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The postulation of a generalized precariousness that calls into question the ontology of individualism implies, although does not directly entail, certain normative consequences. It does not suffice to say that since life is precarious, therefore it must be preserved. At stake are the conditions that render life sustainable, and thus moral disagreements invariably center on how or whether these conditions of life can be improved and precarity ameliorated. But if such a view entails a critique of individualism, how do we begin to think about ways to assume responsibility for the minimization of precarity? If the ontology of the body serves as a point of departure for such a rethinking of responsibility, it is precisely because, in its surface and its depth, the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition. Its very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions, which means that in order to "be," in the sense of "persist," it must rely on what is outside itself. How can responsibility be thought on the basis of this socially ecstatic structure of the body? As something that, by definition, yields to social crafting and force, the body is vulnerable. It is not, however, a mere surface upon which social meanings are inscribed, but that which suffers, enjoys, and responds to

the exteriority of the world, an exteriority that defines its disposition, its passivity and activity. Of course, injury is one thing that can and does happen to a vulnerable body (and there are no invulnerable bodies), but that is not to say that the body's vulnerability is reducible to its injurability. That the body invariably comes up against the outside world is a sign of the general predicament of unwilled proximity to others and to circumstances beyond one's control. This "coming up against" is one modality that defines the body. And yet, this obtrusive alterity against which the body finds itself can be, and often is, what animates responsiveness to that world. That responsiveness may include a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering, hope, to name a few.

Such affects, I would argue, become not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and of critique.¹ In this way, a certain interpretive act implicitly takes hold at moments of primary affective responsiveness. Interpretation does not emerge as the spontaneous act of a single mind, but as a consequence of a certain field of intelligibility that helps to form and frame our responsiveness to the impinging world (a world on which we depend, but which also impinges upon us, exacting responsiveness in complex, sometimes ambivalent, forms). Hence, precariousness as a generalized condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world; responsiveness—and thus, ultimately, responsibility—is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world. Because such affective responses are invariably mediated, they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames; they can also call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames, and in that way provide the affective conditions for

1 See Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2003; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

social critique. As I have argued elsewhere, moral theory has to become social critique if it is to know its object and act upon it. To understand the schema I have proposed in the context of war, it is necessary to consider how responsibility must focus not just on the value of this or that life, or on the question of survivability in the abstract, but on the sustaining social conditions of life—especially when they fail. This task becomes particularly acute in the context of war.

It is not easy to turn to the question of responsibility, not least since the term itself has been used for ends that are contrary to my purpose here. In France, for instance, where social benefits to the poor and new immigrants have been denied, the government has called for a new sense of “responsibility,” by which it means that individuals ought not to rely on the state but on themselves. A word has even been coined to describe the process of producing self-reliant individuals: “responsibilization.” I am certainly not opposed to individual responsibility, and there are ways in which, to be sure, we all must assume responsibility for ourselves. But a few critical questions emerge for me in light of this formulation: am I responsible only to myself? Are there others for whom I am responsible? And how do I, in general, determine the scope of my responsibility? Am I responsible for all others, or only to some, and on what basis would I draw that line?

This is, however, only the beginning of my difficulties. I confess to having some problems with the pronouns in question. Is it only as an “I,” that is, as an individual, that I am responsible? Could it be that when I assume responsibility what becomes clear is that who “I” am is bound up with others in necessary ways? Am I even thinkable without that world of others? In effect, could it be that through the process of assuming responsibility the “I” shows itself to be, at least partially, a “we”?

But who then is included in the “we” that I seem to be, or to be part of? And for which “we” am I finally

responsible? This is not the same as the question: to which "we" do I belong? If I identify a community of belonging on the basis of nation, territory, language, or culture, and if I then base my sense of responsibility on that community, I implicitly hold to the view that I am responsible only for those who are recognizably like me in some way. But what are the implicit frames of recognizability in play when I "recognize" someone as "like" me? What implicit political order produces and regulates "likeness" in such instances? What is our responsibility toward those we do not know, toward those who seem to test our sense of belonging or to defy available norms of likeness? Perhaps we belong to them in a different way, and our responsibility to them does not in fact rely on the apprehension of ready-made similitudes. Perhaps such a responsibility can only begin to be realized through a critical reflection on those exclusionary norms by which fields of recognizability are constituted, fields that are implicitly invoked when, by a cultural reflex, we mourn for some lives but respond with coldness to the loss of others.

Before I suggest a way of thinking about global responsibility during these times of war, I want to distance myself from some mistaken ways of approaching the problem. Those, for instance, who wage war in the name of the common good, those who kill in the name of democracy or security, those who make incursions into the sovereign lands of others in the name of sovereignty—all consider themselves to be "acting globally" and even to be executing a certain "global responsibility." In the US we have heard in recent years about "bringing democracy" to countries where it is apparently lacking; we have heard, too, about "installing democracy." In such moments we have to ask what democracy means if it is not based on popular decision and majority rule. Can one power "bring" or "install" democracy on a people over whom it has no jurisdiction? If a form of power is imposed upon a people who do not choose that form of power,

then that is, by definition, an undemocratic process. If the form of power imposed is called "democracy" then we have an even larger problem: can "democracy" be the name of a form of political power that is undemocratically imposed? Democracy has to name the means through which political power is achieved as well as the result of that process. And this creates something of a bind, since a majority can certainly vote in an undemocratic form of power (as the Germans did when electing Hitler in 1933), but military powers can also seek to "install" democracy through overriding or suspending elections and other expressions of the popular will, and by means that are patently undemocratic. In both cases, democracy fails.

