

Natal Bodies, Mortal Bodies, Sexual Bodies

Reading Gender, Desire, and Kinship through Reiner Schürmann's *Broken Hegemonies*

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What might Reiner Schürmann have to offer those of us—feminist thinkers and queer theorists—who place questions of gender, embodiment, and sexuality at the center of our philosophical and hermeneutical endeavors? In the face of Schürmann's explicit rejection of sexual difference as a relevant category of philosophical analysis and his utter silence on matters of sexuality more generally, is such an engagement either possible or useful? This essay contends that it is both. The "ultimates" Schürmann offers us in *Broken Hegemonies*, namely natality and mortality, are after all irreducibly *corporeal* traits, as are sexuality and sexual difference. In turn, sexuality and sexual difference are both also profoundly implicated in our understanding of and relationship to futurity, which, for Schürmann is the very dimension of natality and mortality. As he writes, "By virtue of mortality, *the future solifies*, by virtue of natality, *it totalizes*."¹ Reading Schürmann's *Broken Hegemonies* alongside and through certain strands of contemporary feminist and queer theory serves to resituate the Schürmannian topology in an alternate theoretical theater, whose scenography includes such elements as a psychoanalytic theory of drives, a phallic economy of kinship and language, the corporeal materiality of precarious, mortal bodies, and the facticity of feminine generativity. As Schürmann traces the operation of the traits of natality and mortality through the successive hegemonic maximizations and dissolutions of the Western philosophical tradition, so will I trace their operation on a different scale and in a different discursive (yet still arguably metaphysical) framework: that of Western patriarchy. Indeed, it is Schürmann's own reliance on Greek tragedy—arguably the primary instituting texts of this patriarchy—in formulating the paradigm for the tragic double bind—as the very establishing operation of hegemony—that opens the way for this line of thinking. In

turn, foregrounding the nexus of nomological and corporeal forces comprising sexuality, sexual difference, reproduction, and kinship will also complicate and confound the traits of natality and mortality. I will bring into focus the sexuete dimensions of corporeal existence, of feminine material generativity, of sexual desire prised away from reproductive imperatives, and of kinship structures proliferating in as-yet unthought configurations. This will allow for a consideration of the paradoxical desolations of natality, as well as the unlikely consolations of mortality. In what follows, then, I will read *Broken Hegemonies* alongside philosophers of gender, sex, and sexuality, including Adriana Cavarero, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Lee Edelman, in order to illuminate and enrich our understanding of an entire field of normatively governed life—patriarchal kinship, heterosexual matrix, and reduction of other to same—that provides the contextual stage for the successive epochal regimes in which the hegemonic fantasms have taken their leading roles.

Broken Hegemonies offers us an original analytic of ultimates (*dernières*), natality and mortality, through which to understand the successive epochs of Western metaphysics. While overtly drawing on Hannah Arendt's terminology, Schürmann's notion of natality must nonetheless be sharply distinguished from the Arendtian kind. For Schürmann, natality indicates from the start a subsumption in commonality, whereas for Arendt it indicates the arising of what is singular and extraneous to what is already established: "Every man, being created in the singular, is a new beginning by virtue of his birth."² Schürmann's ultimates are instead rooted in the ordinary experience "from which no one escapes and which escapes no one," that is, that we arrive by our birth and go to our death (BH 345). These ultimates must not be mistaken for a metaphysical opposition; they are rather simply the fact of my birth and the inevitability of my death; they are *traits* giving rise to *traction*. As traits, they exert their specific pull on our actions, thought, behavior, and self-understanding; in this way, they subtend every element of our experience. Originary, but not grounds in the sense of foundations, and certainly not a pair of tandem opposites—mortality is not the simple negation of natality—these ultimates rather form two asymmetric movements called by Schürmann "impulses" or "strategies"—a strategy and counter-strategy. Natality—being-toward-birth—is the thetic impulse, the impulse that posits universals through the commonality of language. This impulse is characterized by attraction, maximization, legislation, and the appropriation of phenomena into linguistic universals under which these phenomena reappear as mere particulars. Importantly, natality *consoles*, while mortality—being-toward-death—is the irreducible undertow, carrying us away in a

movement of withdrawal, dispersion, transgression, expropriation, and singularization. The projects of natality necessarily involve a disavowal of mortality, they are structured by its denial, while mortality surfaces, necessarily and incessantly, breaking apart the universalizing and consolidating fantasy inherent in the natal.

Schürmann traces these impulses, or strategies, riving ordinary life and ordinary language, through the Western philosophical tradition, in which they become magnified, indeed maximized in and through the structure of the hegemonic fantasm. The founding fantasm of the tradition is the “One” of the Greeks, exemplified by the Parmenidean “it is and it must be” and the static immortality of the Platonic Idea. It rises and falls, expands and contracts, its reign subject to the particularizing or singularizing pull of mortality, and then, disjunctively, a new fantasm emerges for the Romans, that of “Nature,” and for the Germans in modernity, that of “Consciousness.” These swells are understood topologically, emerging from sites characterized not merely historically or genealogically but primarily through the specificities of a language. Language here is not so much the house but the site of the question of being, and the fantasms are in a primary sense born of their native linguistic soil.

Schürmann carefully distinguishes these fantasms from what he calls “supreme referents” such as the Idea, the World, God, or the Subject. In an economic analogy, Schürmann says that a “‘supreme’ standard” would be a standard commodity—gold or oil, while an “‘ultimate’ standard” would be not a thing at all, a non-thing, but rather the “variable relation of goods to a factor that is itself variable” (BH 8). This formulation recalls the abstraction that is the money-form, investigated by Karl Marx in both *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, where he writes, “its very entry into circulation must be a moment of its staying at home and its staying at home must be an entry into circulation.”³ Indeed, the instability and variability of money is particularly striking in moments of economic crisis like our own. The money-form cannot be identified with gold or oil, but hovers beyond them as a contingent relation among commodities, themselves a congealed and mystified form of labor. These “ultimate referents” that are the hegemonic fantasms are likewise relational and contingent, representing a topographical morphology, which may be unstably and temporarily filled up with the determinate content of a supreme referent (the Idea, God, the Subject).

In raising the question of a possible relation here to a phallic economy of language and kinship, and specifically the Lacanian Law of the Father, certain provisos are necessary. Jean-Joseph Goux has argued for an understanding of value as a general equivalent, simultaneously economic, linguistic, paternal, and phallic:

I came to affirm that the *Father* becomes the general equivalent of subjects, *Language* the general equivalent of signs, and the *Phallus* the general equivalent of objects, in a way that is structurally and genetically homologous to the accession of a unique element (let us say *Gold*, for the sake of simplicity) to the rank of the general equivalent of products. Thus, what had previously been analyzed separately as phallogentrism (Freud, Lacan), as logocentrism (Derrida), and as the rule of exchange by the monetary medium (Marx), it was now possible to conceive as part of a unified process.⁴

