

Subjective Rupture: An Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Subjective Transformation

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the phenomenon of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, focussing in particular on the questions of how such change and transformation might come about, and of what it might entail for the subject's experience of self and world. Building on work from the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, I not only inquire into the disruptive (and transformative) potential of extreme, emotionally significant experiences, but also construct a conceptual framework for characterizing the changes and transformations that such experiences can provoke. After establishing this framework as a means of addressing the questions above, I deploy it in relation to the models of subjective transformation set forth by Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, demonstrating how it helps to enrich these models by contributing to a more expansive understanding of their dynamics and implications on the level of subjective consciousness.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One	11
Subversive Resignification and the Authentic Act	12
Butler and Žižek's Preoccupation with the Condition of Subjection	17
Approaching Subjective Transformation from a Different Perspective	24
Chapter Two	27
Subjective Consciousness	30
The Normative Equilibrium of Consciousness	43
The Dynamics of Rupture and Reconsolidation	62
Subjective Transformation	83
Chapter Three	96
Bataille and the Movement of Sovereignty	98
Foucault and the Limit-Experience	105
Return to Butler and Žižek	113
Conclusion	127
Notes	133
Works Cited	147

Introduction

In its broadest aspect, the inquiry that I will conduct in this paper concerns a phenomenon with which we are all intimately acquainted: namely, that of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. More specifically, this inquiry concerns the question of how extreme, emotionally significant experiences can contribute to such change and transformation, how they can bring about profound and lasting changes to one's experience of self and world. As I reflect on this question, moreover, I sense that it encourages us to contemplate the crux of an experiential dynamic with which the vast majority of us can relate. After all, who among us cannot recall personal experiences that, to a greater or lesser degree, seemed not only to forcibly alter the course of their lives, but also to precipitate lasting or semi-permanent changes to their everyday phenomenal experience of themselves, of their world, and of their place within it? Or, at the very least, who among us cannot recall personal experiences that "jarred" them out of their daily litanies of rituals and routines, out of their habitual patterns of thought and behaviour, such that they felt as though nothing in their lives would ever be quite the same—even if only to look back, at some point down the road, and conclude that whatever change they experienced had subsequently been paved over, and that everything had eventually returned to "normal"? Indeed, whether such impressions of change and transformation do in fact prove to be lasting (as might be the case with the birth of one's child, or with the death of a loved one), or whether they seem eventually to dissipate and fade away into nothing (as might be the case with the beginning of a new love, or with the end of an old one), who among us can honestly say that they cannot relate to any of

the myriad experiences which might provoke such impressions (without also implying that they may not have lived long or hard enough to do so, in the first place)?

And yet, while we may be able to relate to such change and transformation on a personal level, how well do we actually understand it? After all, if we claim to understand it on the basis of our own lived experiences, then we must also recognize that such an understanding is contingent upon a host of heterogeneous factors, including the array of unique experiences that make up our lived histories, the distinctive intersubjective and socio-cultural contexts in which these experiences took place, and the various ways in which these experiences and contexts have shaped the particularities of our individual dispositions and personal systems of belief. Since these heterogeneous factors ensure that each of us will relate to the phenomenon of change and transformation in a different way, they suggest that a personal understanding of this phenomenon is insufficient to the task of discussing it within a more general context. Moreover, these factors also implicitly undermine the very basis on which we might lay claim to such a personal understanding, as the manner in which we relate to our lived experiences is inherently mutable, and our recollections of these experiences are necessarily distorted by mnemonic embellishments and elisions. Perhaps most important, however, is the sense that such an understanding is merely intuitive, and fails to provide adequate insight into the dynamics and implications of the relation between extreme, emotionally significant experiences and the changes and transformations that they can provoke. That is, while such an understanding may enable us to ascertain that this relation exists, it provides no tangible, generally applicable means of addressing the questions of precisely *how* such

changes and transformations might come about, and of exactly *what* they might entail for one's experience of self and world.

The primary concern of this paper will be to provide a means of addressing these questions, not only inquiring into the capacity of extreme experiences to precipitate change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, but also constructing a conceptual framework that might help us to characterize the dynamics and implications of such change and transformation. Before we can elaborate on what this framework will entail, however, we must first address one of the fundamental presuppositions of my argument: namely, the distinction between subjective consciousness and the condition of subjection. *Subjective consciousness* refers to the subject's phenomenal experience of herself and her world, an area of inquiry which is traditionally associated with the study of phenomenology, and which has been dealt with extensively by thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty (to name only a few of the more obvious examples). We will undertake a detailed discussion of subjective consciousness later, but, for now, suffice it to say that the conception of subjective consciousness that we will deploy here is unconventionally expansive: rather than being limited to the mental contents that the subject experiences directly at a given moment in time, it encompasses aspects of her phenomenal experience that function largely (if not entirely) outside the bounds of her immediate conscious awareness. In elaborating this conception, we will not only utilize a phenomenological method, but also draw heavily upon recent work from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, and thereby take advantage of an opportunity that was not available to the thinkers above. While this conception includes aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience that could be described as *nonconscious*

(in the terminology of cognitive science), moreover, we should note from the outset that these aspects bear no direct relation to the psychological phenomena traditionally associated with the psychoanalytic unconscious.

Broadly speaking, *the condition of subjection* refers to the means by which human beings are constituted as subjects, in the first place—to the material and socio-ideological forces that not only instigate the formation of the subject, but also engender particular modes of subjection that maintain her subordination to these forces (e.g., as the subject of power, or the subject of lack). This area of inquiry figures prominently in the work of Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault—again to name only a few examples, and albeit in very different ways—and it has since attracted a great deal of interest from those working within the field of critical theory (including Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, among many others). Of course, subjective consciousness and the condition of subjection are fundamentally interrelated: one cannot discuss subjective consciousness without recognizing that it always-already bears the influence of different modes of subjection; and, similarly, one cannot discuss the condition of subjection without recognizing that it presupposes the existence of subjective consciousness (as the experiential domain in which particular modes of subjection necessarily inhere). At the same time, however, the distinction between these categories has important epistemological implications, for they each entail a different perspective on the subject as such. On the one hand, when we consider the subject from the perspective of subjective consciousness, we prioritize her experience of self and world over questions about how this experience is itself constructed through her interactions within a complex socio-ideological environment. On the other hand, when we consider the subject from the perspective of the condition of

subjection, we prioritize the ways in which this environment shapes and acts upon the subject (e.g., language, ideology, power relations) over questions about the more strictly phenomenal aspects of her experience of self and world.