How do these brief reflections on the perils of democracy affect our way of thinking about global responsibility in times of war? First, we must be wary of invocations of "global responsibility" which assume that one country has a distinctive responsibility to bring democracy to other countries. I am sure that there are cases in which intervention is important—to forestall genocide, for instance. But it would be a mistake to conflate such an intervention with a global mission or, indeed, with an arrogant politics in which forms of government are forcibly implemented that are in the political and economic interests of the military power responsible for that very implementation. In such cases, we probably want to say—or at least I want to say—that this form of global responsibility is irresponsible, if not openly contradictory. We could say that in such instances the word "responsibility" is simply misused or abused. And I would tend to agree. But that may not be enough, since historical circumstances demand that we give new meanings to the notion of "responsibility." Indeed, there is a challenge before us to rethink and reformulate a conception of global responsibility that would counter this imperialist appropriation and its politics of imposition.

To that end, I want to return to the question of the "we" and think first about what happens to this "we" during

times of war. Whose lives are regarded as lives worth saving and defending, and whose are not? Second, I want to ask how we might rethink the “we” in global terms in ways that counter the politics of imposition. Lastly, and in the chapters to come, I want to consider why the opposition to torture is obligatory, and how we might derive an important sense of global responsibility from a politics that opposes the use of torture in any and all of its forms.²

So, one way of posing the question of who “we” are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others—even if it means taking those latter lives. After the attacks of 9/11, we encountered in the media graphic pictures of those who died, along with their names, their stories, the reactions of their families. Public grieving was dedicated to making these images iconic for the nation, which meant of course that there was considerably less public grieving for non-US nationals, and none at all for illegal workers.

The differential distribution of public grieving is a political issue of enormous significance. It has been since at least the time of Antigone, when she chose openly to mourn the death of one of her brothers even though it went against the sovereign law to do so. Why is it that

2 For this purpose, see Karen J. Greenberg, ed., *The Torture Debate in America*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Kim Scheppele, “Hypothetical Torture in the ‘War on Terrorism’,” *Journal of National Security Law and Policy* 1 (2005), 285–340.

governments so often seek to regulate and control who will be publicly grievable and who will not? In the initial years of the AIDS crisis in the US, the public vigils, and the Names Project³ broke through the public shame associated with dying from AIDS, a shame associated sometimes with homosexuality, and especially anal sex, and sometimes with drugs and promiscuity. It meant something to state and show the name, to put together some remnants of a life, to publicly display and avow the loss. What would happen if those killed in the current wars were to be grieved in just such an open way? Why is it that we are not given the names of all the war dead, including those the US has killed, of whom we will never have the image, the name, the story, never a testimonial shard of their life, something to see, to touch, to know? Although it is not possible to singularize every life destroyed in war, there are surely ways to register the populations injured and destroyed without fully assimilating to the iconic function of the image.⁴

Open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential. It is, after all, one of the reasons Plato wanted to ban the poets from the Republic. He thought that if the citizens went too often to watch tragedy, they would weep over the losses they saw, and that such open and public mourning, in disrupting the order and hierarchy of the soul, would disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority as well. Whether we are speaking about open grief or outrage, we are talking about affective responses that are highly regulated by regimes of power and sometimes subject to explicit censorship. In the contemporary wars in which the US

3 See Anthony Turney and Paul Margolies, *Always Remember: The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, New York: Fireside, 1996. See also, <http://www.aidsquilt.org>

4 David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

is directly engaged, those in Iraq and Afghanistan, we can see how affect is regulated to support both the war effort and, more specifically, nationalist belonging. When the photos of Abu Ghraib were first released in the US, conservative television pundits argued that it would be un-American to show them. We were not supposed to have graphic evidence of the acts of torture US personnel had committed. We were not supposed to know that the US had violated internationally recognized human rights. It was un-American to show these photos and un-American to glean information from them as to how the war was being conducted. The conservative political commentator Bill O'Reilly thought that the photos would create a negative image of the US and that we had an obligation to defend a positive image.⁵ Donald Rumsfeld said something similar, suggesting that it was anti-American to display the photos.⁶ Of course, neither considered that the American public might have a right to know about the activities of its military, or that the public's right to judge the war on the basis of full evidence is part of the democratic tradition of participation and deliberation. So what was really being said? It seems to me that those who sought to limit the power of the image in this instance also sought to limit the power of affect, of outrage, knowing full well that it could and would turn public opinion against the war in Iraq, as indeed it did.

5 "But Abu Ghraib was interesting. I got criticized by the *New York Times* for not running the pictures. And I told the audience, I'll tell you what happened. I'm not running them because I know—you know, we go all over the world. And I know as soon as I run them, Al Jazeera's going to pick them off *The Factor*, throw them on there and whip up anti-US feeling—and more people are going to get killed. So I'm not going to do it. You want to see them, you can see them someplace else. Not here." *The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News Channel, May 12, 2005.