While suggestive and illuminating, such an approach risks, and in fact enacts, the elision of important differences, breaks, and hinges (*brisures*) among these various master-signifiers. The appropriate cautions certainly apply, that would require, in a longer study, meticulous attention to the specificities of historical and textual institution in their realms of operation (that is, kinship, economics, and philosophy). Nonetheless, Goux's account of the metaphysical hegemony of general equivalents itself takes place at a level of generality instructive for my purposes here. Let me be clear: I am not claiming that Schürmann's hegemonic fantasms really *are* or are *reducible to* something like Goux's "general equivalent." They are, after all, rooted in the existential impulses of natality and mortality of the philosophical language of their time and place, and function according to their own topo-logic as scrupulously described in the six hundred-plus pages of *Broken Hegemonies*. The question here is rather: Might it be possible to discern within the inception and dissolutions of patriarchal kinship, also found at the bookends of the Western metaphysical project, the operations of those impulses toward hegemonic maximization, which are traced in the successive fantasms haunting philosophical discourse? Does it make sense to speak of a hegemonic fantasm on a different and broader scale, a yet more fantasmatic fantasm, haunting the specifically philosophical projects of Western metaphysics with varying and elusive degrees of determinacy? Although Schürmann resists any narrative relationship (and specifically any dialectical relationship) between the three disparate hegemonic fantasms of Western metaphysics, if we juxtapose them—the One, Nature, and Consciousness—we can faintly discern at the very least a movement *toward* movement: from the stasis of the One, to the ordered cyclicality of Nature, and thence to the proliferation of willing, projecting subjects of Consciousness. Insofar as subsumption under the common in the natal operation involves an aspiration to stasis, and the escape from the common as the sign of mortality's traction is a movement *away*, it is possible to also discern the metaphysical project *as a whole* inscribed in these traits. In the twentieth century, following the planetary-scale maximizations of

the violence inherent in natality, Schürmann finds in the withdrawal, dispersal, and destitution of the modern fantasm, the utter diremption and sundering of the possibility of the hegemonic fantasm as such. The metaphysical story is over. For feminists and queer theorists, the diremption of metaphysics prompts the question of the destruction of that which has subtended and haunted previous epochs, prior even to their inception, namely patriarchy and the structures of kinship through which its persistence is secured.

The beginnings and instituting gestures of patriarchy for the West are indeed to be found precisely in the texts Schürmann identifies as exemplary for explicating the structure and mechanism of natal maximizations—Greek tragedies, insofar as they stage the tragic double bind. For Schürmann there is no better illustration of natality's thrust than Agamemnon's elation once he has decided to forsake his daughter Iphigenia's life in the name of the city's campaign of war. Schürmann quotes Aeschylus: "If this sacrifice, this virginal blood, shackles the winds, one can with ardor, proud ardor, desire it without fault" (BH 27). This double bind has two aspects: the presentation of two alternatives entailing a terrible sacrifice, and the inescapability of making a choice. Once Agamemnon has chosen, what follows is a jubilant and passionate affirmation that effectively drowns out any echo of grief, of regret, or recrimination. However, the excoriating sacrifice of his daughter remains as the singularizing undertow of mortality, and it is this that provides the very impetus for the disavowal's exultation: the tragic denial of the counter-law of the family in the name of establishing the law of the state. Natal maximizations are thus founded on and structured through an active and performative disavowal of mortality, and in Greek drama (comedy as well as tragedy) these disavowals, incorporations, and subsumptions frequently involve conflicts of sexual difference. The result of the conflict is the establishment of a hierarchical regime securing and even encrypting the household and the place of women firmly within the purview and limits of the πόλις.⁵ The reminder, or remainder, of the mortal is marked with a feminine sign.⁶

Alongside *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Antigone* too is a recurring leitmotif for *Broken Hegemonies*. While Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia gives us the model of tragic denial as the impetus for hegemonic maximization, Schürmann's interest in *Antigone* lies rather in her strange persistence, in the inherent *failure* of the disavowal or denial of mortality signified by the tragic double bind. *Antigone* illustrates the paradoxical holding together of disparates without reduction that Schürmann finds in the ἐν συνεξές, the "one that holds together," of Parmenides. As is well known, *Antigone's* familial commitment to undertake her dead brother's burial rites conflicts with Creon's commitment to the state that

bars the rites to a city traitor, resulting in Antigone's encryptment and suicide. The bind here would seem to mimic and repeat the murder of Iphigenia as the establishment of the order of the city over and above that of the household and family. However, Schürmann emphasizes the persistence in this play of an irresolvable chiasmus in the tragic structure. He points out that Creon, after all, repents of his treatment of Antigone in the end and speaks of respecting the established laws on the side of family religion, while Antigone crosses over to the side of the πόλις when she makes her final appeal: "Oh, city of my father in the land of Thebes."⁷ The chorus in turn affirms the inevitability of mortality at the play's close: "Pray for no more at all. For what is destined/ for us, men mortal [θνητοῖς], there is no escape."⁸ The chiasmus does not entirely supersede the structure of the tragic double bind: There is still no overarching court of appeal by which one might judge these dispartes, no means of reconciliation, and no exit from the bind; a decision is made, and the daughter, the family, the οἶκος are sacrificed in the name of the law of the city, the law of the father. Nonetheless, Antigone's own decision and commitment also persists—and will persist into the future, beyond the play's close—as a sign of an unsuccessful denial. The chorus, answering Creon's despair, affirms Antigone's side: "What in the future is to care for/ rests with those whose duty it is/ to care for them."⁹ For Schürmann this indicates that dispartate that can never in fact be repressed, that requiring us to "think from both sides" (ἀμφινοεῖν), just as the chorus does when faced with the monstrosity (τέρας) of Antigone herself, unhappy child of unhappy Oedipus, caught defying Creon's decree.¹⁰ Ultimately, Schürmann will argue, such ἀμφινοεῖν is our task, in the face of totalitarianisms and after Heidegger, in our post-fantasmic condition, requiring us to live under the sign of Proteus, even if we do not yet know how.¹¹ Before moving to a consideration of the consequences of this call for living beyond norms for the fate of patriarchal kinship, it will be worth considering Schürmann's own observations, or lack thereof, on the gendered stakes of the tragic double bind.

For the most part Schürmann is not concerned with the question of gender. Nonetheless, in one place, commenting on Parmenides' "Boys to the left, girls to the right," Schürmann says, "as far as the separation of the sexes goes, it will be necessary to think about the masculine in the feminine, the feminine *in* the masculine" (BH 67). A note refers us to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: "It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly, or man-womanly."¹² While the feminist credentials and queer sensibility here give us little cause for argument, there is also no sense that gender, or sex, might be a relevant or interesting problematic for Schürmann. Rather

it seems that if there is or ever was, in fact, a question, or a stake, it is already resolved in advance. Furthermore, in a brief endnote found on the very last page of the text, Schürmann summarily dismisses thinking on sexual difference as inherently metaphysical:

It would be no less a thetic operation to speculate on *the* sexual difference, as if singularities were safe as long as one proves capable of counting up to two and posits no longer the (male) one, but the (female) other. Such an operation constitutes the very recipe of theticism. In speaking of sexualities, common nouns such as “feminism” can only perpetuate binary models and hence the most crudely metaphysical antitheses. (BH 680n.11)

Schürmann’s refusal to acknowledge the ineluctably gendered structure of the tragic double bind in its Greek provenance would seem to mark a prior disavowal, namely that of the significance of these various prephilosophical stagings of the passage into patriarchy: the tragic subsumption in the Greek city-state of a feminine order of corporeity, of mortality, but also of fecundity and natality.¹³

