Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek's "endorsement" of Donald Trump. In an interview for British news, Žižek echoed Trump's own red-faced and rambling campaign rhetoric, namely that Trump's insurgent candidacy marked an endpoint for the stagnant elite governance of the status quo: "Trump disturbed [the implicit consensus of the political order]," opening up a space of possibility and reorientation. If Trump were to win, Žižek prophesied, "it will be a kind of big awakening. New political processes will be set in motion, will be triggered," where Hillary Clinton by contrast "stands for … absolute inertia."[9] Of course, this paradoxical logic—of preferring the greater of two evils, not the lesser—has its classic statement in Karl Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, when he writes, "It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history, by constituting struggle."[10] Going even further back, it is a restatement of the "fortunate fall" in Christian theology, prophesying that all Trump's "malice served but to bring forth / Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy . . . but on himself / Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured."[11] So while Žižek sees Trump as a menace and a calamity, he detects behind the Trump phenomenon a "cunning of reason," where impulses of collectivity and justice will be solicited and asserted in the fray of history. Defined in this way, "disruption" means something like a painful but necessary detour of apparent reversal and disarray.

Before turning to conceptual matters, it is worth introducing an empirical counterpoint to the above descriptions, namely the claim that Trump has *not* been disruptive: that we have not been diverted onto the track of an unprecedentedly abnormal politics. In June 2017, Corey Robin could argue that Trump's presidency had been "spectacularly weak and ineffective." Trump had "given up or has been beaten back on multiple fronts of foreign policy, on free trade, on infrastructure spending, on the Wall, and more. He suffered, at the hands of his party, a humiliating defeat on health care."[12] That August, Samuel Moyn wrote: "the president's most

outrageous policies have been successfully obstructed, leaving largely those that any Republican president would have implemented through executive order."[13] The tax bill Trump signed in December—the only substantial legislation achievement to date—reduced the corporate rate and repealed the Obamacare "individual mandate" penalty. Far from heralding the ascent of a demagogic fascism (or even a distinctly Trumpian agenda), the accomplishment of these goals marked the high water mark of Tea Party conservatism.

It is also worth noting areas of continuity, where the sheer inertia of the state has carried existing initiatives forward, heedless of the transfer of executive power. Far from obstructing Trumpian overreach, Democrats and "Never Trump" Republicans alike (Jeff Flake and Bob Corker) have invested Trump with colossal military and security powers: Congress overwhelmingly passed a $700 billion defense spending bill (with 41 Democrats voting yes) and renewed the NSA's warrantless surveillance program (with 18 Democrats). Much has been made of Trump's "Muslim Ban" and ICE deportations, but deportations actually dropped in Trump's first year: a rate of 17,000 deportations per month, which is half of Obama's peak of 34,000.[14] Did this in Trump seem disruptive?

To label Trump as disruptive—in any of the above senses—is incoherent and debilitating for further analysis. The concern over Trumpian disruption misidentifies the major theater of political struggle as that of defending (newly vulnerable) institutional checks of executive power. Consequently, efforts to democratize the economy, to socialize health care, to abolish the police state and prison industry, and to forgive crippling student debt—not to be identified with the Obama administration or the Clinton campaign—have been muted. Instead of focusing on such issues, the opposition has wedded its fate to the investigations into Russian interference in the election. But to wish for an FBI (now elevated into an unlikely hero of the left) investigation, or subsequent impeachment proceedings, to delegitimize a national election, is not "doing politics." No line can be drawn from the anticipated exposure of wrongdoing or corruption connected with the Mueller investigation, to any substantive projects for equality. Indeed, what is the "hacking" of an election by foreign powers compared to the legal and open purchase of elections by corporate money, under the aegis of the *Citizens United* decision?