6 See, for example, Greg Mitchell, "Judge Orders Release of Abu Ghraib Photos," *Editor and Publisher*, September 29, 2005, http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001218842

The question, though, of whose lives are to be regarded as grievable, as worthy of protection, as belonging to subjects with rights that ought to be honored, returns us to the question of how affect is regulated and of what we mean by the regulation of affect at all. The anthropologist Talal Asad recently wrote a book about suicide bombing in which the first question he poses is: Why do we feel horror and moral repulsion in the face of suicide bombing when we do not always feel the same way in the face of state-sponsored violence?⁷ He asks the question not in order to say that these forms of violence are the same, or even to say that we ought to feel the same moral outrage in relation to both. But he finds it curious, and I follow him here, that our moral responses—responses that first take form as affect—are tacitly regulated by certain kinds of interpretive frameworks. His thesis is that we feel more horror and moral revulsion in the face of lives lost under certain conditions than under certain others. If, for instance, someone kills or is killed in war, and the war is state-sponsored, and we invest the state with legitimacy, then we consider the death lamentable, sad, and unfortunate, but not radically unjust. And yet if the violence is perpetrated by insurgency groups regarded as illegitimate, then our affect invariably changes, or so Asad assumes.

Although Asad asks us to think about suicide bombing—something I won't do right now—it is also clear that he is saying something important about the politics of moral responsiveness; namely, that what we feel is in part conditioned by how we interpret the world around us; that how we interpret what we feel actually can and does alter the feeling itself. If we accept that affect is structured by interpretive schemes that we do not fully understand, can this help us understand why it is we might feel horror in the face of certain losses but indifference or even righteousness

7 Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

in light of others? In contemporary conditions of war and heightened nationalism, we imagine that our existence is bound up with others with whom we can find national affinity, who are recognizable to us, and who conform to certain culturally specific notions about what the culturally recognizable human is. This interpretative framework functions by tacitly differentiating between those populations on whom my life and existence depend, and those populations who represent a direct threat to my life and existence. When a population appears as a direct threat to my life, they do not appear as "lives," but as the threat to life (a living figure that figures the threat to life). Consider how this is compounded under those conditions in which Islam is seen as barbaric or pre-modern, as not yet having conformed to those norms that make the human recognizable. Those we kill are not quite human, and not quite alive, which means that we do not feel the same horror and outrage over the loss of their lives as we do over the loss of those lives that bear national or religious similarity to our own.

Asad wonders whether modes of death-dealing are apprehended differently, whether we object to the deaths caused by suicide bombing more forcefully and with greater moral outrage than we do to those deaths caused by aerial bombings. But here I am wondering whether there is not also a differential way of regarding populations, such that some are considered from the start very much alive and others more questionably alive, perhaps even socially dead (the term that Orlando Patterson developed to describe the status of the slave), or as living figures of the threat to life.⁸ But if war or, rather, the current wars, rely on and perpetuate a way of dividing lives into those that are worth defending, valuing, and grieving when they are lost, and those that are not quite lives, not quite valuable,

8 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

recognizable or, indeed, mournable, then the death of ungrievable lives will surely cause enormous outrage on the part of those who understand that their lives are not considered to be lives in any full and meaningful sense. So although the logic of self-defense casts such populations as “threats” to life as we know it, they are themselves living populations with whom cohabitation presupposes a certain interdependency among us. How that interdependency is avowed (or disavowed) and instituted (or not) has concrete implications for who survives, who thrives, who barely makes it, and who is eliminated or left to die. I want to insist on this interdependency precisely because when nations such as the US or Israel argue that their survival is served by war, a systematic error is committed. This is because war seeks to deny the ongoing and irrefutable ways in which we are all subject to one another, vulnerable to destruction by the other, and in need of protection through multilateral and global agreements based on the recognition of a shared precariousness. I think this is finally a Hegelian point, and one worth reiterating here. The reason I am not free to destroy another—and indeed, why nations are not finally free to destroy one another—is not only because it will lead to further destructive consequences. That is doubtless true. But what may be finally more true is that the subject that I am is bound to the subject I am not, that we each have the power to destroy and to be destroyed, and that we are bound to one another in this power and this precariousness. In this sense, we are all precarious lives.

After 9/11 we saw the development of the perspective according to which the “permeability of the border” represents a national threat, or indeed a threat to identity itself. Identity, however, is not thinkable without the permeable border, or else without the possibility of relinquishing a boundary. In the first case, one fears invasion, encroachment, and impingement, and makes a territorial claim in the name of self-defense. But in the

other case, a boundary is given up or overcome precisely in order to establish a certain connection beyond the claims of territory. The fear of survivability can attend either gesture, and if this is so, what does it tell us about how our sense of survivability is inevitably bound up with those we do not know, who may well not be fully recognizable according to our own national or parochial norms?

According to Melanie Klein, we develop moral responses in reaction to questions of survivability.⁹ My wager is that Klein is right about that, even as she thwarts her own insight by insisting that it is the ego's survivability that is finally at issue. Why the ego? After all, if my survivability depends on a relation to others, to a "you" or a set of "yous" without whom I cannot exist, then my existence is not mine alone, but is to be found outside myself, in this set of relations that precede and exceed the boundaries of who I am. If I have a boundary at all, or if a boundary can be said to belong to me, it is only because I have become separated from others, and it is only on condition of this separation that I can relate to them at all. So the boundary is a function of the relation, a brokering of difference, a negotiation in which I am bound to you in my separateness. If I seek to preserve your life, it is not only because I seek to preserve my own, but because who "I" am is nothing without your life, and life itself has to be rethought as this complex, passionate, antagonistic, and necessary set of relations to others. I may lose this "you" and any number of particular others, and I may well survive those losses. But that can happen only if I do not lose the possibility of any "you" at all. If I survive, it is only because my life is nothing without the life that exceeds me, that refers to some indexical you, without whom I cannot be.