The distinction between these perspectives is crucial because they each lead to a different understanding of *subjective transformation*, and will therefore figure prominently throughout our discussion in this paper. Indeed, depending on whether we consider the phenomenon of subjective transformation in terms of subjective consciousness, on the one hand, or with regard to the condition of subjection, on the other, we arrive at two distinct understandings of what such transformation might entail. Thus, considered from the perspective of subjective consciousness, subjective transformation pertains to a significant and lasting change to the subject's experience of herself and her world. Considered from the perspective of the condition of subjection, however, subjective transformation pertains to a transformation of the subject as such, at least insofar as it entails a kind of radical undoing of that which constitutes the subject as a subject, in the first place. To clarify these divergent understandings of subjective transformation, we need only look to the extreme, emotionally significant experiences mentioned above. For instance, while the loss of a loved one might constitute a momentous event in the life of the subject, and while this loss might bring about profound, enduring changes to her experience of self and world, it is important to recognize that these changes need not (and likely will not) drastically alter that which maintains her in a condition of subjection. In terms of the thinkers mentioned above, then, these changes to her subjective consciousness can come about without altering the sense in which she remains subject to Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser), to the

big Other (Lacan), and to relations of power-knowledge (Foucault). While these changes may well alter the subject's *relation to* these modes of subjection, in other words, we should maintain the distinction between such moderate alterations and the more radical eventuality of transforming (and perhaps even undoing) these modes of subjection themselves—and it is this same distinction which asserts itself between the two meanings of subjective transformation outlined above, distinguishing that which occurs on the level of subjective consciousness from that which concerns the condition of subjection.

Our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation will involve the simultaneous elaboration of *subjective rupture*, a conceptual framework which will help us to characterize the dynamics and implications of this phenomenon on the level of subjective consciousness. Since this phenomenon constitutes such an expansive and radically heterogeneous area of inquiry, the framework of subjective rupture should be understood as a heuristic device, one that aims to facilitate exploration and discovery, rather than to explain in a determinate way. As with the expansive conception of subjective consciousness outlined above, our elaboration of this framework will lead us to engage extensively with work from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology. Although we cannot undertake a comprehensive description of this framework at this early stage of our discussion, we can at least provide a cursory account of its principal components, the most important of which include the normative equilibrium of consciousness and the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation. On the one hand, the normative equilibrium of consciousness corresponds to a complex and variegated state of psychical functioning, a state which develops over the course of the subject's conscious existence, manifests itself in different ways (and to varying degrees)

at a given moment in time, and not only contributes to the sense of intimate familiarity that permeates the subject's phenomenal experience of herself and her world, but also exerts a constraining influence on the way that she feels, thinks, and behaves in particular situations. On the other hand, the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation correspond to moments when the disruptive potential of a particular experience exerts itself over against this equilibrium, and the interrelation between these dynamics can be characterized according to a twofold progression, one that begins with a state of initial rupture and shifts subsequently to a process of reconsolidation, and that thereby creates the potential for change and transformation. This account of the framework of subjective rupture is regrettably reductive, and we will refine it considerably in the second chapter of this paper, but, nonetheless, it at least helps to show how this framework will provide a means of both conceptualizing how such change and transformation might come about and contemplating what it might entail for the subject's experience of self and world.

Apart from facilitating our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation, however, subjective rupture will also allow us to extend our inquiry to the extant criticism on subjective transformation, to show how this framework might enhance disparate efforts to think such transformation in terms of the condition of subjection. This second aspect of our inquiry will involve an engagement with the work of Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, each of whom has set forth a different model of subjective transformation that approaches the eventuality of such transformation primarily from the perspective of the condition of subjection. As such, although each of these thinkers defines the condition of subjection in a different way, and although the particular content of their respective models differs accordingly, the *form* of

each of these models shares important similarities with that of the others—at least insofar as they are all predicated on the effort to theorize change and transformation with regard to the condition of subjection, and are thus more concerned with the means by which human beings are constituted as subjects (and maintained in their subjection) than with the subject’s phenomenal experience of self and world. As we will see, this shared concern with the condition of subjection opens the way for a productive intervention, as it effectively prevents these thinkers from elaborating on precisely what their respective models of subjective transformation might entail on the level of subjective consciousness. And this intervention conveys the full scope of what we will attempt to accomplish with subjective rupture: not merely to provide a means of conceptualizing the dynamics and implications of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, but also (and by extension) to establish a functional conceptual framework that might be deployed in relation to disparate models of subjective transformation—with the aim here being to vicariously bolster these models by drawing out their implications for the subject’s experience of self and world. Thus, while we will explore the phenomenon of subjective transformation from the perspective of subjective consciousness, we will neither discount nor undermine the positions of those who have theorized such transformation from the perspective of the condition of subjection. On the contrary, we will demonstrate that the former perspective is important in its own right, and that any model of subjective transformation would benefit from taking both of these perspectives into account.

Our discussion in this paper will be divided into three chapters. In Chapter One, we will situate the framework of subjective rupture in relation to contemporary criticism,

undertaking a sustained engagement with Butler and Žižek's respective models of subjective transformation, and arguing that both of these models evince a problematic preoccupation with the condition of subjection. Once we have identified the array of problems that arise from this preoccupation, moreover, we will suggest that these problems underline the need for a different approach, thereby opening the way for the productive intervention outlined above. Then, in Chapter Two, we will initiate this intervention through our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation, focussing specifically on how the disruptive (and transformative) potential of extreme, emotionally significant experiences manifests itself on the level of subjective consciousness. Over the course of this inquiry, we will not only set forth an expansive conception of subjective consciousness, but also establish the framework of subjective rupture, elaborating both the normative equilibrium of consciousness and the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation, and ultimately elucidating their significance to subjective transformation. Finally, in Chapter Three, we will demonstrate the theoretical utility of this framework, deploying it in relation to the models proposed by Bataille, Foucault, Butler, and Žižek, and showing how it not only provides a useful supplement to their respective discussions, but also helps to enrich the forms of subjective transformation that they endorse by contributing to a more expansive understanding of what they might entail on the level of subjective consciousness.

To reiterate, then, we will establish the framework of subjective rupture as a means of facilitating our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation. On the one hand, this inquiry will involve an exploration of the dynamics and implications of this phenomenon, an exploration which will focus on how extreme, emotionally

significant experiences can precipitate profound and lasting alterations to the subject's experience of herself and her world, and which will coincide with our elaboration of the framework of subjective rupture itself. On the other hand, this inquiry will involve a consideration of the extant criticism on subjective transformation, a consideration which will lead us not only to engage with the models proposed by Bataille, Foucault, Butler, and Žižek, but also to deploy the framework of subjective rupture in relation to these models, to deploy it with a view to elucidating their dynamics and implications on the level of subjective consciousness. In pursuing each of these objectives, moreover, our intention will be to promote a broader (and thus more inclusive) theoretical perspective on the phenomenon of subjective transformation, one that seeks to understand this phenomenon without becoming preoccupied with the concerns of a radical or emancipatory politics, and that therefore refuses to privilege either the radical forms of subjective transformation that Butler and Žižek advocate or the (ostensibly) less radical forms endorsed by Bataille and Foucault, preferring instead to view each of their positions as valuable in its own right. As such, this paper will entail an insistence that the subject emphatically *is* susceptible to lasting transformation (whether radical or moderate); that such transformation should be considered not only with regard to the condition of subjection, but also on the level of subjective consciousness; and that the effort to elaborate the dynamics and implications of such transformation is a matter of theoretical importance.