In a very different taking-up of the Arendtian natality-mortality couplet, Adriana Cavarero skillfully draws our attention to the erasure of the order of birth in the instituting of Western philosophy. Unlike Arendt, for whom natality signifies an abstract upspringing of the new, Cavarero insists on the embodied, corporeal, material nature of birth: birth from the womb, from a mother—the rootedness of all of us in a corporeal maternal lineage. In the course of her analysis of the myth of Demeter and her daughter Kore (inspired by Plato’s allusion to Demeter in the *Cratylus*), she notes that maternal power is precisely that boundless mode of generation extending between two infinities— infinite origin and infinite perpetuation: “Both infinities, past and future, origin and perpetuation, always exist through the feminine. This feminine is not an abstract form: it is a portion of infinity that humans can sustain, and where each discrete individual takes root and finds meaning.”¹⁴ In the myth, Hades interrupts this continuum, abducting Kore and keeping her underground in the realm of death, during which the earth, the mother, stops generating. The feminine order of birth is disrupted by the masculine order of death, a death that is “the central locus of a masculine symbolic horizon.”¹⁵ Excluded from the secret of life, or generation, man does not look at birth but rather at death, “and every time he prefigures his own death.”¹⁶ Cavarero argues that the philosophic project is a masculine project fixated upon death, and that in its universalizing impulses, in which men as mortals stand in for all of us, and φύσις, necessarily sexed, is replaced by a neutral metaphysics, it has “turned its gaze away from the place of birth, measuring existence on an end point that bears no memory of its beginning.”¹⁷

Birth is subsequently determined in the masculine perspective as a “coming from nothing,” understood on the basis of death’s “passing into nothingness.”¹⁸ The corporeal, material rootedness of all of us in our mother’s womb is thereby obscured from view and banished from metaphysics, which now devotes itself to an immortalizing practice of death.

Thus, Cavarero’s understanding of natality/mortality is at odds with Schürmann’s in numerous ways. For Schürmann, natality is characterized by the commonality of language, the consolations of what is communal and shared, and the theticism of the project as it springs forward into a new future. Cavarero might say that this is a fully masculinized and neutralized natality: a natality without birth, without matter, without bodies, without mothers, without wombs, without women. Indeed it is a properly Athenian natality, sprung fully formed from the head of Zeus.¹⁹ A Schürmannian response might in turn emphasize that Cavarero’s vision of an originary fecund, generative feminine plenitude is itself a maximization, albeit a matriarchal one, offering precisely the consolations of natality (in Schürmann’s sense), and seeking in particular to establish a guarantee of futurity, which bluntly denies the mortality that must eventually, inexorably, intervene. Such a reading of Demeter-Kore would not be inaccurate, certainly. Cavarero, however, places the immortalizing impulses of metaphysics on the side of mortality, a reaction formation to a masculine obsession with death. For her, the foregrounding of death is not a foregrounding of singularization, but is rather a vector forcing us directly into a totalizing metaphysical horizon—philosophy as the practice of death. Nicole Loraux, too, stresses the uniquely Greek understanding of men in myth as primarily *mortal* (βροτοί, θνητοί, ἄνθρωποι), in contrast with other cultures (Babylonian, Semitic) and other Indo-European languages that refer to man as primarily terrestrial or earthly (*homo*, *humus*).²⁰ Loraux thus provides us with an anterior cultural context for the metaphysical turn toward death. Furthermore, for Cavarero, it is a philosophy of birth and a foregrounding of natality, *not* mortality, that performs the singularizing function, and that can take us beyond the invasive reach of the πόλις and its laws. She puts it this way: “As a recuperation of the sense of the human engendering from the mother, a philosophy of birth has thus the main purpose of disinvesting the concrete individuality of each human from societal totalization.”²¹

Between Schürmann and Cavarero, then, we have reached an impasse, and here it will be useful to displace its terms. What I want to briefly suggest (and we will return to this in due course) is that thinking natality as the materiality of birth, as embodied, as corporeal, and as feminine, far from providing *consolations* or guarantees, rather opens us to materiality in its aleatory dimension: random, meaning-

less, and opaque—the radical sense of which, *qua* being, is given its clearest formulation in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: “Now all things which are generated, whether by nature or by art, have matter; for there is a potentiality for each of them to be, and also not to be, and this potentiality is the matter in each.”²² Indeed, Cavarero interprets this potentiality in the Demeter myth as a feminine secret: Women have an obscure power both to give *and suspend* birth.²³ This power *within* natality, with its potential threat to the very existence of humankind, far exceeds the power of individual mortality: “It is not the nothingness of male philosophers who identify it with death which provides the measure the world, and its destiny; it is rather the *nothingness* of birth, a mute petrification of φύειν: the desolate land where even death dies of unmourned immobility.”²⁴

So far I have emphasized that in antiquity the first flourishing of philosophical maximization—the rise of τὸ ἔν—took place on a ground, in a context, at a site where a *prior* disavowal had taken place and continued to be enacted and literally performed in annual festivities: the disavowal of feminine corporeal generativity. Such repeated performances on the Greek stage told how the feminine (and Dionysian) became enclosed within an οἶκος, subsumed within the πόλις, and came to be governed by certain particular laws of patriarchal kinship. In the remainder of this paper, I will explore further the specifically gendered configurations of the tragic double bind, and then turn to a consideration of how Schürmann’s thinking, alongside a feminist foregrounding of sexed corporeality, might help to illuminate contemporary ideologies of kinship and sexuality and their queer theoretical critique.

Investigating the gendered double binds of tragedy with Schürmann’s assistance, exemplified by the figures of Iphigenia, Antigone, and Oedipus, I will show how the double bind serves to both *institute* and *deinstitute* regimes of kinship and gender. As noted above, the tragic fates of Iphigenia and Antigone classically represent the violent founding of the law of the city—of unadulterated patriarchal rule—on the basis of a turning away from and a tragic blindness to the law of the family and the ties of kinship.²⁵ In both cases the daughter’s inescapable death at the behest of the father’s law becomes the symbolic precondition for the nomological and political community from which the feminine is effectively banished. The family, the household, and the woman are subsumed in the universality of the state—no longer an alternate or rival force, they are rendered as only subtending and subservient to the city’s needs. But the law of the father, in its confounding, is also *refounded* at the levels of both οἶκος and πόλις. Once the house of Thebes has run aground in tragic exhaustion, the result is not just the establishment of the city and the terms of its separation from the house-

hold. At the level of the family, the name of the father, the “no” of the father, the incest taboo, and heteronormativity of kinship are also nominally secured. In order for this resolution to take place (if it ever indeed does), certain rendings, crises, and conflicts must first occur.

The *Oedipus* cycle indeed begins with a city in crisis—as in the Demeter-Kore myth the fertility of nature and of women is suspended and a blight is upon Thebes. The reason, we find as the drama unfolds, is a short circuit in the order of kinship, a confusion of categories, and the polluting miasmas of parricide and incest. The structure of kinship itself, perpetual thesis and literal guarantee of the future, is doubled and deformed, like the swollen feet of the king, which are the sign of his connection with and rootedness upon the earth, Γῆ, the order of genesis and becoming. These structural dissolutions are worked further upon the body of Oedipus, and in the culminating scene of Jocasta’s death and Oedipus’ blinding, the doublings themselves are refracted and multiplied: Jocasta bewails her twofold brood, “the bed in which she brought forth husband by her husband, children by her own child”; Oedipus seeks Jocasta out, calling her “this field of double sowing”; he rushes on the two doors, and, finding her dead, tears off her two gold brooches with which he strikes out his two eyeballs, over and over again.²⁶ This folding, an invagination in the very structure of kinship itself, confounds its two vectors that must always be kept separate: the order of descent and the order of affinity; the woman one came from and the woman one lies with. The impossibility of this double bind results in Oedipus, now blinded, enacting upon his own body the impossibility of θεωρεῖν, of seeing and of theticism as the positing of a future—envisioning the future as natality. Oedipus thus obliterates natality as such, and this obliteration is engendered by the folding of kinship.²⁷ But this is not the end of the story: Oedipus’ fate at Colonus also reveals, however obscurely, his passage to divinity. The place of his death, his eventual succumbing to the traction of mortality, his sacred and secret disappearance (the sight of which causes Theseus to also experience at least a momentary blindness), will provide protection to yet another city: Athens. The singularity of Oedipus’ sacrificial sexual transgression thus serves to re-establish him as immortal and (like the taming and encryption of the *Eumenides*) secures the safety of Athens. Athens itself, we might say, is the natal project, born, secured, and sustained through this tragic double bind.