My use of Klein here is decidedly un-Kleinian. Indeed, I believe she furnishes an analysis that compels us to move in a direction that Klein would and could never go. Let

9 Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States."

me consider for a moment what I think is right about Klein's insight, even as I have to disagree with Klein in her account of drives and of self-preservation and seek to develop a social ontology on the basis of her analysis—something she would have surely refused.

If guilt is linked to fears about survivability, then this suggests that, as a moral response, guilt references a pre-moral set of fears and impulses tied up with destructiveness and its consequences. If guilt poses a question for the human subject, it is not first and foremost a question of whether one is leading the good life, but of whether life will be livable at all. Whether conceived of as emotion or feeling, guilt tells us something about how the process of moralization occurs and how it deflects from the crisis of survivability itself. If one feels guilt at the prospect of destroying the object/the other to whom one is bound, the object of love and attachment, then it may be for reasons of self-preservation. If I destroy the other, then I destroy the one on whom I depend in order to survive, and so I threaten my own survival with my destructive act. If Klein is right, then, I probably don't care very much about the other person as such; they do not come into focus for me as another, separate from me, who "deserves" to live and whose life depends on my ability to check my own destructiveness. For Klein, the question of survival precedes the question of morality; indeed, it would seem that guilt does not index a moral relation to the other, but an unbridled desire for self-preservation. In Klein's view, I only want the other to survive so that I may survive. The other is instrumental to my own survival, and guilt, even morality, are simply the instrumental consequences of this desire for self-preservation, one that is threatened mainly by my own destructiveness.

Guilt would seem then to characterize a particular human capacity to assume responsibility for certain actions. I am guilty because I sought to destroy a bond that I require in order to live. Guilt appears to be a primarily

self-preservative impulse, one that may well be bound up with the ego, even though, as we know, Klein herself is no ego psychologist. One might read this drive for self-preservation as a desire to preserve oneself as a human; but because it is my survival that is threatened by my destructive potential, it seems that guilt refers less to any humanness than to life, and, indeed, to survivability. Thus, only as an animal who can live or die do any of us feel guilt; only for one whose life is bound up with other lives and who must negotiate the power to injure, to kill, and to sustain life, does guilt become an issue. Paradoxically, guilt—which is so often seen as a paradigmatically human emotion, generally understood to engage self-reflective powers and so to separate human from animal life—is driven less by rational reflection than by the fear of death and the will to live. Guilt thus disputes the anthropocentrism that so often underwrites accounts of the moral sentiments and instead establishes the *anthropos* as an animal seeking survival, but one whose survivability is a function of a frail and brokered sociality. Life is sustained not by a self-preserving drive, conceived as an internal impulse of the organism, but by a condition of dependency without which survival proves impossible, but which can also imperil survival depending on the form that dependency takes.

If we take Klein's point that destructiveness is the problem for the human subject, it would seem that it is also what links the human and non-human. This seems most acutely true in times of war when sentient life of all kinds is put at heightened risk, and it seems to me acutely true for those who have the power to wage war, that is, to become subjects whose destructiveness threatens whole populations and environments. So if I conduct a certain first-world criticism of the destructive impulse in this chapter, it will be precisely because I am a citizen of a country that systematically idealizes its own capacity for murder. I think it was in the film *Rush Hour 3* that, when the lead characters get into a taxi in Paris, the taxi driver

realizes they are Americans and expresses his enthusiastic interest in the impending American adventure.¹⁰ Along the way, he offers a keen ethnographic insight: “Americans!” he says, “They kill people for no reason!” Now, of course, the US government gives all kinds of reasons for its killings while at the same time refusing to call those killings “killings” at all. But if I undertake an inquiry into this question of destructiveness, and if I turn toward the question of precariousness and vulnerability, then it is precisely because I think a certain dislocation of perspective is necessary for the rethinking of global politics. The notion of the subject produced by the recent wars conducted by the US, including its torture operations, is one in which the US subject seeks to produce itself as impermeable, to define itself as protected permanently against incursion and as radically invulnerable to attack. Nationalism works in part by producing and sustaining a certain version of the subject. We can call it imaginary, if we wish, but we have to remember that it is produced and sustained through powerful forms of media, and that what gives power to their version of the subject is precisely the way in which they are able to render the subject’s own destructiveness *righteous* and its own destructibility *unthinkable*.

The question of how those relations or interdependencies are conceived is thus linked with whether and how we can extend our sense of political dependency and obligation to a global arena beyond the nation. Nationalism in the US has, of course, been heightened since the attacks of 9/11, but let us remember that this is a country that extends its jurisdiction beyond its own borders, that suspends its constitutional obligations within those borders, and that understands itself as exempt from any number of international agreements. It jealously guards its right to sovereign self-protection while making righteous incursions into other sovereignties or, in the case of

10 *Rush Hour 3*, dir. Brett Ratner, 2007.

Palestine, refusing to honor any principles of sovereignty at all. I want to emphasize that the move to affirm dependency and obligation outside the nation-state has to be distinguished from those forms of imperialism that assert claims of sovereignty outside the boundaries of the nation-state. This is not an easy distinction to make or to secure, but I think it presents an urgent and contemporary challenge for our times.