Chapter One

Though it is hardly unique to our times, the effort to think the eventuality of subjective transformation has perhaps taken on a new importance within the coordinates of the contemporary intellectual situation, where fears abound regarding the coddled complacency that seems to define and delimit the general contours of subjectivity in the contemporary West, and where there has arisen a correlative interest in considering how this complacency might be shaken, how the principles that undergird it might be altered or transformed. Indeed, ever since Michel Foucault's arresting account of the disciplinary production of the subject in Discipline and Punish, many thinkers have contemplated the possibility of being or existing otherwise, occasionally going so far as to propose radical theoretical models of subjective transformation through which the condition of subjection might be mitigated. The work of Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek is of particular interest, in this regard, as they have each proposed such a model of subjective transformation, and they each enjoy a position of prominence within the fields of contemporary cultural, social, and political thought. Although many differences separate the models proposed in their discussions of subversive resignification and the authentic act, these models are nonetheless united insofar as they are both limited by a problematic preoccupation with the condition of subjection. As we shall see, Butler and Žižek not only frame this condition according to their respective understandings of what constitutes the most fundamental level of subjection, but also establish the radical political potential of their models by casting them as attempts to address this level. This shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection stems from Butler and Žižek's respective ideological commitments to queer theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, commitments which

ultimately come to inflect their models with an inherent negativity. More importantly, in focussing exclusively on the condition of subjection, and in explicitly orienting their models toward the prospect of mitigating this condition, Butler and Žižek disregard the level of subjective consciousness, thereby neglecting to discuss an important aspect of the very forms of subjective transformation that they respectively endorse. Given that these models have been discussed by various critics over the past decade, moreover, it is perhaps surprising that this aspect has continued to be comprehensively ignored. In what follows, then, I will endeavour to show that these models of subjective transformation are marked by Butler and Žižek's shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection, a preoccupation which not only manifests itself in their decision to elide the level of subjective consciousness, but which also gives rise to two problematic aspects of the models themselves: namely, their variously radical and emancipatory character, on the one hand, and their overly negative, exclusionary privileging of a particular ideological position, on the other.

Subversive Resignification and the Authentic Act

In The Psychic Life of Power,¹ Butler poses an interesting question concerning Foucault's discussion of subjectivation in Discipline and Punish, inquiring as to whether we should be satisfied with "a resistance that can only undermine, but which appears to have no power to rearticulate the terms . . . by which subjects are constituted, by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject" (88-89). That is, Butler takes issue with Foucault's formulation of a resistance that allows for the subversion of processes of subjectivation without addressing the more fundamental condition of subjection itself, proposing her notion of subversive "resignification" as an alternative

form of resistance which might enable a rearticulation of this condition, or of what she terms the subject's "passionate attachment to subjection" (105). Butler frames this "attachment to subjection" in psychoanalytic (or, better, Althusserian) terms: the subject comes into being on the basis of "injurious interpellations" that "constitute identity through injury," and, because any term that aids in the constitution of identity must also exert a powerful narcissistic allure, the subject necessarily develops a "passionate attachment" both to these interpellations and to subjection, more generally (104-105). But these "injurious interpellations [can] also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification"; and it is precisely this notion of radical (or subversive) "resignification" that Butler proposes as a form of resistance which might "rework and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection without which subject formation—and re-formation—cannot succeed" (104-105). In The Ticklish Subject,² Žižek expresses a similar dissatisfaction with a "resistance that can only undermine," not only criticizing Foucault's insistence "on the immanence of resistance to Power," but also asserting that "Lacan leaves open the possibility of a radical rearticulation of the entire symbolic field by means of an *act* proper" (262). Thus, after critiquing Butler's subversive resignifications on the grounds that they remain within the purview of the hegemonic big Other, Žižek argues that the most fundamental level of subjection (what Lacan terms "fundamental fantasy") can only be "traversed," and that this traversing (or "gaining a distance towards") is only possible through the more radical gesture of the authentic Lacanian act (266). As Žižek goes on to explain, an authentic act alters "the very standard by which we measure and value our activity," and it does so precisely by "disturbing" the fundamental fantasy that serves "as the ultimate framework of our world-experience"

(307). Although Butler and Žižek continue this debate in Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, moreover, the crux of their respective arguments does not change.³

As was mentioned above, these ostensibly opposed positions are linked by a common thread: namely, a determination to bypass the level of subjective consciousness, to focus instead on the more fundamental condition of subjection itself, and to theorize how this condition might be mitigated (if at all). Although Butler and Žižek articulate this distinction between subjective consciousness and the condition of subjection in different ways, the form of the distinction and the manner in which they deploy it is essentially the same: Butler's subversive resignifications aim to rearticulate the terms "by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject," thereby bypassing the level of subjectivity *qua* "the lived and imaginary experience of the subject" (122); and similarly, Žižek's authentic acts aim to traverse "the *fundamental fantasy* that serves as the ultimate support of the subject's being," thereby bypassing the level of subjectivity *qua* "*symbolic identification*" and "the symbolic identity we assume" only after disavowing this ultimate support (266). While they utilize slightly different understandings of subjective consciousness and disagree over what constitutes the most fundamental level of subjection, then, both Butler and Žižek draw a distinction between two levels of subjectivity proper, and they explicitly orient their models of subjective transformation toward the level which they see as the more fundamental of the two. For Butler, this level is roughly correlative to the subject's (unconscious) "passionate attachment to subjection," and this attachment is cultivated by the injurious interpellations through which the subject obtains her symbolic identity. As we have seen, moreover, Butler's notion of radical/subversive resignification is essentially an attempt to theorize how the

subject might “rework and unsettle” this passionate attachment—how the subject might disrupt the incessant stream of injurious interpellations that sustain this attachment, turning them to her own advantage through the subversive deployment of performative reconfigurations, and thereby potentially rearticulating the terms “by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject.” For Žižek, this more fundamental level is none other than the fundamental fantasy which “serves as the ultimate support of the subject’s being,” the “hard phantasmic core” which sustains this being only insofar as it remains “primordially repressed,” masking the gap or void at the heart of the subject, and thereby securing her incorrigible propensity for “*symbolic identification*” (265-66). And, needless to say, the authentic act is defined precisely by its capacity to disturb this “phantasmic core,” by its capacity to facilitate a traversing of this (primordially repressed) structuring principle of the subject’s being, and to thereby engender the possibility of retroactively altering “the ultimate framework of [her] world-experience.” In short, then, when Butler proposes how “the possibilities of resignification” might “rework and unsettle the passionate attachment to subjection” (105), and when Žižek proposes how an act proper might disturb “the very fundamental fantasy” that constitutes “the ultimate framework of our world-experience,” the implication is that they are both concerned more with the condition of subjection than with subjectivity *qua* consciousness, more with the means “by which subjects are constituted” as subjects than with “the lived and imaginary experience of the subject” as such.