While Oedipus’ transgression is that of kinship, transgressions of gender also play a part in the formation of the tragedy’s foundational power, insofar as it is narratives of gender-crossing that led to the prior blinding of Tiresias, the prophet who predicts Oedipus’ fate and who stands before Oedipus as his double, foreshadowing literally and figura-

tively the blinding that is to come. Two accounts of Tiresias' blinding have come down to us, both of which involve complex themes of sexual difference and gender transgression. According to the first, Zeus and Hera were arguing over who experiences the greatest sexual pleasure, men or women, and consulted Tiresias. Tiresias had had experience of both: He had once attacked a pair of copulating snakes and been changed into a woman. After seven years, he attacked copulating snakes a second time, and was changed back into a man. He testified that women's share of pleasure was nine-tenths, while men's share only one-tenth. Hera was so angered by his response that she blinded him, but as a recompense, Zeus made him into a seer. In the other version, found in the third-century BCE poet Callimachus, Tiresias inadvertently comes upon Athena bathing with her favorite nymph, Chariclo, who also happens to be his, Tiresias', mother. He is unable to tear his sight away from the vision of the naked Athena, ministered to by his mother, and the subsequent punishment is blinding "for having trespassed all bounds when he beheld the goddess' naked body."²⁸ However, Chariclo pleads for her son's clemency and Athena takes pity on them. While she cannot reverse the law of Chronos, which decrees a heavy price for beholding a naked immortal unbidden, she instead grants him the power of foresight. In each case, a goddess punishes Tiresias by blinding, on account of the hubris of his desire, which has failed to honor normal bounds. In the first story, he has crossed and confounded the boundary of gender and failed to take the side of the feminine, while, in the second, it is the boundary between mortals and gods that is transgressed and punishable. The second, furthermore, evokes a queer and literally pre-Oedipal kind of primal scene; after all, Tiresias comes upon his own mother consorting naked with Athena (the most masculine of goddesses and protectress of the city), outside the city limits, and is transfixed by the vision, unable to tear his eyes away.

Like the kinship transgressions of Oedipus, these transgressions of gender form the soil, the ground, the preconditions of the very city in which the philosophical maximizations traced by Schürmann are subsequently born. It is through this uncanny foreshadowing that Tiresias foresees the events leading to Oedipus' profane blindness and sacred fate, ultimately leading, in *Antigone*, to Creon's too-late gesture of reconciliation. Is such a reconciliation even possible, and what might it enable? It comes, after all, at the close of a great story where the doubling of figures, tropes, the very folding of kinship itself has formed itself into an inescapable bind with a slew of awful, horrifying tragic consequences. In trying to answer these questions while foregrounding the thematics of gender, I will turn to Judith Butler's understanding of Antigone's own interventions into the structures of kinship, which runs

surprisingly close at moments to Schürmann's reading of the play in *Broken Hegemonies*.

Judith Butler engages both Hegelian and Lacanian accounts of *Antigone*: in the former, kinship and the state are rigorously separated; in the latter, which is wedded to the structuralist insistence on kinship as a function of the symbolic order, the law of the father is indisputable and uncontestable. As Butler makes clear, for Lacan (contra Lévi-Strauss, for whom the incest taboo uniquely traverses nature and culture), kinship is neither a material relation of blood, nor a social and cultural institution, but "the effect of a linguistic set of relations in which each term signifies only and always in relation to other terms."²⁹ In this formulation we may hear echoes of Schürmann's own definition of the hegemonic fantasm: the "variable relation of goods to a factor that is itself variable" (BH 8). Here, then, are grounds for a confluence, or at least a certain congruence, between the symbolic order of kinship and language ruled over by the paternal law, and the ultimate referent that is for Schürmann the hegemonic fantasm. Like Schürmann, who understands *Antigone* as offering the possibility of amphinoetic life, of thinking from both sides despite and beyond the natal fantasm, Butler reads *Antigone* as offering a possibility of life beyond this symbolic order. She argues that Antigone's aberrant and disobedient action, and even more significantly, her aberrant speech acts declaring and performing her actions ("I say that I did it and I do not deny it"³⁰) outlive Antigone herself. In this doubling of action and narration, in the gap opened up between transgressive actions and the meanings they might be given, in the possibility of resignification made possible by the space between performing an act and the scene of saying or telling, Butler finds an opening for living otherwise, arguing that Antigone seismically shifts through her performative gestures the sphere within which what might count as intelligible lives might be lived.

Both Butler and Schürmann find anti-hegemonic resources in the very name of Antigone: ἀντι-γονή, most literally translated as "against generation." Butler argues that the name leads to a polysemy in which Antigone finds herself not only on the side of kinship *against* the πόλις, but also in opposition to kinship itself. In addition, she mentions Graves' interpretation of the name: "in the place of a mother."³¹ Here, another kinship fold: the doomed virgin displaced, dropped into a maternal role she will never fulfill, creating a short-circuit in the reproductive futurity kinship is supposed to guarantee.³² Schürmann, in turn, stresses most literally the chiasmatic quality of the name: "born against"/"against birth" (BH 197). We will recall Schürmann's emphasis on the final reconciliatory moment in the play, in which Creon and Antigone, Schürmann claims, switch allegiance and cross over, chiasti-

cally, into one another's realms. Creon is eventually moved to repent his punishment of Antigone, and henceforth pledges to honor the laws on the side of the household, while Antigone, in her final words, calls directly upon the gods of the city. However, on closer examination of the text we find that in Creon's passage he does not actually mention the οἶκος at all, but rather the καθεστῶτας νόμους, the laws previously set down—thetically, prior to his decree—laws that precede him and presumptively already function to govern him.³³ The accession here, then, is not so much to the household as such, but to what is more ancient and traditional, to a spectral paternity rather than to any specific side or aspect that belongs to the household or the feminine. In turn, when Antigone makes her plea to the city, its lords and gods, she does not quite accede to the side of the πόλις as state, but remains close to the earth, to the materiality of generation. Her cry is, “ὦ γῆς Θήβης ἄστῳ πατρῶον καὶ θεοὶ προγενεῖς.”³⁴ The land that is Thebes is γῆ, the earth; the city is named by ἄστῳ, the material city, rather than the civil institution of the πόλις; the gods are προγενεῖς—those who were born before, in apposition rather than opposition to she who was born against, Ἀντιγόνη. What is significant here is not that Creon and Antigone cross over into each other's domains, but that the respective discursive orders to which they appeal harbor the potential for honoring the realm of the other within their own terms. The ancient burial rites are not simply or purely feminine or governed by the order of nature, they too are nomological, thetic; the city of Thebes is not purely an institution of men, but also a part of the earth and subtended by the order of φύσις, of generation.