It is too soon to say that Trump's presidency will *not* initiate a resurgence of radical politics along the lines that Žižek predicted. But so long as we conceptualize affairs in the language of disruption, resistance, opposition, and destabilization, we ensure that the existing physics of power will continue unabated. "Disruption" is essentially descriptive; it rehearses the inventory of existing positions, the strategic alignment of forces, but through labeling rather than analysis. Once something has been labeled "disruptive," we have learned precisely nothing about it. Nonetheless, the picture of disrupted politics holds us captive. The pseudo-concept of disruption smuggles into our discourse a covert physics and a metaphysics of actuality and necessity—whether the unsettled equilibrium envisioned by Fukuyama, or the quasi-evolutionary narrative of Christensen's "innovative disruption," or Žižek's teleological contraries. Yet the Trumpian order cannot simply be *resisted*—or broken asunder, breached—with the positive elements at hand (impeachment, psychiatric evaluation, the validity of the popular vote, institutional checks and balances, sheer inertia, the stabilizing presence of military professionals, etc.).

In other words, the rhetoric of "disruption" is only the mask for its apparent opposite: the inescapable discipline of *what is*. I turn now to three thinkers who have challenged the framework of such political metaphysics, who imagine the possibility for being beyond the deformations enforced by the laws of Being: Simone Weil, whose Cartesian dualism separates the realm of social mechanics from the workings of grace; Giorgio Agamben, whose concepts gesture toward a life not resolvable into the relations of ontology; and Alain Badiou, who rigorously separates errant or unplaced being from the transcendental laws of being-there. Each of these thinkers also has a private terminology for the exit from metaphysical compulsion: for Weil, "decreation" as interrupting what she calls "gravity"; for Agamben, "deactivation" as the undoing of "exception"; and for Badiou the concept of the event, what he calls a "perturbation of the order of the world."[15] Each of these authors is attempting to conceptualize such an exit from the order of things that will not fall prey to the Scylla of an inescapable proliferation, as in the Foucauldian analysis whereby all interruption of power is but a play of solicitation and recapture,[16] or to the Charybdis of despair, as in Heidegger's lament that "Only a god can save us."[17]

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Weil's entire political and moral thinking depends on the continuity of social domination with the inexorable "necessity" of physical laws, so that "human mechanics" is explicitly modeled on the law of gravity.[18] Importantly, Weil refuses to distinguish between kinds of compulsion: all instances of material necessity or *power over* are subsumed under her definition of force as "that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing"—an operation she locates "at the very center of human history."[19]The mistake is to think that force can be possessed, for it is "just as external to its employer as to its victim."[20] Force cannot be separated out by agent or motive, cannot be divided into oppressive and liberatory force. Conqueror and slave "both, at the touch of force, experience its inevitable effects: they . . . dro[p] either to the level of inert matter, which is pure passivity, or to the level of blind force, which is pure momentum."[21] Force is not an instrument to be wielded but a starkly inhuman distribution of checks and unmakings: "[T]hose who have force on loan from fate count on it too much and are destroyed. But at the time their own destruction seems impossible to them . . . Since other people do not impose on their movements [any] halt, [any] interval of hesitation . . . they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them . . . And now we see them committed irretrievably to chance; suddenly things cease to obey them."[22] Here Weil is describing Achilles before the gates of Troy, but twenty-eight centuries have not altered things.[23]

Force is heedless acceleration; it therefore cannot be so implemented as to overturn or moderate its own effects. This observation is the basis of Weil's criticism of Marx, on one hand, and of the liberal right, on the other hand. Espousing an adamantly humanist "workerist" position, Weil picks a quarrel with Marx on the grounds that he imagines the socialist appropriation of the productive forces as a utopian exit from material exigencies—which involves overlooking how Marx's analysis in *Capital* pertains to the specifically capitalist imperatives of relative surplus-value production, e.g., the intensification of labor, or the cheapening of labor-power as commodity. Likewise, the liberal "notion of rights is connected to the notion of . . . exchange, of quantity," and so is "by its nature dependent on force."[24]

Weil's criticism of force applies equally to the three conceptions of disruption above. In each, "disruption" names the intervention of force into a state of affairs understood as more or less reactive. With Weil, we now see that theories of disruption are really descriptions of how far inert being will be pulled into the logic of force: minimally (where "too big to fail" blocs like the two-party system or the "deep state" maintain an irresistible momentum), entirely and by liquidation (the neoliberal conversion of all life in its own image), or entirely and by opposition (the hope placed in an equal-but-opposite surge of resistance).