Although neither Butler nor Žižek explicitly refers to these formulations as “models of subjective transformation,” this term is evoked implicitly by the very language with which they characterize these formulations. When Butler moves to

consider the practical implications of unsettling the subject's passionate attachment to subjection, for instance, she goes so far as to claim such an eventuality would ultimately involve a kind of abnegation of the subject's identity. Indeed, if it were to be successful (in a teleological sense), radical/subversive resignification would constitute a failure of the interpellations by which the subject comes into existence, and would thus demand "a willingness *not* to be—a critical desubjectivation" (130). As such, Butler casts her notion of resignification as a more radical form of resistance than the one formulated by Foucault, conferring upon it the capacity to unsettle the subject's passionate attachment to subjection, and perhaps even to open the way toward a "desubjectivized domain" which might entail "a more open, even more ethical, kind of being, one of or for the future" (131). When Žižek sets out to explain the relation between the authentic act and "the subject's (agent's) identity" in Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, moreover, he goes so far as to claim that an act proper redefines "the very core of [our] identity," that "it transforms the very coordinates of the disavowed phantasmic foundation of our being" (124). Thus, although the act cannot hope to *abolish* the condition of subjection *qua* fundamental fantasy (as such an abnegation is not countenanced by Lacan), the mere disturbance or traversing of this "phantasmic foundation" nonetheless entails a profound capacity for transformation with regard to the subject's symbolic identity. With these claims in mind, then, it would be difficult to dispute that Butler and Žižek's respective formulations of subversive resignification and the authentic act, despite never being explicitly described as such, nonetheless amount to *de facto* models of subjective transformation. After all, does Butler's discussion of subversive resignification not explicitly gear itself toward the prospect of precipitating a "re-formation" of the subject,

at least insofar as she gestures toward the eventual repudiation of the subject's narcissistic, primordial attachment to the symbolic identity conferred upon her by injurious interpellations? And does Žižek's discussion of the act proper not consist of an explicit attempt to articulate the dynamics (and limits) of subjective transformation within Lacan's theoretical edifice? Regardless, we can at least see that this debate between Butler and Žižek corresponds closely with the parameters outlined above: for, although they define the condition of subjection in different ways, they each formulate models of subjective transformation that attempt to address this more fundamental level of subjectivity proper, thereby evincing a certain preoccupation with the possibility of somehow unsettling or disturbing the condition of subjection itself.

Butler and Žižek's Preoccupation with the Condition of Subjection

The emphatically radical character of these models stems from Butler and Žižek's shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection, and this preoccupation coincides with their respective critiques of Foucault. As was alluded to earlier, both Butler and Žižek frame their discussions in terms of a departure from Foucault, first critiquing his formulation of resistance to processes of subjectivation (in Discipline and Punish), and then endeavouring to resolve this deficiency by proposing more radical alternatives. Butler's departure from Foucault culminates in her claim that his account of the disciplinary production of the subject, and particularly of the possibilities for resistance that this production opens up, offers no means for mitigating "the disciplinary cultivation of *an attachment to subjection*" (102). This claim not only serves as the basis for Butler's turn to psychoanalysis, but also helps to explain her preoccupation with the condition of subjection: for, after thus rejecting Foucault's formulation of "a resistance that can only

undermine,” she necessarily sets herself the task of articulating a more radical form of resistance in its place; and, in order to accomplish this task, she must first show that the subject’s “passionate attachment” constitutes a more fundamental level of subjection than the one that Foucault identifies in his discussion of processes of subjectivation—as it is only after she has identified this more fundamental level that she can articulate her more radical form of resistance, proposing how radical/subversive resignifications might unsettle the subject’s attachment to subjection. Consequently, the whole thrust of Butler’s argument becomes constrained by the need to articulate a more radical form of resistance, and this need not only leads to her preoccupation with moving beyond the level of subjectivation (and instead addressing the primordial/unconscious “passionate attachment” that precedes Foucault’s processes of subjectivation), but also to some extent predetermines the radical character of the response that she formulates to address this more fundamental level. Žižek’s discussion of the authentic act is framed in terms of a twofold critique: after rejecting Foucault’s insistence on “the immanence of resistance to Power,” he proceeds to take issue with Butler’s formulation of resistance through resignification, arguing that “such practices [of performative reconfiguration] ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very field of such ‘transgressions’ is already taken into account, even engendered, by the hegemonic form of the big Other” (264). Similar to Butler’s critique of Foucault, then, Žižek’s critique of Butler effectively necessitates his articulation of a *still more* radical form of resistance than her notion of subversive resignification. And thus he too becomes preoccupied with the condition of subjection, with showing that the Lacanian “fundamental fantasy” constitutes a more fundamental level of subjection than the one that Butler identifies through her turn to

Althusserian interpellation. Moreover, and again in a similar fashion to Butler, it is only after he has identified this fundamental level that he can extol the still more radical credentials of the authentic act, contending that an act proper potentially precipitates a “radical rearticulation of the entire symbolic field” into which it intervenes, thereby avoiding the hegemonic cooptation which befalls Butler’s subversive resignifications. As such, we can see that Butler and Žižek’s shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection not only arises through their critiques of Foucault, but also leads them to propose models of subjective transformation that become implicated in their attempts to articulate a more radical form of resistance, such that the formal dynamics of these models are constrained by their respective architect’s commitment to making them serve the purposes of a radical or emancipatory politics.