But even if this chiasm is not quite the chiasm we would wish for, here is Schürmann: “Antigone and Oedipus . . . live the dissolution at the core of every consolidation, and they affirm it” (BH 134); while Butler emphasizes how Antigone is “at a distance from what she represents, while what she represents is far from clear.”³⁵ Where are we left at the close of the tragic cycle? Oedipus and Antigone have both returned to the earth. To be sure, Oedipus, transgressor of the laws of kinship, has in death and burial secured the safety and continuance of the Athenian πόλις. Antigone, transgressor of the laws of the πόλις, affirms in death the rites of kinship: “reverence to what claims reverence.”³⁶ Yet these scenes of encryption and the transgressions that lead there nonetheless remain undecidable, unknowable, troubling, unfixed. I want to suggest that we might read Antigone with Butler, *and not against* Schürmann, in her unstable kinship relations, her “wavering gender,”³⁷ and her embrace of death, as tragically deinstitutioning the heterosexual law of the father as a precondition for the intelligibility of the human.

If this order of kinship, of heterosexual normativity ruled by the paternal law, at odds with itself and precarious from its very inception, indeed forms a shadowy, mythopoetic, prephilosophical hegemonic fantasm, we might then trace its various hauntings at another level, alongside but not against Schürmann, within the texts of Western philosophy. And this is precisely the undertaking of Irigaray's analysis of the philosophical λόγος in both *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, in which she draws our attention to philosophy's strategies of "diversion, deflection, reduction of the other in the Same."³⁸ By this Irigaray means the reduction of what is feminine in philosophical discourse to a mute other, serving only to mirror and reflect the self-same unicity of the masculine. She names successive master-figures of Western philosophical discourse as they trip and slide from one signifier to the next: "idea, substance, subject, transcendental subjectivity, absolute knowledge," and calls for their "reopening" in order that they might render back what they have appropriated from the side of the as-yet unthought feminine: the feminine, we might say, to come.³⁹ Can we also understand Schürmann's hegemonic fantasms—the One of the Greeks, the Nature of the Romans, and the Consciousness of modernity—as similarly haunted by the logic of phallic dominance and specularization of the feminine? The phallus, after all, as befits an ultimate referent, is not a *thing*, certainly not the penis, but a variable signifier, a general equivalent, like the money form, which slides and trips from figure to figure in the broken, non-commensurate, metonymic work of the unconscious (gold, feces, the monarch, the gun, and so on).⁴⁰ The argument here is not that the hegemonic fantasms are *the same as* the master-signifiers of the tradition, but that the phallus is a name for what persists on the side of the masculine and excludes the feminine, marking the patriarchal kinship-and-language that is philosophy's context and that provides its symbolic ordering. In this way, it partakes *both* of the nature of the fantasm, and of the master signifier. We might think of it as accompanying the hegemonic fantasms of philosophy, operating on a different level of magnification to be sure, making possible the appearance of particular bodily morphologies and practices, making visible and legible certain configurations of desire, generation, and reproduction; haunting language and in the unconscious, but with nonetheless a structuring and, indeed, hegemonic role throughout the epochs and linguistic sites in which Western metaphysics has flourished and perished.

Pace Schürmann's dismissal of considerations of sexual difference, I want to insist that an approach such as Irigaray's, which is attuned and attentive to the sexed and gendered resonances of the texts of philosophy, complements rather than detracts from the Schürmannian

project. It does so by lending a dimension of inquiry into the repositories and residues of the feminine in the various discursive tracings of the ascent and descent of the philosophical fantasms, a dimension to which Schürmann, in his emphasis on tragedy, is arguably already attentive. Irigaray points us in particular toward figurations of materiality, corporeality, spatiality, and staging:

the “matter” from which the speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself; the *scenography* that makes representation feasible, representation as defined in philosophy, that is, the architectonics of its theatre, its framing in space-time, its geometric organization, its props, its actors, their respective positions, their dialogues, indeed their tragic relations, without overlooking the *mirror*, most often hidden, that allows the logos, the subject, to reduplicate itself, to reflect itself by itself.⁴¹

This understanding of the persistence of tragedy within philosophy, of philosophy as essentially enacting, performing, and sustaining the subsumption of the feminine as part and parcel of the double binds that structure the natal maximizations of its hegemonic fantasms is nothing if not consonant with Schürmann’s consistent invocations of Iphigenia and Antigone throughout *Broken Hegemonies*. Furthermore, I would argue, such attentiveness to sexual difference must form an indispensable dimension of any rigorous working-through of the tradition that would form a groundwork for the possibility of an an-archic life, a life beyond norms. Schürmann’s call for living beyond a reactive normativity, living rather with insight and circumspection, must bring into account that profoundly norm-governed realm: that of bodily existence, arriving as it does through the nomological matrices of gender, sexuality, and kinship. Such a call requires a resonance that foregrounds the possibility of alternate bodily modalities, practices and topologies—the precarious vulnerability, proximity, contiguity, generativity, fluidity, and lability of embodied and desiring beings.

From *Gender Trouble* forward, Judith Butler has pressed for an expansion of the intelligible, an expansion of the livable, bringing into the visual and political field and into legibility lives and relations existing at odds with normatively sanctioned kinship and political structures.⁴² Care is required here because the call for legibility has the ring of, and runs the risk of, revivifying the linguistic and normative subsumptions of natality, and the concomitant reparticulation of lives under the umbrella of new and improved universals. In the later works *Precarious Lives* and *Frames of War*, however, Butler emphasizes the precarity and vulnerability of human lives, exploring the close affinity that pertains between lives recognized precisely as precarious and the possibility of livability. In so doing, she affirms what we might call the

political dimension of singularization, a politics that would bring into view the fragility of our corporeal existence and, ultimately, through these vicissitudes of embodiment, our mortality. Schürmann, in turn, while warning that we may only “think and speak under the fantasmogenic impetus of natality,” also calls us to “enlarge one’s way of thinking beyond the fantasied common” through the thought and speech made possible by the non-nominative, anti-legislative middle voice (BH 631). Harking to the linguistic world of the Greeks and their distinctive grammatical voice, neither passive nor active but medial, and asking us to hear its resonances in our own languages and own time, Schürmann seeks resources within language itself for the possibility for living and thinking without norms.

What I am insisting upon here is that attentiveness and circumspection in relation to the lived body—its drives, impulses, morphologies, and modalities—*redoubles* the work of this medial language and thought, insofar as it too draws us toward locality, situation, an encompassing process: the touching-touched of action that is also at once an undergoing—what Merleau-Ponty has called the flesh of the world.⁴³ By bringing the body and its morphologies of sex and gender, its vicissitudes and fragility, its generative capacities, its impulses and desires, into proximity with language and its medial capacities (not insignificantly, this relationship between flesh and idea is understood by Merleau-Ponty both as chiasm and as a *hinge* [*brisure*]⁴⁴), the Schürmannian project is thus opened on to, and vastly enriched by, an entire dimension of life heretofore excluded and foreclosed by the parameters of *Broken Hegemonies*.

In the final section, I shall consider one more queer-theoretical configuration that forms a striking, though clearly unwitting, response to Schürmann’s attentiveness to the disavowals and maximizing violences inherent in natality. Lee Edelman’s *No Future* takes up, in a stridently polemical mode, an uncompromising and unapologetic position firmly on the side of mortality. Edelman contends that the future, futurity *as such*, is entirely constituted and colonized by the imperatives of heterosexual reproduction. He takes the culturally relentless figures of the heterosexual family and in particular the child as grounding a barrage of normativizing and hegemonic practices—a literalization of natality, one might say—in the name of perpetuating a knowable, stable, eternally heterosexual future. In the final section of this essay, I bring Edelman and Schürmann’s apparently compatible impulses into dialogue, finding illumination through the uneasy confluence I have previously wrought between *Broken Hegemonies* and feminist philosophies of embodiment, both for understanding and finally moving beyond Edelman’s seductive oppositional dialectic.