So what does Weil propose, beyond or outside of force? Here, she is an unreconstructed Cartesian dualist. The "one exception and one only" is "the domain of thought," because any "expression of spiritual force is essentially contradictory."[25] Although a lucid answer is traced in her earlier political analyses,[26] the term I want to focus on here is the idea of "decreation" found in her later, aphoristic, Christian writings.

> Relentless necessity, wretchedness, distress, the crushing burden of poverty and of labor which wears us out, cruelty, torture, violent death, constraint, disease—all these constitute divine love . . . Necessity is the screen set between God and us so that we can be.[27]

> God renounces being everything. We should renounce being something.[28]

> God gave me being in order that I should give it back to him. It is like one of those traps whereby the characters are tested in fairy tales . . . God allows me to exist outside of myself. It is for me to refuse this authorization.[29]

Decreation is a theory of necessity (or force) as seen from God's perspective. The trick, so to speak, is to divest ourselves of the illusory perspective of agency and control so that we may "strip" ourselves of this "imaginary divinity" as "Christ did of his real divinity."[30] As Gillian Rose glosses "decreation," it is "to move out towards the world and to God without the recoil which is self and possession."[31] This interfering "recoil" is just the subject, defined in terms of force.

Two important distinctions have to be made here. First, Weil's notion of "decreating" the self to make room for the non-subjective has nothing in common with the ontological celebration of contingency, vibrancy, and quantum indeterminacy in matter. It is central to her thinking of the limitations of power that matter lack any agency of its own; that it be sheer limit. "All forces [for her, the opposite of agency] are material."[32] Second, "decreation" should be strongly distinguished from projects of anti-essentialism or deconstruction that amount to a negative theology of identity, where the dismantling of fixed and stable identity either valorizes ephemerality and performativity, or persists in the dour contemplation of identity's impossibility or failure. For Weil, such postures still take up the *space* of the canceled self, whether in its wreckage of non-coinciding or its unmoored improvisations. Decreation is, rather, to imagine that God "loves that perspective of creation which can only be seen from the point where I am. But I act as a screen. I must withdraw so that he may see it."[33] By contrast, the deconstructed or radically undone identity is, on this interpretation, like a piece of disassembled home exercise equipment, stubbornly filling up a corner of the closet or spare bedroom but not truly done away with. Identity, then, even under erasure, still belongs to mechanics. The only

possible withdrawal from the reign of force is to clear this space of the self. "Decreation" is not a nullity or dialectic, but the space for the only possible freedom from implacable material domination, that of grace.

There are two importantly negative senses of disruption in Giorgio Agamben's thought. First, there are the disruptions constitutive of sovereign power and indeed of Western politics itself, paradigmatically 1) the exclusion from the Greek polis of ζωή, "bare, anonymous life," and 2) the state of exception, in which ζωή is then included or recaptured as the object of political power by the sovereign's (permanently open-ended) decision.[34] This decision concerns homo sacer, the figure of bare life always already excluded from "the juridical order" but entirely vulnerable, in the suspension of that order, to sovereign power in homo sacer's "capacity to be killed."[35]

If exclusion and exception are taken as kinds of disruption, brutally wrenching—and this is at an explicitly metaphysical level—βίος out of ζωή, law out of nature, relation out of being, act out of potentiality, and so on, this is not a one-time affair, but rather an ongoing violence. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Antonio Negri, and Carl Schmitt, Agamben refuses to separate the legality and effectivity of political order (as constituted, for instance, by a social contract) from an excessive and all-encompassing constituting power.[36] For this reason, Agamben sees no ultimate distinction between democracy and totalitarianism, but rather "an inner solidarity" between them.[37] As with Weil, to do battle on the terrain of legality, rights, and constitutionalism would already be to give away the game, since these terms are irreparably tainted from the outset.[38] This sweeping condemnation of all politics since Aristotle as metaphysically contaminated may be supported by the painstaking philological exactitude of Agamben's textual exegesis, but his conclusions are utterly paralyzing.