Unfortunately, while this commitment certainly allows Butler and Žižek to imbue their models of subjective transformation with a sense of radical potentiality, it also leads them into a kind of theoretical impasse. Indeed, one might even argue that this commitment to radical/emancipatory politics leads Butler and Žižek to situate the eventuality of subjective transformation in an as-yet-unimaginable beyond: Butler entertains the possibility that subversive resignifications might open the way to a future “desubjectivized domain”; and Žižek emphasizes the authentic act’s capacity to transform “the disavowed phantasmic foundation of our being,” stressing that such a transformation cannot properly be conceived until after it has come to pass (CHU 124). Thus, whereas Butler’s notion of subversive resignification seems radical insofar as it aims to precipitate a “re-formation” (and eventual “desubjectivation”) of the subject, her discussion of this model of subjective transformation leads not to any discernible resolution of the problem

that she set out to address (that of unsettling the subject's "passionate attachment to subjection"), but rather to a projection of this resolution onto a vague and distant point in the future. And we encounter a similarly evasive tactic in Žižek's discussions of the authentic act: for, given the inherent difficulty (if not impossibility) of conceptualizing a gesture that radically rearticulates "the entire symbolic field" into which it intervenes, Žižek (understandably) defers offering any tangible examples of what an act proper might entail within the coordinates of a given subject's symbolic identity. Although he provides a number of examples with regard both to situations in which the subject encounters a "forced choice" and to "the domain of politics proper," for instance, he is reluctant to provide any such examples with regard to "the subject's (agent's) identity" (CHU 122-23). As such, aside from a number of negative statements about what the authentic act does "not simply," "not only," and "not merely" achieve, Žižek's only positive indications of what might constitute an act with regard to the subject's identity are altogether elusive: an act proper doesn't merely "redraw the contours" of the subject's symbolic identity, it "transforms the spectral dimension that sustains this identity," redefining the phantasmic core of the subject's being (CHU 124). For both Butler and Žižek, then, there is a sense in which the very radical potentiality of their models leads them into an elaborate theoretical impasse, at least insofar as the forms of subjective transformation that they propose are so radical as to elude all but the most abstract faculties of conceptualization. That is, in establishing the radical *form* of their models, Butler and Žižek effectively prevent themselves from imbuing these models with any tangible, particular *content*; and, accordingly, the radical potentiality of these models

(rather paradoxically) ends up diminishing their capacity to characterize the possibilities for subjective transformation in the present.

But if this impasse is directly attributable to the radical potentiality of these models, it is also more broadly attributable to the basis of this potentiality: namely, to Butler and Žižek's critiques of Foucault and attendant preoccupation with the condition of subjection. As we have seen, these critiques constrain Butler and Žižek to articulate more radical alternatives to Foucault's formulation of resistance (to processes of subjectivation), thereby not only prompting their preoccupation with the condition of subjection, but also to some extent predetermining the radical character of the models that they endorse. Rather than merely point out that Butler and Žižek's critiques of Foucault thereby constitute the indirect root causes of the above theoretical impasse, however, we should note here that both these critiques and the preoccupation they lead to raise two additional issues, each of which exacerbates this theoretical impasse in a more direct, immediate way. The first of these issues concerns the seemingly negative bent of Butler and Žižek's argumentation: for, in criticizing Foucault's formulation of the possibilities for subjective transformation on the basis that it is not radical enough, they both become preoccupied with articulating more radical alternatives, expending much of their forceful argumentation in an effort to distinguish their respective positions (both from that of one another and from that of Foucault). Moreover, one could argue that this negative aspect of Butler and Žižek's argumentation stems not only from their critiques of Foucault, but also from their preoccupation with the condition of subjection, as their disagreement over what constitutes this more fundamental level is (at least partially) attributable to their respective ideological commitments to queer theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis: for

Butler, this level pertains to the formation of subjection through the prohibition of homosexual desire (through the coercive, normalizing injunctions of injurious interpellations); for Žižek, this level pertains to the Lacanian notion of fundamental fantasy. The very intractability of this disagreement—the fact that, despite their lengthy discursive engagements with one another, this disagreement is never resolved—speaks both for the strength of these commitments and for their contribution to the negative bent of Butler and Žižek’s argumentation. And this brings us to the second issue: namely, the sense that these ideological commitments not only contribute to this negativity, but also serve to install this negativity in the very models of subjective transformation that Butler and Žižek endorse. In other words, when Butler proposes her notion of subversive resignification as a means of combating the normalizing injunctions of injurious interpellations, and when Žižek proposes the Lacanian act proper as a means of disturbing the phantasmic core of the subject’s being, they each explicitly align these models with their respective ideological commitments—such that the models themselves inherently privilege a particular ideological position (and are thus marked by an inherent negativity).

These issues contribute to the above theoretical impasse in two distinct ways. With regard to the first issue, the negative character of Butler and Žižek’s argumentation is evident in their efforts to establish the radical (political) credentials of their models of subjective transformation, to dispute one another’s positions (as well as that of Foucault), and to defend the interests of their own ideological commitments—efforts which each consequently distract them from so much as recognizing this impasse. In terms of the second issue, the inherent negativity of these models is apparent in their explicit

orientation toward ideologically inflected understandings of the condition of subjection, an orientation which conspires to limit them in advance. That is, insofar as they serve the purposes of Butler's and Žižek's ideological positions, these models become more exclusive than inclusive, foreclosing on a wealth of potential connections with other such positions, and thereby diminishing their own capacity to account for the eventuality of subjective transformation, more generally. Whereas the former issue is logistical, preventing them from recognizing (let alone addressing) the theoretical impasse that they encounter (due to their demanding rota of alternative argumentative responsibilities), the latter issue is conceptual, and leads them to elide the many similarities between their models (for to emphasize such similarities would be to compromise their respective ideological commitments). Regardless, each of these issues relates back to Butler and Žižek's preoccupation with the condition of subjection: for, as we have seen, this preoccupation manifests itself not only in their critiques of Foucault and attendant determination to elaborate a more radical form of resistance, but also in their disagreement over what constitutes the most fundamental level of subjection. And these twin manifestations in turn engender the two main problems that beset Butler and Žižek's models of subjective transformation: namely, the ruse of radical potentiality (which renders them resistant to the conferral of any tangible, particular content, thereby [paradoxically] hampering their capacity to characterize change and transformation in the present) and the inherent negativity of ideological partisanship (which forces each model to serve the purposes of an exclusive ideological position).

Approaching Subjective Transformation from a Different Perspective

Aside from inciting this impasse, however, Butler and Žižek's decision to focus exclusively on the condition of subjection (and bypass the level of subjective consciousness) also leads them to defer elucidating a crucial aspect of the models that they respectively set forth. That is, while they orient their models of subjective transformation toward the radical eventuality of unsettling/disturbing the condition of subjection, and while this eventuality could not come to pass without precipitating some form of transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, the dynamics and implications of such transformation—the questions of precisely *how* it might come about, and of exactly *what* it might entail for the subject's experience of self and world—are but a secondary consequence of the fundamental question that Butler and Žižek set out to address, and are therefore not dealt with explicitly in either of their arguments. However, this decision to disregard the level of subjective consciousness in turn opens the way for a potentially productive intervention. After all, given that Butler and Žižek's preoccupation with the condition of subjection leads them to formulate models of subjective transformation which, due both to their radical potentiality and to their inherent negativity, ultimately arrive at an elaborate theoretical impasse, would it not be prudent to explore a completely different approach? In other words, could we not avoid this preoccupation with the condition of subjection, opting instead to approach the phenomenon of subjective transformation from the perspective of subjective consciousness? And would this different approach not also allow us to formulate a rather different model of subjective transformation, one that might attend more closely to the subject's phenomenal experience of self and world, and perhaps even provide a more

positive framework for conceptualizing the dynamics and implications of such transformation?