When I refer to a schism that structures (and de-structures) the national subject, I am referring to those modes of defense and displacement—to borrow a psychoanalytic category—that lead us, in the name of sovereignty, to defend a border in one instance and to violate it in another with impunity. The call to interdependency is also, then, a call to overcome this schism and to move toward the recognition of a generalized condition of precariousness. It cannot be that the other is destructible while I am not; nor vice versa. It can only be that life, conceived as precarious life, is a generalized condition, and that under certain political conditions it becomes radically exacerbated or radically disavowed. This is a schism in which the subject asserts its own righteous destructiveness at the same time as it seeks to immunize itself against the thought of its own precariousness. It belongs to a politics driven by horror at the thought of the nation's destructibility, or that of its allies. It constitutes a kind of unreasoned rift at the core of the subject of nationalism. The point is not to oppose destructiveness *per se*, to counter this split subject of US nationalism with a subject whose psyche wants always and only peace. I accept that aggression is part of life and hence part of politics as well. But aggression can and must be separated from violence (violence being one form that aggression assumes), and there are ways of giving form to aggression that work in the service of democratic life, including "antagonism" and discursive conflict, strikes, civil disobedience, and even revolution. Hegel and Freud both understood that the repression of destruction can

only happen by relocating destruction in the action of repression, from which it follows that any pacifism based on repression will have simply found another venue for destructiveness and in no way succeeded in its obliteration. It would further follow that the only other alternative is to find ways of crafting and checking destructiveness, giving it a livable form, which would be a way of affirming its continuing existence and assuming responsibility for the social and political forms in which it emerges. This would be a different labor than either repression or unbridled and "liberated" expression.

If I call for an overcoming of a certain schism in the national subject, it is not in the service of rehabilitating a unified and coherent subject. The subject is always outside itself, other than itself, since its relation to the other is essential to what it is (here, clearly, I remain, perversely, a Hegelian). So the following question emerges: how do we understand what it means to be a subject who is constituted in or as its relations, whose survivability is a function and effect of its modes of its relationality?

With these insights in mind, let us return to the question Asad poses to us about moral responsiveness. If just or justified violence is enacted by states, and if unjustifiable violence is enacted by non-state actors or actors opposed to existing states, then we have a way of explaining why we react to certain forms of violence with horror and to other forms with a sense of acceptance, possibly even with righteousness and triumphalism. The affective responses seem to be primary, in need of no explanation, prior to the work of understanding and interpretation. We are, as it were, against interpretation in those moments in which we react with moral horror in the face of violence. But as long as we remain against interpretation in such moments, we will not be able to give an account of why the affect of horror is differentially experienced. We will then not only proceed on the basis of this unreason, but will take it as the

sign of our commendable native moral sentiment, perhaps even of our "fundamental humanity."

Paradoxically, the unreasoned schism in our responsiveness makes it impossible to react with the same horror to violence committed against all sorts of populations. In this way, when we take our moral horror to be a sign of our humanity, we fail to note that the humanity in question is, in fact, implicitly divided between those for whom we feel urgent and unreasoned concern and those whose lives and deaths simply do not touch us, or do not appear as lives at all. How are we to understand the regulatory power that creates this differential at the level of affective and moral responsiveness? Perhaps it is important to remember that responsibility requires responsiveness, and that responsiveness is not a merely subjective state, but a way of responding to what is before us with the resources that are available to us. We are already social beings, working within elaborate social interpretations both when we feel horror and when we fail to feel it at all. Our affect is never merely our own: affect is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere. It disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others. But if a response is always a response to a perceived state of the world, what is it that allows some aspect of the world to become perceivable and another not? How do we re-approach this question of affective response and moral evaluation by considering those already operative frameworks within which certain lives are regarded worthy of protection while others are not, precisely because they are not quite "lives" according to prevailing (norms of recognizability)? Affect depends upon social supports for feeling: we come to feel only in relation to a perceivable loss, one that depends on social structures of perception; and we can only feel and claim affect as our own on the condition that we have already been inscribed in a circuit of social affect.

One might, for instance, believe in the sanctity of life or adhere to a general philosophy that opposes violent

action of all kinds against sentient beings, and one might invest powerful feelings in such a belief. But if certain lives are not perceivable as lives, and this includes sentient beings who are not human, then the moral prohibition against violence will be only selectively applied (and our own sentience will be only selectively mobilized). The critique of violence must begin with the question of the representability of life itself: what allows a life to become visible in its precariousness and its need for shelter, and what is it that keeps us from seeing or understanding certain lives in this way? The problem concerns the media, at the most general level, since a life can be accorded a value only on the condition that it is perceivable as a life, but it is only on the condition of certain embedded evaluative structures that a life becomes perceivable at all.