First, his negative critique completely eschews any work upon what Gillian Rose calls "the broken middle," the framework of institutions in their flawed actual configurations.[39] Importantly, Agamben's point is not to roll back the exercise of the "state of exception," to restore to the sovereign only the ordinary powers of a constituted and limiting authority, since for him the problem goes all the way back; the state of exception is simply "the constitutive paradigm of the juridical order come to light."[40] The Nazi death camps thus stand as the monitory horizon of the entire "political space of modernity."[41]

When Agamben comes to his positive proposals, however, they also sound like disruption. His characteristic vocabulary is of "de-posing,"[42] "deactivation and inactivity,"[43] "destituent potential,"[44] and other syntactical conjurations. It is clear that Agamben intends "inoperativity" and the like to disable or disrupt the force of law, where "law" is crossed out or "under erasure,"[45] as Heidegger sometimes crossed out "Being." But what do we know about inoperativity, what kind of notion is it? How could we discern its operations, and by what criteria would we judge whatever it brought about? At times,[46] when Agamben connects the state of exception to the very structure of linguistic signification, we are as if returned to Friedrich Nietzsche's saying that we are stuck with God as long as we hold on to grammar.[47] Thus, "inoperativity" remains a transcendental postulate, a trace of the timeless auto-differentiation of metaphysical impositions, structurally prior to, yet inaccessible by, our categories of experience and evaluation. For all the ingenuity of Agamben's formulations, the

gestured-at deactivation of metaphysics remains a metaphysics, tethering being to a lost, unrepresentable ground. What remains as "the fundamental ontologico-political problem today is … the exhibition of the ceaseless void that the machine of Western culture guards at its center."[48] This exhibition is something like that coming into view of the behind-structure of undetermined life in its unwelcome vulnerability and affliction, as much a figure of abjection as of contingency. (Hence the emphasis on bearing witness, as in his book on Auschwitz.)[49] As Christian Haines has noted, this baring of wounds "without social and historical determination can amount to [nothing] more than the valorization of unworldliness as such."[50] Unworldly, I would add, in the strict sense of unavailable, unspeakable, and so forth.

Agamben has said that "the critique of law" carried out in the *Homo Sacer* project "has its roots in Weil's essay," *La personne et le sacré*, translated in English as "On Human Personality."[51] Indeed, Agamben's dissertation was on Weil's political thought, and he subsequently borrowed (without attribution) her concept of "decreation" for an essay on Herman Melville's "Bartleby." Agamben aligns himself with Weil in three ways: her situating of human "affliction" beyond the threshold of political and ethical thought;[52] her "radical critique of the sphere of rights";[53] and her thinking of the "impersonal."[54] But I would like to put some daylight between these figures.

First, for Agamben, sovereignty is founded on an originary rupture and separation. All law (and even Being itself) is subsequently conditioned by this epochal and violent partitioning. For Weil, however, in affairs of power, "there is never truly a rupture of continuity";[55] otherwise it would not *be* power. She approvingly cites the reply of the Athenians to the delegation from Melo, as reported by Thucydides: "Tradition teaches us as touching the gods and experience shows us as regards men that, by a necessity of nature, every being invariably exercises all the power of which it is capable."[56] Instead of Agamben's founding exclusion, Weil argues for a founding salvation built into creation itself, with God at both poles of sovereign and afflicted body. In her account of the Passion, God in Christ "went to the greatest possible distance," effecting a "supreme tearing apart" of God's being.[57] In between the Father and the Cross there is only uninterrupted, anonymous necessity—the entirety of creation is nothing but "mechanically harsh matter."[58]