With these conjectures in mind, and with all due respect to Butler and Žižek, we will pursue precisely such an approach, not only inquiring into the phenomenon of subjective transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, but also constructing a framework for conceptualizing its dynamics and implications. This inquiry will require us to investigate aspects of subjective transformation that Butler and Žižek do not set out to address, aspects which we will approach not through psychoanalytic theory, but rather through a blend of phenomenology, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience. Moreover, the framework that we will construct over the course of this inquiry will be more inclusive (and thus more positive) than the models of subjective transformation advanced by Butler and Žižek, as it will be oriented toward the subject's experience of self and world, and will therefore provide a means of enriching disparate meditations on the prospect of mitigating the condition of subjection by exploring the correlative prospect of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. Rather than privileging a particular ideological position or rejecting the views of others as somehow not radical or emancipatory enough, then, subjective rupture will help to characterize the dynamics and implications of such change and transformation from a broader perspective, as well as to bolster the efforts of various thinkers who have considered the eventuality of subjective transformation primarily in terms of the condition of subjection—including Butler and Žižek, as well as Bataille and Foucault. (And we will return to this latter endeavour during our discussion of the theoretical utility of subjective rupture, in Chapter Three). In short, the framework of subjective rupture will privilege a

wide array of experiences as potential sites of change and transformation—sites which are characterized not by their capacity to liberate the subject from its “passionate attachment to subjection” (or from any other formulation of the condition of subjection), but rather by their capacity to precipitate profound and lasting alterations to her experience of self and world. While this approach is admittedly less radical than those adopted by Butler and Žižek, perhaps it might prove all the more productive for its relative modesty, providing a more positive means of characterizing the possibilities for subjective transformation in the present.

Chapter Two

It is difficult to imagine a more expansive, complex, and radically heterogeneous phenomenon than that of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. The many differences that make every individual's experience of self and world relatively unique, the host of experiences that might constitute transformative events for a particular individual, the diversity of possible responses to these experiences, the multiplicity of materially conditioned contexts in which these experiences might occur—each of these factors must be taken into account if one hopes to discuss such change and transformation with even a semblance of rigour. Since subjective consciousness itself constitutes an important object of study in a variety of different fields (from classical philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology to contemporary critical theory and cognitive science), moreover, one could argue that its discursive coordinates are rather less stable than those of the psychoanalytic unconscious, if only because it can be described from such a diverse array of disciplinary perspectives. In light of these considerations (and the analytical difficulties they present), our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation will involve the simultaneous elaboration of *subjective rupture*, a conceptual framework which will help us to address each of the factors above, as well as to develop a means of characterizing the dynamics and implications of this phenomenon. This inquiry should be understood as a preliminary investigation, rather than as an attempt to arrive at a conclusive account of subjective transformation as such; and, similarly, the framework that we will develop over the course of this inquiry should be understood as a heuristic device, one that aims to facilitate further investigation and discovery by providing a means of characterizing and

evaluating such transformation, and yet that refuses to present itself as the sole or definitive means of doing so.

Although particular instances of subjective rupture are necessarily heterogeneous, they share at least two points in common: namely, the disruption of the normative equilibrium of consciousness and the consequent potential to precipitate change and transformation. Our elaboration of the framework of subjective rupture will therefore involve three main objectives: first, to establish a working definition of the normative equilibrium of consciousness; second, to consider how this equilibrium might be susceptible to disruption; and third, to explore the extent to which such disruption might in turn enhance the potential for change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. In pursuing each of these objectives, we will devote considerable attention to the work of prominent neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux, and Walter J. Freeman. Without holding up this work as a paradigm of empirical “truth,” and without overlooking its inherent limitations, we will use it to inform our elaboration of the framework of subjective rupture (and our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation, more generally). This is not to ignore the distinction between the brain and the mind, but rather to speculate on the relation between the two. Indeed, our engagement with this work is predicated on the monistic view that Jennifer Hosek and Walter Freeman advocate in “The Neurodynamic, Intentional Self,”⁴ where they contend that “the mind in all its multidimensional facets—its capacities for imagination, subjective apprehension of the world, and what humans call the sublime—is a biological process” (515). This monistic view regards the mind and the brain as two different perspectives on the same phenomenon, and yet it does so without denying our present

inability to explain the relation between them, without succumbing to the reductionist temptation of simply positing a direct correlation between the mental contents that animate the mind and the biological processes that occur in the brain (at least not as we presently understand them). For the purposes of our argument in this chapter, then, the “hard problem” of consciousness (the explanatory gap that currently separates extant scientific knowledge of the brain from consciousness *qua* subjective experience) is of little consequence: for, if we accept that the qualia of subjective experience, despite being currently intangible to science, nonetheless originate from biological processes in the brain—if we accept, in other words, that the mind is *not* a separate substance (as this paper most certainly does)—then there is nothing to prevent us from speculating about the mind on the basis of what we know about the brain. As such, while we will maintain two levels of description (one for neurobiological research on the brain, and another for subjective consciousness), we will not allow the gap that separates them to prevent us from contending that the one will inform the other—or, more precisely, that changes to neurobiological processes in the brain will necessarily accompany change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, that what we know about the former might therefore help to enhance our understanding of the latter, and that the potential interrelations between the two provide ample grounds for speculative analysis. Before we can proceed with our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation, however, we must first establish precisely how “subjective consciousness” will be deployed here.

Subjective Consciousness

In invoking the term “subjective consciousness,” I am following the OED definition of “subjective” as an adjective meaning “proceeding from or taking place within the subject”—with “the subject” here understood as the modern philosophical term for the “*conscious or thinking subject*,” the “self or ego” to which “all mental representations or operations are attributed.” Moreover, I understand the category of “the subject” as a kind of placeholder, as a strictly formal category which stands in place of particular individuals, and which therefore lacks any particular content until it is considered in relation to a given individual.⁵ In its turn, “subjective consciousness” can also be understood as a kind of empty, formal category, one that provides us with a means of discussing what is by definition a private, solipsistic phenomenon in a way that simultaneously allows for comparisons to be drawn between different individuals. That is, while this category recognizes the private, solipsistic nature of one’s phenomenal experience of self and world, it rests on the assumption that this experience nonetheless shares important formal similarities with that of other individuals, and that these similarities are significant enough to justify the attempt to consider this experience in general (independent of the particular guises that it might assume in relation to a given individual). And so, without discounting the sense that one can never directly “know” the consciousness of another, this category allows us to contemplate the phenomenal experience of self and world in a more expansive context. The task of defining the second semantic component of “subjective consciousness” is slightly more complex, however, as “consciousness” not only carries with it an array of different connotations, but also refers

to a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, one that we cannot adequately define without covering more ground.