Edelman asserts what he calls an “impossible polemic” for a queer temporality, in which queerness thought through the death drive marks an excess of something inassimilable (the Lacanian real, or *jouissance*): an excessive queer sexuality that troubles and refuses reproductive futurity. He astutely singles out the figure of the child as that which, in our current public life, it is utterly impossible to be against, and which is, as such, the most ideologically charged figure of our contemporary discursive and political landscape. The Child, as the “token of futurity,”⁴⁵ may be described in Schürmannian terms as the very representative of natality as such. Our culture’s rapturous obsession with the child may be analogous to—albeit ironically and morbidly—Agamemnon’s elation at his daughter’s murder, insofar as it signifies nothing more than our disavowal and repression—not merely of the subsumed order of kinship and family but of mortality itself. As such, Edelman identifies our investment as a libidinal, sustaining fantasy. Might we venture that this maximized, irrefragable figure of the child at least shares some qualities with the hegemonic fantasm? We might usefully recall that the baby is also what Freud called an “ancient symbolic equivalence,” yet another substitute for the phallus, desired as such by the woman on the royal road to “normal femininity.”⁴⁶ Our contemporary maximization of the Child thus appears as one more reassertion of the patriarchal law of the father, in direct lineage from the instituting gestures of tragedy, which, as we saw, sought to secure the perpetuity of Athens through the eternalizing and unbroken reproductions of heterosexual kinship.

Edelman’s compelling provocation is to call queers to consciously and deliberately take up the side of mortality, to assume the death drive knowingly, to become or enact mimetically and ironically (irony being the queer trope *par excellence*) that which we are accused, anyway, of being. In his words, we do this:

by saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck [little orphan] Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.⁴⁷

If this outburst smacks of something excessive, then that is precisely the point. Queer sexuality is nothing if not excessive, excessively pleasurable, according to Edelman, in that it cannot be translated from the “corrupt, unregenerate vulgate of fucking into the infinitely tonier, indeed sacramental, Latin of procreation.”⁴⁸ And, in its structural insis-

tence on fucking for pleasure and not for babies, queer sex is inherently harnessed to the death drive, even prior to the age of AIDS. I would add, too, following Freud in *The Ego and the Id*, that this queer excess is also an excess of any simple narcissism, in that it disobeys the Oedipal imperative in which heterosexuality and stable gender identity are simultaneously achieved through the rigorous separation of desire for the opposite-sex parent on the one hand, and identification with the same-sex parent on the other.⁴⁹ In Edelman's Lacanian framework, queer sexuality is marked by the excess that points to the impossible of the real and the ecstasies of *jouissance*, underpinned by a machinic repetition that ineluctably associates it with the death drive. Coupled with the Freudian reading, a queer sexual excess on the side of the death drive would also function to disrupt any clean separation of genders and gendered identifications, and unsettle the vectors that would clearly separate desire and identification along gendered lines, raising the specter of swerves and redoublings in the architecture of heteropatriarchal kinship. This queer disordering of the death drive works its interference at multiple levels: those of sexuality, of gender, and of kinship.

Might we find any traces in *Broken Hegemonies* of this queer, sexual dimension of mortality? Schürmann introduces the projective vector of natality using the following examples as illustrations: "Founding the United Nations, adopting a parliamentary resolution, sitting down to start writing a book, [and] choosing a life partner" (BH 18). This latter, choosing a life partner, is perhaps as close as he comes to considering the dimensions of sexual life or the affinities of kinship as relevant to the work, and it is expressed in the mode of a conscious, deliberate choice. Here, then, we need to consider how to bring about an encounter between the existential traits of natality and mortality worked out in *Broken Hegemonies* as thoroughly conscious, non-sexual and disembodied, with a polemic against natality and for mortality that draws its theoretical resources from a psychoanalytic notion of the drives, *der Trieben*. The drives, and specifically the death drive, require some contextualization.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud struggles with a phenomenon that he cannot, try as he might, account for in the economic terms of the pleasure principle, which attempts at every turn to minimize and release psychic tension.⁵⁰ This is the death drive, found in the well-known compulsion to repeat, to re-live in dream life or during analysis the traumas of war, or the distress accompanying the inevitable failures of infantile sexuality. If these repetition compulsions are read as attempts at mastery, as attempts to turn a passive situation into one in which the subject has active control, they may be folded

back into the libidinal instincts, the life instincts, the desire for fulfillment of a wish with the accompanying release of tension. But Freud finds in their insistence something inassimilable. As Lacan put it, “after the restitutive tendency has manifested itself, something is left over which at the level of individual psychology appears to be gratuitous, paradoxical, enigmatic, and is genuinely repetitive.”⁵¹ Freud is thus forced to reformulate the governance of psychic life by the libido or sexual drive in terms of a dual structure, evoking the ancient poet-philosopher Empedocles: Eros, on the one hand, the integrative, conjugal, sustaining force; and, on the other hand, subtending Eros and perhaps even more ancient and fundamental, Thanatos, the drive to restore an earlier state of things as the aim of life. As Lacan puts it, “the tendency to union—Eros tends to unite—is only ever apprehended in its relation to the contrary tendency, which leads to division, to rupture, to a redispersion.”⁵² This language will have an all-too familiar ring to those even vaguely familiar with the arguments of *Broken Hegemonies*. Are we then justified in identifying Eros with the trait of natality, and the death drive with mortality? Is there space in the Schürmannian account of the natal impulse (*pulsion*, drive) that might accommodate the psychic drives, the operations of the unconscious, the appearing of the symptom, that which hinders, diverts, and incapacitates, despite our best conscious intentions? Most pressingly, how can an existential analytic of ultimates be brought into dialogue with either the Freudian account of drives, situated at the juncture of the biological and the psychic, at the level of the organism, or the Lacanian account, located at the level of language?

While Freud remains insistently biologicistic on the death drive, speaking of life and death paradigmatically at the cellular level of the single-celled organism, Lacan elaborates the drives in the linguistic register of the symbolic order. Accordingly, the death drive is what returns, what repeats and insists, at the level of language and of the letter. The death drive is for Lacan what “tends. . . beyond the limits of life” and the homeostatic closures of libidinal economy.⁵³ This is hard to grasp. Does the libido represent a closed circuit, with the death drive as its excess, or is it the automatism of the death drive, as repetition, that will brook no disruption, no change, no progress, no future? Where in the account is there room for what is unruly, excessive, what impinges from without, and what diverts? The problem can perhaps be solved, or rather displaced, if we consider that for Lacan the death drive does not emanate from the subject, but rather works through it, despite it, from elsewhere, from what is repressed and from what is unconscious, from the Other whose place is the symbolic order: the order of language itself, according to Lacan’s dictum that “the unconscious is structured

like a language.”⁵⁴ Without pretending to fully explicate this enigmatic idea, it is worth noting that it encroaches quite directly upon Schürmann’s insistence that language is on the side of natality, of what is common, posited, and conscious. Lacanian language is, by contrast, constitutively on the side of the Other, and this is also the side of the death drive, of mortality. The Other is not the one with whom I share things, who consoles me in commonality, but the place from which the letter’s repetitive insistence emanates, always reminding me of my finitude. For Lacan, mortality as death drive persists within language itself, mostly unconscious, appearing in symptoms, saying what it does not mean, carrying us away from sense, intention, and sovereign subjectivity. Moreover, Lacan draws on the destiny of Oedipus at Colonus to show life as paradoxically conjoined to death, and vice versa, with speech as the medium: “[W]hen life has been dispossessed of its speech, its final word can only be the final malediction expressed at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Life doesn’t want to be healed. . . . Anyway, what is healing? The realisation of the subject through a speech which comes from elsewhere, traversing it.”⁵⁵ What is analysis after all? For Lacan, it precisely performs the work of bringing language to desire *through* the encounter with the analyst, and seen in this light, language for him is *also* natal in the Schürmannian sense: “In naming [his desire], the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world. He introduces presence as such, and by the same token, hollows out absence as such.”⁵⁶ Language, for Lacan, is thus the scene and ground, the site and structure, through which both natal and mortal impulses, libido and death drive, unconscious symptom and the possibility of coming to consciousness, play themselves out. In the move from Freud to Lacan, note that—as with Schürmann—we have left behind the body, its morphologies, materialities, its impulses and its desires.