Second, whereas power for Agamben, following Schmitt, is centered on the decision—so that the sovereign wielding the exception really is the "decider," for Weil power is a sphere of blind impotence. "Those one calls 'masters,' ceaselessly constrained to reinforce their power on pain of seeing it stripped from them, are only pursuing a dominance essentially impossible to possess."[59] The nominal control of power is a hot potato ever changing hands. Across her writings, Weil sometimes supports this thesis with readings of Homer's *Iliad*; elsewhere the *Bhagavad Gita*, which she read in Sanskrit; sometimes she credits it as an insight of Marxism, citing Rosa Luxemburg's characterization of the incessant structural acceleration of capitalism accumulation as a "carousel in the void."[60]

Lastly, Weil's term, "decreation," insofar as it carries with it certain scholastic investments concerning the Trinity and necessity, is unrecognizable in Agamben's use of the same word. The difference here is that Weil is never a messianic thinker, whereas Agamben, in his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, *The Time that Remains*, reads his concept of a suspensive community into Paul's messianism.[61] Weil's decreation is, by contrast, explicitly in

imitation of Christ: “An imaginary divinity has been given to man so that he may strip himself of it like Christ did of his real divinity . . . God renounces being everything. We should renounce being something.”[62]

Like Agamben’s battery of images for de-posing life outside of or prior to sovereign power, Alain Badiou’s figure of the Event goes back to a pre-ontological “void”[63] or indifferent multiplicity that has to be thought “*before* its objectivation in a specified world.”[64] Because “being qua being is absolutely homogeneous,”[65] there is always some originary “*element* [from the multiplicity of the void, which is] *struck by inexistence* .[66] But where “the inexistent comes to exist with . . . the maximal value,”[67] we are dealing with an Event, namely “a sort of delicate and implacable break in the laws that govern appearance.”[68] In such moments, “what organizes the distribution of the intensities of existence and of the emergencies of action changes in an essential way.”[69] Badiou specifies that “an event is not the realization of a possibility internal to the situation or dependent on the transcendental laws of the world. An event is the creation of new possibilities.”[70] He describes the political event as “invention,” “creation,”[71] or “experimenting,”[72] “putting on the agenda something affirmative, positive.”[73]

On the issue of an originary rupture and separation (Agamben) or a completion of being in creation (Weil), Badiou sides with Weil—being qua being is undisturbed presentation, to use his vocabulary. Also like Weil, Badiou does not grant state power—the democratic legal order of which Agamben is so suspicious—any real control or decision, since the “real” is simply the careening of capital heedless of any such authority. When it comes to “decreation,” however, Badiou is on one side and Weil and Agamben on the other. For the latter two, the entire field of active intervention is fallen, given over to force or relation. For Badiou, however, the Event is a “commandment” to “[w]ork on the consequences of the new”;[74] the imperative is not so much that an “objective agent” should be “transformed into a subjective power,”[75] as in traditional Marxism, but rather the enforcing of “shocking displacements, material and mental.”[76] The ultimate objective is, as with G. W. F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology*[77] and Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* (which does invoke “disruption”),[78] a normative concept of self-determination as negativity. For humanity to “decid[e] its destiny” is possible only as “radical subtract[ion] from capitalism.”[79] Not only does the subject not disappear in this negative movement, but “*the political subject historicizes itself in its own deployment*.[80]

Here I would push back against Badiou, for what I see as his ultra-leftism. He identifies the Event with the subjectivizing or the self-organizing of the inexistent, its becoming rather than its positive availability as agent. But the symptomatic excess of representation (aligned with the Event) is never interpreted in any relation to a deformed subjectivity’s (aligned with repressive Being) self-grasping, as Lukács had in his analysis of “the antinomies of bourgeois thought.”[81] Badiou’s account of representation, following Althusser’s abstract presentation of ideology, has no purchase on the connection between the negativity of capitalism—its spiraling expansion and contradictions—and consciousness. When Badiou speaks of the internationalized “nomad proletariat,” the deracinated population internal to each country’s workforce,[82] he never interprets this figure in terms of political economy—the specific forms of exploitation, expanded reproduction, and modalities of capital that require and condition this figure, how capital produces its own gravediggers—but only as a mass, now laying disassembled in “fragments” and “detachments,”[83] to be organized. The becoming-subject of this figure can only