The conception of subjective consciousness that we will deploy here is heavily indebted to Antonio Damasio's notion of "extended consciousness," which he sets forth in The Feeling of What Happens,⁶ an expansive and erudite meditation on different aspects of consciousness and their relation to different facets of the self. Building on his earlier discussions of "core consciousness" and its relation to the "core self" (which together account for human sentience, for the primordial sense of self that undergirds the entire spectrum of human experience), Damasio proceeds to delineate the higher reaches of human consciousness, which he describes in terms of the relation between "extended consciousness" and the "autobiographical self." Whereas *core consciousness* pertains to the sense that, even in the most transient of experiences, a conscious organism interprets incoming stimuli in a self-referential way (e.g., the basic ontological sensation that an experience is happening to "you" *qua* sentient being), *extended consciousness* pertains to the means by which such experiences are recorded and classified in autobiographical memory, as well as to the means by which the resulting agglomeration of these memories comes to constitute the broader experiential canvas of the autobiographical self.⁷ Extended consciousness thus "provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self—an identity and a person, you or me, no less—and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it" (16). As each new experience is recorded and classified in autobiographical memory, moreover, the subject's autobiographical self not only

undergoes continual modifications over the course of her conscious existence, but also frames and colours each successive moment of her phenomenal experience.⁸

Given that both these continual modifications and their cumulative influence on the subject's phenomenal experience are crucially dependent on learning, conventional memory, and working memory, we should perhaps undertake a brief explication of these terms and of their significance to Damasio's notion of extended consciousness, more generally. Within the taxonomical purview of cognitive neuroscience, *learning* and *conventional memory* essentially refer to the encoding and storage of information about a given experience through the modification of the synaptic connections that link together the billions of neurons in the human brain. As Joseph LeDoux explains in Synaptic Self,⁹ these synaptic connections not only constitute "the main channels of information flow and storage in the brain," but also form elaborate ensembles (or "patterns of interconnectivity") that, at their highest level of complexity, make up the neural systems that control all of the functions performed by the brain (2). Remarkably, most of these systems are "plastic" (which is to say that "the synapses involved are changed by experience"), and this characteristic of synaptic plasticity is shared by the systems involved in "sensory function, motor control, emotion, motivation, arousal, visceral regulation, and thinking, reasoning, and decision-making" (8, 303). We will undertake a more detailed discussion of synaptic plasticity in the next section of this chapter, but, for now, suffice it to say that *learning* pertains to the immediate, experience-dependent modifications enabled by the brain's capacity for synaptic plasticity, whereas *conventional memory* pertains more to the storage, consolidation, and (re)classification of these initial modifications, as well as to their implicit and explicit manifestations.

The terms *implicit* and *explicit* refer to a distinction that is frequently utilized by researchers working in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, and that is especially important to the study of learning and memory. Broadly speaking, all of the processes that occur in the brain are *implicit*, which is to say that they are inaccessible to consciousness; however, many of these implicit neurobiological processes precipitate *explicit* effects that can be experienced directly on the level of conscious awareness. Though we can experience the feelings of happiness or sadness directly, for instance, we are necessarily unaware of the implicit processes that make these feelings possible, such as the release of neuromodulators throughout the different regions of the brain, or the manifold ways in which these modulators influence neural circuits and systems. In terms of conventional memory, the implicit/explicit distinction basically functions as an extension of this hard-and-fast distinction between implicit processes and their explicit effects. As Damasio explains, *all* of the information stored in conventional memory is necessarily *implicit* (or not available to consciousness), constituting a kind of vast, dormant reservoir of the records (or neural “dispositions”) stored by various brain systems during each of the subject’s past experiences; and yet, on the other hand, many of these records can be activated in such a way that they generate *explicit* neural patterns, which are the neurobiological basis for all of the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness, including sensations, perceptions, feelings, abstract thoughts or ideas, and remembered facts or experiences (331-32). In the parlance of cognitive science, these mental contents are generally referred to as *mental images* or *representations*. For Damasio, moreover, when a given mental representation “gets to be known in the consciousness process,” it is inflected by its relationship to the individual in question, and

thus becomes an “object” (20)—which is to say that, when a mental representation is consciously apprehended, it is necessarily inflected by an array of explicit neural patterns, each of which arises from implicit records that have been created and revised on the basis of past experiences, and which therefore helps to imbue the experience of this representation with a degree of idiosyncratic particularity.¹⁰ At the same time, many of the implicit records stored during the subject’s past experiences *cannot* generate explicit neural patterns, and these records also exert a profound influence on each moment of the subject’s conscious, waking existence, except that they do so covertly, manifesting themselves primarily in the way that we perform specific actions (the *way* that we walk, talk, think, feel, and react, for instance), rather than in the mental contents that we can experience directly on the level of conscious awareness. Broadly speaking, then, those records that *cannot* generate the explicit neural patterns that give rise to consciously accessible mental representations are grouped under the heading of *implicit memory*, whereas those that *can* generate such patterns are grouped under the heading of *explicit memory*—or, put another way, implicit memories necessarily exert their influence at one remove, as this influence does not manifest itself directly on the level of conscious awareness, whereas explicit memories correspond to all of the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness as such.¹¹ And, of course, during any significant experience in which the subject is awake and attentive, the neural systems involved in processing the various aspects of this experience (and its significance to the subject) will encode information both implicitly and explicitly, which means that explicit memories are always accompanied by a kind of implicit mnemonic residue.

Explicit memories of past experiences can be further divided into *episodic* and *semantic* memories, with the former referring to memories of unique, lived experiences that can be consciously revisited (and, to some extent, relived), and the latter referring to memories of particular facts that can be consciously recalled—and, of course, these categories overlap insofar as episodic memories can also be stored as semantic memories (but not the other way around).¹² Moreover, the degree to which the memory of a past experience can be classified as episodic (that is, the degree to which the subject can consciously revisit it, rather than simply recall that it occurred) depends largely on the amount of neural activity that the experience elicited at the time of its occurrence, as well as on the amount of activity that it elicits *after* its occurrence, through subsequent reactivations of the implicit records in which it is stored (and consequent reconstructions of the memory into consciously accessible mental representations)—a process which further ingrains the information encoded during the initial experience, and yet also enables the revision of this information on the basis of subsequent experiences. The point here is not only that, for the most part, the subject's capacity to form and recall explicit memories of past experiences tends to function especially well with regard to experiences that are significant to her lived past and projected future (as these experiences elicit a considerable amount of neural activity at the time of their occurrence, and are subsequently reconstructed with a degree of frequency), but also that the explicit memories of such experiences play a crucial role in forming the idiosyncratic fabric of her subjective consciousness.¹³ That said, the mental representations that arise from explicit memories need not command the subject's full conscious attention: rather, these representations constitute the experiential backdrop for whatever happens to command

the subject's attention during a given moment in time—and this is where working memory comes in to complete the picture.