To perceive a life is not quite the same as encountering a life as precarious. Encountering a life as precarious is not a raw encounter, one in which life is stripped bare of all its usual interpretations, appearing to us outside all relations of power. An ethical attitude does not spontaneously arrive as soon as the usual interpretive frameworks are destroyed, and no pure moral conscience emerges once the shackles of everyday interpretation have been thrown off. On the contrary, it is only by challenging the dominant media that certain kinds of lives may become visible or knowable in their precariousness. It is not only or exclusively the visual apprehension of a life that forms a necessary precondition for an understanding of the precariousness of life. Another life is taken in through all the senses, if it is taken in at all. The tacit interpretive scheme that divides worthy from unworthy lives works fundamentally through the senses, differentiating the cries we can hear from those we cannot, the sights we can see from those we cannot, and likewise at the level of touch and even smell. War sustains its practices through acting on the senses, crafting them to apprehend the world selectively, deadening affect in response to certain images and sounds, and enlivening

affective responses to others. This is why war works to undermine a sensate democracy, restricting what we can feel, disposing us to feel shock and outrage in the face of one expression of violence and righteous coldness in the face of another. To encounter the precariousness of another life, the senses have to be operative, which means that a struggle must be waged against those forces that seek to regulate affect in differential ways. The point is not to celebrate a full deregulation of affect, but to query the conditions of responsiveness by offering interpretive matrices for the understanding of war that question and oppose the dominant interpretations—interpretations that not only act upon affect, but take form and become effective as affect itself.

If we accept the insight that our very survival depends not on the policing of a boundary—the strategy of a certain sovereign in relation to its territory—but on recognizing how we are bound up with others, then this leads us to reconsider the way in which we conceptualize the body in the field of politics. We have to consider whether the body is rightly defined as a bounded kind of entity. What makes a body discrete is not an established morphology, as if we could identify certain bodily shapes or forms as paradigmatically human. In fact, I am not at all sure we can identify a human form, nor do I think we need to. This view has implications for rethinking gender, disability, and racialization, to name a few of the social processes that depend upon the reproduction of bodily norms. And as the critique of gender normativity, able-ism, and racist perception have made clear, there is no singular human form. We can think about demarcating the human body through identifying its boundary, or in what form it is bound, but that is to miss the crucial fact that the body is, in certain ways and even inevitably, unbound—in its acting, its receptivity, in its speech, desire, and mobility. It is outside itself, in the world of others, in a space and time it does not control, and it not only exists in the vector of

these relations, but as this very vector.¹¹ In this sense, the body does not belong to itself.

The body, in my view, is where we encounter a range of perspectives that may or may not be our own. How I am encountered, and how I am sustained, depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which this body lives, how I am regarded and treated, and how that regard and treatment facilitates this life or fails to make it livable. So the norms of gender through which I come to understand myself or my survivability are not made by me alone. I am already in the hands of the other when I try to take stock of who I am. I am already up against a world I never chose when I exercise my agency. It follows, then, that certain kinds of bodies will appear more precariously than others, depending on which versions of the body, or of morphology in general, support or underwrite the idea of the human life that is worth protecting, sheltering, living, mourning. These normative frameworks establish in advance what kind of life will be a life worth living, what life will be a life worth preserving, and what life will become worthy of being mourned. Such views of lives pervade and implicitly justify contemporary war. Lives are divided into those representing certain kinds of states and those representing threats to state-centered liberal democracy, so that war can then be righteously waged on behalf of some lives, while the destruction of other lives can be righteously defended.

11 A given morphology takes shape through a specific temporal and spatial negotiation. It is a negotiation with time in the sense that the morphology of the body does not stay the same; it ages, it changes shape, it acquires and loses capacities. And it is a negotiation with space in the sense that no body exists without existing somewhere; the body is the condition of location, and every body requires an environment to live. It would be a mistake to say that the body exists in its environment, only because the formulation is not quite strong enough. If there is no body without environment, then we cannot think the ontology of the body without the body being somewhere, without some "thereness." And here I am not trying to make an abstract point, but to consider the modes of materialization through which a body exists and by means of which that existence can be sustained and/or jeopardized.

This schism serves several functions: it constitutes the disavowal of dependency and seeks to sideline any recognition that the generalized condition of precariousness implies, socially and politically, a generalized condition of interdependency. Although not all forms of precariousness are produced by social and political arrangements, minimizing the condition of precariousness in egalitarian ways remains one task for politics. War is precisely an effort to minimize precariousness for some and to maximize it for others. Our ability to respond with outrage depends upon a tacit realization that there is a worthy life that has been injured or lost in the context of war, and no utilitarian calculus can supply the measure by which to gauge the destitution and loss of such lives. But if we are social beings and our survival depends upon a recognition of interdependency (which may not depend on the perception of likeness), then it is not as an isolated and bounded being that I survive, but as one whose boundary exposes me to others in ways that are voluntary and involuntary (sometimes at once), an exposure that is the condition of sociality and survival alike.

The boundary of who I am is the boundary of the body, but the boundary of the body never fully belongs to me. Survival depends less on the established boundary to the self than on the constitutive sociality of the body. But as much as the body, considered as social in both its surface and depth, is the condition of survival, it is also that which, under certain social conditions, imperils our lives and our survivability. Forms of physical coercion are precisely the unwilling imposition of force on bodies: being bound, gagged, forcibly exposed, ritually humiliated. We might then ask what, if anything, accounts for the survivability of those whose physical vulnerability has been exploited in this way. Of course, the fact that one's body is never fully one's own, bounded and self-referential, is the condition of passionate encounter, of desire, of longing, and of those modes of address and addressability upon

which the feeling of aliveness depends. But the entire world of unwilling contact also follows from the fact that the body finds its survivability in social space and time; and this exposure or dispossession is precisely what is exploited in the case of unwilling coercion, constraint, physical injury, violence.