erupt from some immaterial dimension, not from a dialectic of subjectivity, as again Lukács had attempted in connecting the self-abolishing of the proletariat to its material production as *misrecognized* subjectivity. Badiou's subject is by contrast a mere ontological premise. He therefore doesn't see how class is *reproduced* by capital, so that the proletariat becomes, for him, simply a "point of radical negativity."[84] I am thinking here of Lenin's scathing rebuke, "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder": "We can (and must) begin to build socialism, not with abstract human material, or with human material specially prepared by us, but with the human material bequeathed to us by capitalism."[85] What Badiou misses, owing to his Maoist orientation on the matter, is how class itself is "completed" by capital, is transformed as a concept. For Badiou, Marx's analysis of the social genesis and furnishing of a perpetual supply of wage labor, and of the relative surplus population in relation to the composition of capital, does not count as an analysis of class.[86]

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What does this all have to do with Trump, taking these three thinkers together? First, at the level of language, we should be circumspect about the metaphors and the ontology behind the two-fold characterization of Trump as "disruptive" and the right-minded as the "resistance." What emerges from considering Weil, Agamben, and Badiou, is how disruption—far from inaugurating any novelty or instability—remains *internal* to the overarching workings of force, sovereignty, and the dominant structure. There can be nothing truly new or liberating so long as we remain within the domain of physical forces and their interaction or law-like consequences—what Badiou calls "Being's prohibition of the event."[87] Unfortunately, the clamor for Trump's impeachment is a call for just such a marshaling of blind Force, whose illusory and reckless possession Weil observes in the see-saw violence of the *Iliad*. Like the momentary triumph of Patroclus or Hector, who sweep all before them for a brief day, the congressional opposition imagines in its grasp the power to bring low and depose the hubristic tyrant. Perhaps they can do it; perhaps they can't. What is certain is that presidential impeachment has in its history (in 1868 and 1998) never been anything but a tool of an aggrieved and overreaching congressional opposition. This reduction of impeachment to Force was already predicted in *Federalist* No. 65: the prosecution of impeachment risks "connect[ing] itself with the pre-existing factions, and will enlist all their animosities, partialities, influence, and interest on one side or on the other; and in such cases there will always be the greatest danger that the decision will be regulated more by the comparative strength of parties, than by the real demonstrations of innocence or guilt."[88] Impeachment could only be the temporary exaltation, by crude strength, of one existing faction or another, raising the ante for another round of retribution. Of course this cannot be seen by the victors who imagine they possess force irrevocably. From Agamben's position, as well, impeachment would simply extend—now "against" Trump—the very logic of exceptionality (the "elites" to be "drained" from politics by his administration) by which he defines himself. To impeach Trump for inviting illegitimate interference into the election would in essence render a decision over (and interiorizing relation to) those political actors deemed improper and to be excluded. But such a decision will always remain within the exceptional logic of sovereign power. Trump's racist claim that millions of "illegals" delivered the popular vote to Clinton is structurally identical to the effort to delegitimize Trump's election based on Russian interference.