Let us return to Edelman and his queer polemic against the child and the future. Edelman proceeds by elaborating a concrete figure who could stand firm on the side of the death drive against the architecture of heteronormative kinship: the *sinthomosexual*. This is the one who stands resolutely, “denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of futurity that mends each tear, however mean, in reality’s dress.”⁵⁷ This *sinthomosexual* is an impossible figure, standing at the limits of humanity; an irremediable Scrooge proudly proclaiming his refusal to worship at the altar of either the Child or of the Future figured by the child. Embracing this symptomatic homosexuality is, according to Edelman, “the ethical task for which queers are singled out.”⁵⁸ It is an ethical and political task that paradoxically rejects out of hand any ethical and political call of living into futurity by fully acceding to the

death drive, to mortality. Further, and once again we can observe an accordance with Schürmann: The *sinthome* is beyond the logic of mere negation, but remains resolutely in the space of the inassimilable, excessive residue; it “refuses the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers, it admits no translation of its singularity and therefore carries nothing of meaning, recalling in this the letter as the site at which meaning comes undone.”⁵⁹ With this gesture, Edelman would seem to have carried us beyond even Lacan, and brought us to the very figuration of Schürmann’s undertow, his counterstrategy, his transgression, his mortality, his singularization. In this polemical space of rejection, of the “fuck you” of the *sinthomosexual*, another comment from Schürmann is no doubt pertinent: “[T]he *counter* and *anti* gestures necessarily operate right in the middle of that which they commit themselves to denying. No one is more solidly fixated on the figure of the father, the male, or of principles, than he who claims to have freed himself from it” (BH 514). In other words, to position oneself on the side of mortality, to stand firm against natality, is an ethical and political *thesis* that merely returns us to the non-contradictory, symmetrical logic of the not-A that denies A, a logic that the natality-mortality couplet does not and will not obey. But again, perhaps the excesses of anarchic and symptomatic *jouissance*, swirling in the monstrous figure of *sinthomosexual*, also may be read *with* Schürmann as exceeding both syllogistic and dialectical economies of negation as the other of the same. Edelman, of course, realizes the *impossibility* of his position *as* position, but argues most strenuously for it anyway.

Edelman’s intransigent position on the side of the death drive and against the thetic natality of kinship on one level expresses a certain consonance with Schürmann’s call for living beyond norms and beyond the double binds signified by Oedipal kinship. But while it attends to an excessive and deathly *jouissance* in queer, nonreproductive sex, it also performs its own specific disavowal of the generative, natal capacities of the feminine body. Edelman and Schürmann leave the material capacities of the body, and in particular the opaque, aleatory generativity of the female body, out of the account, to the detriment of both. And this is an extraordinary omission. Bodies, after all, desire, generate, and proliferate: Encountering one another through unpredictable defiles, normative and queer, or normo-queer, they intensify pleasure and materially multiply in often unexpected and unpredictable ways. It must be neither forgotten nor disavowed that these generative capacities *also* operate despite or beyond the normative architecture of heterosexuality, that materiality, existentiality, and kinship ties *also move independently of norms* while ineluctably entwined with them. Such movement is clearly evidenced by demands for access to birth control

and the right to abortion, by the lives of single mothers, bastard children, adoptees, queer parents, blended families, drag houses, leather families, and other modes of living in intergenerational non-traditional household and kinship formations. The proliferations of desires, pleasures, bodies, and kinship indicated here disclose a dimension of natality that is less a positive and conscious thesis than an opaque and unpredictable facticity of living on: generativity as such, persisting beyond norms and normativity. These are forms of life that do not refuse the future, but that do not, either, require the eternalizing prop of heteronormativity, nor a disavowal of mortality structured by tragedy as a fantasmatic guarantee of their natality, persistence, and flourishing.

Once again, we can see that the project of *Broken Hegemonies* is enriched by a consideration of the vagaries of corporeity and sexual life, and of *sexuate* life, as Irigaray would put it. Finally, it is necessary to ask: Are these dimensions of sex and sexual difference expressible in the language of ultimates? Do they condition our experience in an originary or existential way or do they remain at the level of the merely ontic, the anthropological, the empirical? It would be hard to argue for their existential insignificance in the face of Julia Kristeva's powerful words in "Stabat Mater" on the experience of childbirth: "I confront the abyss between what was mine and is henceforth but irreparably alien. Trying to think through that abyss: staggering vertigo."⁶⁰ This natal discourse of Kristeva's is of course diametrically at odds with Edelman's rigorously anti-reproductive polemic, but the juxtaposition is instructive. First, it lays bare a certain ontological ultimacy, both material and existential, in which the "I" inexplicably and impossibly becomes "we," "you and I," "I and Thou," specifically from the perspective of a woman, and thus foregrounds an irreducible sexual difference. Second, it bespeaks the literalization of natality in the material becomings of the body (though let us not forget that at the heart of the natal scene there are also the mortal bodily risks involved with physical childbirth, as well as the immortalizing fantasies that are its hegemonic scaffold). The body with its vicissitudes—sexual, generative, and mortal—is the irreducible site, a monstrous site to be sure, on, in, and through which the existential traits move and pull.

Perhaps, then, we might call on Schürmann to help us to think through the disparates of sexual pleasure on the side of mortality and also bodily generativity on the side of natality, without denial or disavowal, or indeed the normative interpellations of heterosexuality. The queer feminist philosophical task, then, is to bring into existential purview the specifically feminine capacities of material generation in addition to, rather than instead of, the excessive bodily pleasures of

sexualities, rooted in the mortal movement of both toward singularization. There is something excessive, a mortal undertow, on both sides then—the side of the woman-mother and the side of the queer (who may be in fact on the same side, occupying the same body). Bodily facticity, material generativity, species-being, unconscious desires, and excessive *jouissance*—all of these irrupt in and through us despite the ideological and normative edifices of heteronormative reproductive futurity and phallic, masculine subjectivity, or the disembodied aspirations of a neutralized existential analytic. Bodies—masculine, feminine, and transgendered, sensitive and tender, vulnerable and precarious, aggressive and voracious, loving and desiring—conjoin and disperse, and sometimes generate and multiply. Schürmann may indeed assist feminist queers attempting think through the crises of heteronormative kinship in this era of the closure of Oedipus, the end of the epoch of that shadowy and persistent fantasm, the phallus, and its concomitant anxieties, circulated and relentlessly reproduced in our time in the form of “family values” by the Christian right. Attending to the violence of natality sharpens certain questions, such as whether and how the phenomenon of gay marriage resurrects and/or displaces the law of the father. Or how we are to think about the myriad forms of gender, sexual life, lineage, and domesticity clamoring in and around the contested space of the contemporary οἶκος, which in its intensive politicization both is and is not also a πόλις.