I would like to consider this question of survivability under conditions of war by considering briefly the recently published collection, *Poems from Guantánamo*, which includes twenty-two poems that survived the censorship of the US Department of Defense.¹² In fact, most of the poems written by Guantánamo detainees were either destroyed or confiscated, and were certainly not allowed to be passed onto the lawyers and human-rights workers who put together this slim volume. There were apparently 25,000 lines of poetry written by Shaikh Abdurraheem Muslim Dost that were destroyed by military personnel. When the Pentagon offered its rationale for the censorship, it claimed that poetry “presents a special risk” to national security because of its “content and format.”¹³ One has to wonder what it is about the content and format of poetry that seems so incendiary. Could it really be that the syntax or form of a poem is perceived as a threat to the security of the nation? Is it that the poems attest to the torture? Or is it that they explicitly criticize the United States, for its spurious claim to be a “protector of peace,” or its irrational hatred of Islam? But since such criticisms could be made in editorials or prose, what is it about the poetry that seems particularly dangerous?

Here are two stanzas from a poem entitled “Humiliated in the Shackles,” by Sami al-Haj, who was tortured at US prisons in Bagram and Kandahar before

12 Marc Falkoff, ed., *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.

13 Mark Falkoff, “Notes on Guantánamo,” in *Poems from Guantánamo*, 4.

being transferred to Guantánamo, from where he was recently released:

I was humiliated in the shackles.

How can I now compose verses? How can I now write?

After the shackles and the nights and the suffering and
the Tears,

How can I write poetry?¹⁴

Al-Haj attests to being tortured, and asks how he can form words, make poetry, after such humiliation. And yet, the very line in which he questions his ability to make poetry is its own poetry. So the line enacts what al-Haj cannot understand. He writes the poem, but the poem can do no more than only openly query the condition of its own possibility. How does a tortured body form such words? Al-Haj is also asking how it can be that poetry can come from a tortured body, and how the words emerge and survive. His words move from the condition of torture, a condition of coercion, to speech. Is it the same body that suffers torture and that forms the words on the page?

The forming of those words is linked with survival, with the capacity to survive, or survivability. Let us remember that at the beginning of their detention, prisoners in Guantánamo would engrave short poems on cups they had taken away from their meals. The cups were Styrofoam and so not only cheap, the very emblem of cheapness, but also soft, so that prisoners would have no access to glass or ceramics which could more easily be used as weapons. Some would use small rocks or pebbles to engrave their words on the cups, passing them from cell to cell; and sometimes toothpaste was used as a writing instrument. Apparently, as a sign of humane treatment, they were later given paper and proper writing

14 Ibid., 41.

'tools, but the work done with those tools was for the most part destroyed.

Some of the writings contain bitter political commentary. For instance, the opening poem by Shaker Abdurraheem Aamer:

Peace, they say.
Peace of mind?
Peace on earth?
Peace of what kind?

I see them talking, arguing, fighting—
What kind of peace are they looking for?
Why do they kill? What are they planning?

Is it just talk? Why do they argue?
Is it so simple to kill? Is this their plan?

Yes, of course!
They talk, they argue, they kill—
They fight for peace.¹⁵

It is with perspicacious irony that Aamer concludes that they “fight for peace.” But what marks this poem out is the number of questions Aamer puts into poetic form, that he asks out loud, and the mixture of horror and irony in the question at the poem’s center: “Is it so simple to kill?” The poem moves between confusion, horror, and irony, and concludes by exposing the hypocrisy of the US military. It focuses on the schism in the public rationality of the poet’s captors: they torture in the name of peace, they kill in the name of peace. Although we do not know what the “content and format” of the censored poems might have been, this one seems to revolve around the repeated and open question, an insistent horror, a drive toward exposure.

15 Ibid., 20.

(Indeed, the poems make use of lyric genres that are part of Koranic scripture as well as formal features of Arab nationalist poetry, which means they are citations—so when one poet speaks, he invokes a history of speakers and at that moment establishes himself, metaphorically speaking, in their company.)

The unreasoned schism that structures the military field of affect cannot explain its own horror at the injury and loss of life sustained by those representing the legitimate nation-state, or its righteous pleasure at the humiliation and destruction of those others not organized under the sign of the nation-state. The lives of those at Guantánamo do not count as the kind of “human lives” protected by human-rights discourse. The poems themselves offer a different kind of moral responsiveness, a kind of interpretation that may, under certain conditions, contest and explode the dominant schisms running through the national and military ideology. The poems both constitute and convey a moral responsiveness to a military rationale that has restricted moral responsiveness to violence in incoherent and unjust ways. Thus we can ask: what affect is verbally conveyed by these poems, and what set of interpretations do they deliver in the form of affects, including longing and rage? The overwhelming power of mourning, loss, and isolation becomes a poetic tool of insurgency, even a challenge to individual sovereignty. Ustad Badruzzaman Badr writes:

The whirlpool of our tears
Is moving fast towards him
No one can endure the power of this flood¹⁶

No one can endure, and yet these words arrive, as tokens of an unfathomable endurance. In a poem called “I Write My Hidden Longing,” by Abdulla Majid al-Noaimi, each stanza is structured through the rhythm of suffering and appeal:

16 Ibid., 28.

My rib is broken, and I can find no one to heal me
 My body is frail, and I can see no relief ahead¹⁷

But perhaps most curious are the lines in the middle of the poem in which al-Noaimi writes:

The tears of someone else's longing are affecting me
 My chest cannot take the vastness of emotion¹⁸

Whose longing is affecting the speaker? It is someone else's longing, so that the tears seem not to be his own, or at least not exclusively his own. They belong to everyone in the camp, perhaps, or to someone else, but they impinge upon him; he finds those other feelings within him, suggesting that even in this most radical isolation, he feels what others feel. I do not know the syntax in the original Arabic, but in English "My chest cannot take the vastness of emotion" suggests that the emotion is not his alone, but of a magnitude so great that it can originate with no one person. "The tears of someone else's longing"—he is, as it were, dispossessed by these tears that are in him, but that are not exclusively his alone.