Second—and closely related—these authors all criticize the discourse of rights; the entire field of rights and claims about rights is always already fallen, and the gaining and securing of rights as such is a game not worth the candle. In this sense they are all the heirs of Marx's criticism of Bruno Bauer. One consensus about Trump is that his administration is stampeding over rights—with the Muslim ban, the moves to suppress voting rights, the ban on transgender persons in the military, the rights of the press, abortion, land claims of native populations, and so on. On the other hand, the reactionary forces also make their own claims in terms of rights, as in their attack on affirmative action, which they don't present as nakedly racist, or the appeal to the second amendment, or appeals to religious conscience. Then there is the worry that Trump is stacking the courts with conservative judges for an entire generation to come. It is an open question, where we stand with rights today. I will only add that the basic claim of the Black Lives Matter movement, which dates from Obama but is the true north of all anti-Trump activity, is not *about rights.* The difference between the Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter movements recalls the distinction Weil makes between the "person" of rights-claims (the "acrimonious harping on restitution," in her unfavorable characterization) and the way a human being counts or matters (the "something sacred" in each of us).[89]

Third—and following from the criticism of the "subject of rights" raised by all three authors—what different kind of political subjectivity do they envision? Here they are strangely unanimous, if enigmatic. Citing Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (but winking all the time at Jacques Lacan), Badiou urges that "one must . . . therefore assume the subjectivity of refuse."[90] Agamben and Weil carry over the Christian overtones of "refuse" in their discussions of bare life and affliction. I have criticized these authors for their illegitimate derivations of this figure, where "refuse" might be defined as the supplement or excess of the sealed logic of "disruption" (always an interpretation of the negativity that solicits and re-aligns the energies of a closed structure). What we require instead is an attention to *discharge*, to refuse, to negativity as unincorporable waste, the refuse whose expulsion is enforced by the system yet "outside" of it. Concretely, this means reframing many issues, now seen in terms of rights, instead as opportunities for *subjectivizing* the discharge of global capitalism. The enormous displacement of refugees and undocumented people, for instance, would then lose its character as a topic of human rights and be approached as the necessary obverse of capital's metabolism. The discussion over prison reform in America—not only in the case of for-profit prisons but systemically—would then be recast in terms of exploitation of prisoners, rather than security or justice. The rhetoric of rights and the rhetoric of disruption are both precision instruments for registering violation. What we want now, however, is not to sound the alarm where norms are being violated but register what unseen injury and deformation of lives have been accumulating without having triggered any alarms.

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2. Peter Wehner, "Declaration of Disruption," *New York Times*, July 4, 2017.↩

3. Greg Weiner, "The President's Self-Destructive Disruption," *New York Times*, October 11, 2017.↩

4. Francis Fukuyama, "The Dangers of Disruption," *New York Times*, December 6, 2016.↩

5. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 229.↩

6. Beth Reinhard, "Jeb Bush Plays Up Role as a 'Disrupter,'" *Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2015.↩

7. Jill Lepore, "The Disruption Machine," *New Yorker*, June 23, 2014.↩

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), p. 35.↩

9. Slavoj Žižek, interview, Channel 4 News (UK), November 3, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b71CNNKdVRw.↩

10. Karl Marx, *Misère de la philosophie* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2002), p. 175; All translations from French originals are mine—B.P.↩

11. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, lines 217–20.↩

12. Corey Robin, "The Profit Unarmed," *Jacobin*, June 18, 2017.↩

13. Samuel Moyn, "Trump Isn't a Threat to Our Democracy. Hysteria Is," *New York Times*, August 11, 2017.↩

14. Ted Hesson, "Trump deportations lag behind Obama levels," *Politico*, August 8, 2017.↩

15. Alain Badiou, *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), p. 87.↩

16. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1997), p. 59.↩

17. Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," interview with *Der Spiegel*, in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 107.↩

18. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.↩

19. Simone Weil, "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force," trans. Mary McCarthy, in Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff, *War and the Iliad* (New York: New York Review Books, 2005), p. 3.↩

20. Weil, "The Iliad," p. 20.↩

21. Weil, "The Iliad," p. 26.↩

22. Weil, “The Iliad,” p. 15.↩

23. Any appearance of humanity’s release from the “inexorable pressure continually exercised by nature upon man,” as owing to advances in production methods, she sees as merely dissimulating how “human action on the whole continues only to be pure obedience to the brutal sting of immediate necessity; only, instead of being harassed by nature, man is henceforth harassed by man. Simone Weil, *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l’oppression sociale* (Paris: Folio, 1998), p. 50–1.↩