Finally, then, Schürmann will draw our attention to the uselessness of norms in figuring out how to think and act. A norm, in foregrounding and recommending some courses of action as well as constituting a world, must always rely on denial, on necessary blindness, on obscuring certain phenomena and rendering them unthinkable—herein lies what we might call its libidinal investment, without subscribing too rigorously to a libidinal economy of finitude. Rather, for Schürmann, there must be a fidelity to the πόλεμος of ultimates, an awareness of the evils that spring from such disavowals, coupled with the *Einsicht* (perspicacity, inspection, circumspection) of the phenomenologist who, by an attentive practice, may get through life without the accoutrements of thetic idealizations or norms. I want to end, therefore, by refusing Edelman’s reduction of an unthought futurity to normative heterosexuality, of the reduction of the *à-venir*, the future as the to-come, to the familial thesis, and by affirming the natality-mortality couplet *with* Schürmann as fundamentally asymmetric, non-oppositional, as *different*. The singularization to come carries us away from our dreams of progress and toward mortality, certainly, and in so doing discloses our corporeal fragility, our precarity, but also our polymorphous, protean, creative, unexpected ways of living, desiring, and generating, and our

necessary incommensurability with all prior determinations. We might then grasp toward a sort of exposure to what lies beyond normativity. Not, this time, through the transgressions of hubris or gigantomachia (representing natality's maximizations and leading to a deadening and thickening of the skin), but by attending instead to the affecting, broken, compelling call of living on and living in our disappointing, pleasurable, surprising bodies, with and through mortality.

NOTES

1. Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 19; henceforth BH, followed by page number.
2. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, 1981), vol. 2, p. 109.
3. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. and ed. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973), p. 235. See also Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols., trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 162–3. The question of whether money itself could be understood as a hegemonic fantasm, one that has persisted with great tenacity into our contemporary moment, is a question for another time.
4. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 4.
5. Works demonstrating this theme would include the remainder of the *Oresteia*, especially *Eumenides*; the *Oedipus* cycle, especially *Antigone*; Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata*.
6. The association of women with mortality has been often noted in feminism, perhaps most vividly described and diagnosed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard Madison Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989), esp. "Dreams, Fears, Idols," chap. 9.
7. Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. David Grene, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), vol. 1, l. 937, cited in BH 197.
8. Sophocles, *Antigone*, ll. 1337–8.
9. *Ibid.*, ll. 1334–5.
10. *Ibid.*, ll. 379–80.
11. BH 514. It is worth noting that Proteus was also the subject of Aeschylus' lost satyr play performed after the *Oresteia* at the Athenian festival.

12. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 2005), p. 103; quoted in BH 639n.30.
13. The claim that Greek tragedy consistently stages a passage to a particular configuration of patriarchy must not be mistaken for a Bachofenian thesis positing an archaic matriarchy, even though the resonances of Johann Jakob Bachofen's often keen readings of myth, tragedy, and mortuary symbolism, and in particular his identification of a productive agon between Dionysian and Apollonian elements in Greek culture, later and more famously popularized by Nietzsche, doubtless make themselves felt in this characterization. See Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).
14. Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 60.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
19. The question of the natality of Athens, in particular the relationship between autochthony and women, has been explored at length by Nicole Loraux, especially in *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes*, trans. Caroline Levine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and *Born of the Earth: Myth and Politics in Athens*, trans. Selina Stewart (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Loraux insists on the complexity of the relationship between women and the earth: "Metaphor? Analogy? Assimilation? As if these three rhetorical figures melt into one another, those who study this relationship seem often to use them interchangeably" (Loraux, *Born of the Earth*, p. 97). Her targets are numerous: Bachofen, B.C. Dietrich, and Jean-Pierre Vernant, whom, she argues, have taken up Plato's statement in the *Menexenus* that "it is not the earth which imitated women in conception and generation, but women the earth" (Plato, *Menexenus*, 237D3–238A5; cited in Loraux, *Born of the Earth*, p. 97), in a slapdash and reductive fashion. She convincingly demonstrates that the founding myths of Athens rely on autochthony—the earth, Γῆ, as mother (or father—fatherland, πατρίς) of a fraternal and democratic gens forming the citizenry of the πόλις, while the creation and involvement of women in the subsequent reproduction and sustenance of the city appears as a supplementary and problematic addendum. However, what I stress here is that it is specifically in tragedy (and also to some extent comedy) that the institution of kinship comes to the fore as a question and problem in itself, seeking to establish and consolidate the proper place of women in and for the city.
20. Loraux, *Born of the Earth*, pp. 1–12.
21. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, p. 81.

22. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1989), Z7, 1032a20–3.
23. Cavarero later makes a powerful argument for reproductive freedom on the basis of positing the female body as a sphere of inviolability, free from juridical power. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato*, p. 79–80.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
25. For a searching treatment of the gendered resonances of Iphigenia's death, see Christopher P. Long, "The Daughters of Metis: Patriarchal Dominion and the Politics of the Between," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 28:2 (2007), pp. 67–86.
26. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, trans. David Grene, in *Greek Tragedies*, 3 vols., ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), vol. 1, ll. 1251–79.
27. It may be noted here that yet another of Oedipus' doubles, Tiresias, is blinded in exchange for the gift of foresight, and that his blinding signifies less an inability to see the future than an opening to the future. However, what Tiresias envisions he does not posit—the events he foresees are destined, fated, and, as such, appear on the side of mortality, on the side of the inevitable undertow, rather than on the side of natality's productions.
28. Nicole Loraux, *The Experiences of Tiresias*, trans. Paula Wissing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 11. Especially in *Children of Athena* and *Born of the Earth*, Loraux explores the gendered stakes of the founding myths of Athens along the lines suggested in this argument.
29. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 41.
30. Sophocles, *Antigone*, l. 443; cited in Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, p. 8.
31. Cited in Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, p. 88n. 24.
32. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, p. 22. Carol Jacobs, "Dusting Antigone," *Modern Language Notes* 3:5 (1996), pp. 890–917, treats the Sentinel's trope of Antigone's returning to the empty nest at some length, and in comparison to Homer's *Odyssey*, as well as discussing the ways in which she both is and is not loyal to Jocasta, whose death by hanging she re-enacts, displacing as well as taking her place.
33. Sophocles, *Antigone*, l. 1191.
34. *Ibid.*, ll. 995–6.
35. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, p. 22.
36. Sophocles, *Antigone*, l. 1001.
37. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, p. 76. Butler notes that Oedipus, at Colonus, hails Antigone as a man.

38. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 74.
39. Ibid.
40. See Goux, *Symbolic Economies*.
41. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 75; emphasis in original.
42. To indicate a few of these by their current names: the queer, the bastard, the adoptee, the transgendered, the polyamorous, the celibate, the pervert, the barebacker, the slut, the single, the single parent, the orphan, the collective, the village it allegedly takes to raise a child, the divorced, the unmarried, the remarried, the roommate, the woman who refuses motherhood, the refugee, the exile, the detainee.
43. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). This formulation of the implication of the middle voice is derived from Philippe Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Basic Interpretation with Some Theological Implications* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), esp. chap. 1; and Émile Benveniste, "Active and Middle Voice in the Verb," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary E. MEEK (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 145–51.
44. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 148.
45. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 12.
46. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), p. 128.
47. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 29.
48. Ibid., p. 40.
49. For this formulation of the Oedipus complex, see Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), vol. 19, pp. 31–4.
50. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989).
51. Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, bk. 2 of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 66.
52. Ibid., p. 79.
53. Ibid., p. 326.
54. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973*, in *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, trans.

Bruce Fink, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 48.

55. Lacan, *Seminar II*, pp. 232–3.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

57. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 35.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

60. Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” trans. Louis S. Roudiez, in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 325.