So what do these poems tell us about vulnerability and survivability? They interrogate the kinds of utterance possible at the limits of grief, humiliation, longing, and rage. The words are carved in cups, written on paper, recorded onto a surface, in an effort to leave a mark, a trace, of a living being—a sign formed by a body, a sign that carries the life of the body. And even when what happens to a body is not survivable, the words survive to say as much. This is also poetry as evidence and as appeal, in which each word is finally meant for another. The cups are passed between the cells; the poems are smuggled out of the camp. They are appeals. They are efforts to re-

17 Ibid., 59.

18 Ibid., 59.

establish a social connection to the world, even when there is no concrete reason to think that any such connection is possible.

In the epilogue to the collection, Ariel Dorfman compares the writings of the Guantánamo poets to those of Chilean writers under the Pinochet regime. Although clearly mindful of the ways in which the poetry conveys the conditions of the camp, Dorfman calls attention to something else about the poems:

What I sense is that the ultimate source of these poems from Guantánamo is the simple, almost primeval, arithmetic of breathing in and out. The origin of life and the origin of language and the origin of poetry are all there, in the first breath, each breath as if it were our first, the anima, the spirit, what we inspire, what we expire, what separates us from extinction, minute after minute, what keeps us alive as we inhale and exhale the universe. And the written word is nothing more than the attempt to make that breath permanent and secure, *carve it into rock* or mark it on paper or sign it on a screen, so that its cadence will endure beyond us, outlast our breath, break the shackles of solitude, transcend our transitory body [*las cadenas precarias de la soledad*] and touch someone with its waters.¹⁹

19 *Poems*, p. 71. In the original: "Porque el origen de la vida y el origen del lenguaje y el origen de la poesía se encuentran justamente en la aritmética primigenia de la respiración; lo que aspiramos, exhalamos, inhalamos, minuto tras minuto, lo que nos mantiene vivos en un universo hostil desde el instante del nacimiento hasta el segundo anterior a nuestra extinción. Y la palabra escrita no es otra cosa que el intento de volver permanente y seguro ese aliento, marcarlo en una roca o estamparlo en un pedazo de papel o trazar su significado en una pantalla, de manera que la cadencia pueda perpetuarse más allá de nosotros, sobrevivir a lo que respiramos, romper las cadenas precarias de la soledad, trascender nuestro cuerpo transitorio y tocar a alguien con el agua de su búsqueda." *Poemas desde Guantánamo: Los detenidos hablan*, Madrid: Atalaya, 2008.

The body breathes, breathes itself into words, and finds some provisional survival there. But once the breath is made into words, the body is given over to another, in the form of an appeal. In torture, the body's vulnerability to subjection is exploited; the fact of interdependency is abused. The body that exists in its exposure and proximity to others, to external force, to all that might subjugate and subdue it, is vulnerable to injury; injury is the exploitation of that vulnerability. But this does not mean that vulnerability can be reduced to injurability. In these poems, the body is also what lives on, breathes, tries to carve its breath into stone; its breathing is precarious—it can be stopped by the force of another's torture. But if this precarious status can become the condition of suffering, it also serves the condition of responsiveness, of a formulation of affect, understood as a radical act of interpretation in the face of unwilled subjugation. The poems break through the dominant ideologies that rationalize war through recourse to righteous invocations of peace; they confound and expose the words of those who torture in the name of freedom and kill in the name of peace. In these poems we hear "the precarious cadence of solitude." This reveals two separate truths about the body: as bodies, we are exposed to others, and while this may be the condition of our desire, it also raises the possibility of subjugation and cruelty. This follows from the fact that bodies are bound up with others through material needs, through touch, through language, through a set of relations without which we cannot survive. To have one's survival bound up in such a way is a constant risk of sociality—its promise and its threat. The very fact of being bound up with others establishes the possibility of being subjugated and exploited—though in no way does it determine what political form that will take. But it also establishes the possibility of being relieved of suffering, of knowing justice and even love.

The Guantánamo poems are full of longing; they sound the incarcerated body as it makes its appeal. Its

breathing is impeded, and yet it continues to breathe. The poems communicate another sense of solidarity, of interconnected lives that carry on each others' words, suffer each others' tears, and form networks that pose an incendiary risk not only to national security, but to the form of global sovereignty championed by the US. To say that the poems resist that sovereignty is not to say that they will alter the course of war or will ultimately prove more powerful than the military power of the state. But the poems clearly have political consequences—emerging from scenes of extraordinary subjugation, they remain proof of stubborn life, vulnerable, overwhelmed, their own and not their own, dispossessed, enraged, and perspicacious. As a network of transitive affects, the poems—their writing and their dissemination—are critical acts of resistance, insurgent interpretations, incendiary acts that somehow, incredibly, live through the violence they oppose, even if we do not yet know in what ways such lives will survive.