24. Simone Weil, *La personne et le sacré* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2017), 48-9.↩

25. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 108.↩

26. Influenced by syndicalism, Weil defends manual labor as the unique social situation in which practical, problem-solving attention is paramount. The methodical and perspicuous process of labor—rather than the products or facilitation by machinery—are to be “the highest value” in a free society. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 117.↩

27. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 32–3.↩

28. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 33.↩

29. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 40.↩

30. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 33.↩

31. Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*, p. 217.↩

32. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 108.↩

33. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, pp. 41–2.↩

34. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 124.↩

35. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 8.↩

36. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 64.↩

37. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 10.↩

38. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.181.↩

39. Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 48.↩

40. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 7.↩

41. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 123.↩

42. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 64.↩

43. Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 64.↩

44. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, p. 267.↩

45. Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 39.↩

46. Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 36–7.↩

47. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1976), p. 483.↩

48. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, p.266.↩

49. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone, 2002), p.161.↩

50. Christian Haines, "A Lyric Intensity of Thought: On the Potentiality and Limits of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* Project." *boundary2online*, August 29, 2016.↩

51. Giorgio Agamben, interview with Antonio Gnolio, trans. Ido Govrin. Interview first published in *La Repubblica*, May 15, 2016.↩

52. Giorgio Agamben, "Au-delà du droit et de la personne," in Weil, *La personne et le sacré*, p. 22.↩

53. Agamben, "Au-delà du droit," p. 10.↩

54. Agamben, "Au-delà du droit," p. 16.↩

55. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 75.↩

56. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 10.↩

57. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper, 2001), p. 72.↩

58. Weil, *Waiting for God*, p. 75.↩

59. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 58.↩

60. Weil, *Réflexions*, p. 59.↩

61. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Daley (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 107.↩

62. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 33.↩

63. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 48.↩

64. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 49.↩

65. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 32.↩

66. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 62; italics in original.↩

67. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 77.↩

68. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 16.↩

69. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 15.↩

70. Alain Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste* (Fécamp: Lignes, 2009), p. 191.↩

71. Alain Badiou, with Aude Lancelin, *Éloge de la politique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017), p. 13.↩

72. Badiou, *Éloge de la politique*, p. 21.↩

73. Badiou, *Éloge de la politique*, p. 73.↩

74. Badiou, *Second manifeste*, p. 80.↩

75. Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 46.↩

76. Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 51.↩

77. "This complete perturbation of its entire substance, this absolute dissolution of all its stability into fluent continuity, is, however, the simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure self-referent existence." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper, 1967), p. 237. See, for a non-Marxist gloss on passages like this, Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 52.↩

78. For "*the essence of man*" to become "the true demiurge of history, his non-being must at once become the concrete and historically dialectical form of ethical knowledge of the present in which man is necessarily condemned to non-existence. The negation of his being becomes concretized, then, in the understanding of bourgeois society." Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 190. Lukács depicts class consciousness as "disrupt[ing] the reified structure of existence" (p. 197).↩

79. Badiou, *Éloge de la politique*, p. 98.↩

80. Alain Badiou, *Qu'est-ce que j'entends par Marxisme?* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 2016), p. 20.↩

81. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 110–49.↩

82. Badiou, *Éloge de la politique*, p. 74.↩

83. Badiou, *Éloge de la politique*, p. 79.↩

84. Badiou, *Qu'est-ce que j'entends*, p. 43.↩

85. V.I. Lenin, "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder," in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), p. 574.↩

86. Badiou, *Qu'est-ce que j'entends*, p. 45.↩

87. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 184–90.↩

88. Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist no. 65" in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Gary Wills (New York: Bantam, 1982), p. 331. Even in the best case postulated by Hamilton, impeachment is still conceived in terms of force, "as a bridle in the hands of the legislative body" (p. 332).↩

89. Weil, *La personne et le sacré*, pp. 54, 26.↩

90. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 56.↩