Working memory pertains to the mind's capacity not only to directly apprehend and manipulate a limited number of objects at a given time, but also to simultaneously hold active an array of mental representations that remain outside the scope of the subject's immediate conscious awareness; and, on the level of neural function, this latter aspect of working memory corresponds to the brain's capacity to integrate these objects with the information stored in conventional memory, and particularly with the explicit memories that are most significant to the subject's lived past, projected future, and sense of self-identity. As such, although the limits of working memory ensure that the subject can only focus on so many things at once, there is always an excess of explicit effects circulating outside of these limits, and this excess exerts a profound and multifaceted influence on each successive moment of the subject's phenomenal experience, regardless of what she happens to be focussing on at the time. Even when we are not acutely or immediately aware that we are feeling happy or sad, for instance, these feelings nonetheless have the potential to suffuse our subjective consciousness: though an engaging conversation with a close friend might engender a wave of happiness, we might subsequently return to our work with a renewed sense of vigour, and thus not consciously recognize that we are feeling happy until long after bidding our friend farewell (even though the feeling was making itself felt all the while). Damasio contends that the explicit memories that pertain to one's sense of self-identity function in much the same way, such that, during "any moment of our waking and conscious lives, a consistent set of identity records is being made explicit in such a way that it forms a backdrop for our

minds and can be moved to the foreground rapidly if the need arises”—and the neural counterpart to this process is the creation of implicit records “on the basis of which the brain can evoke, given the appropriate stimulus, a collection of fairly simultaneous responses ranging from emotions to intellectual facts” (223-24). Whereas this particular “backdrop” (of “identity records”) is correlative to Damasio’s notion of the autobiographical self, his notion of extended consciousness pertains more to the structure of the backdrop itself: for the integrative capacity of working memory extends to the explicit (and implicit) memories encoded during any significant episode of the subject’s lived experience, and can therefore make a whole battery of complex mental representations explicit in conjunction with the “consistent set of identity records” that grounds the autobiographical self. In cognitive terms, this integrative capacity is enabled by the strictly implicit work of *executive functions*, the mental operations that monitor and coordinate the processing of sensory stimuli, facilitate the retrieval of explicit memories and the attendant integration of information from diverse neural circuits and systems, and ultimately underlie both the manipulation of the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness and the constantly changing composition of its backdrop.¹⁴ More importantly, the complex, consciously accessible mental representations that make up this backdrop can, by way of the implicit processing carried out by executive functions, not only affect the modulation of emotional states, but also activate cognitive and behavioural patterns stored in various implicit systems—all of which can in turn exert a profound influence on the way that we feel, think, and behave in particular situations. We will undertake a more detailed discussion of emotions and cognitive and behavioural patterns in the next section of this chapter, but, for now, suffice it to say that their mutual

association with explicit mental representations dramatically enriches the conception of subjective consciousness that we will deploy here, expanding its scope to include intricate mental phenomena that function largely outside the bounds of our immediate conscious awareness, such as the elaborate emotional responses that undergird our social values and beliefs, as well as the habitual patterns of thought and behaviour that exert a pervasive influence on almost every aspect of our lived experience.

It is here that we arrive at an important distinction between Damasio's formulation of extended consciousness and subjective consciousness as such. The implicit records formed during the subject's past experiences, the explicit neural patterns that can arise from these records and become mental representations, and the exclusively human endowment of a powerful and extensive working memory with which to manipulate these representations (and integrate them with the information stored in conventional memory)—these features of extended consciousness help to account both for the neurobiological underpinnings of subjective consciousness and, at one remove, for some of its fundamental experiential characteristics. For Damasio, however, extended consciousness “is *not* the same as love and honour and mercy,” just as it is not the same as “moral turpitude” or “existential angst” (309-10); and so, while extended consciousness provides an account of “the biological phenomena subsumed by the term consciousness,” it must not be conflated with these “other phenomena,” which we have yet to “describe, name, and attempt to understand scientifically” (311). Extended consciousness should thus be understood as a strictly *formal* neurobiological framework, a framework which attempts neither to account for nor to explain the phenomenal *content* of the subject's lived experience, whereas subjective consciousness subsumes both the

form of this framework and the phenomenal content that it refuses to account for. And yet, at the same time, while subjective consciousness encompasses the phenomenological realm of everyday lived experience, it is not strictly reducible to this realm: for, as we have already begun to see, it retains certain characteristics that cannot be properly or readily apprehended on the level of everyday lived experience. Although this conception of subjective consciousness is unconventionally expansive, I feel that it is justified, as it will allow us to consider important aspects of phenomenal experience that do not necessarily correspond to the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness, and that are nonetheless of central significance to the phenomenon of subjective transformation. From here on, then, when I use the term “subjective consciousness,” I am not simply referring to the phenomenal experience of sensory stimuli, of emotional and mental states (e.g., joy, sorrow, empowerment, and humiliation), or of abstract conceptualizations (e.g., ideas, beliefs, hopes, and aspirations). Rather, I am referring to the experience of such subjective phenomena as inflected by the totality of the subject’s lived experience. Thus understood, subjective consciousness partakes of both a synchronic aspect and a diachronic aspect: it is synchronic insofar as the subject can directly apprehend only so many objects at a time, and yet it is also diachronic insofar as whatever the subject apprehends will be coloured by her lived experience, which manifests itself through the ever-changing backdrop of mental representations that accompanies these objects.

On the level of everyday phenomenal experience, these synchronic and diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness can, to a certain extent, coexist simultaneously, and so they correspond not to a strict temporal distinction, but rather to a structural feature of the conscious state itself. In order to highlight the implications of this coexistence, it

would perhaps be instructive to consider it in relation to Freud's topographic model of the human psyche, which entails a distinction between three psychological systems: namely, the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. As Freud explains in his 1915 essay on "The Unconscious,"¹⁵ the crucial distinction here is between the conscious-preconscious system(s) and the unconscious system: for "the system *Pcs.* shares the characteristics of the system *Cs.*," and the action of censorship "exercises its office at the point of transition from the *Ucs.* to the *Pcs.* (or *Cs.*)" (578). That said, our primary concern here is with the distinction between the conscious and the preconscious, as it provides a useful counterpoint to the synchronic and diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness identified above. Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire offer a concise account of this distinction in "The Unconscious Mind,"¹⁶ where they relate that

[t]he unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense is constituted by contents inaccessible to consciousness; the preconscious, on the other hand, is theoretically available to it: constituted by my non-activated memories, my knowledge, my stock of opinions, etc., it covers the whole area described, outside of psychoanalysis or prior to it, as "unconscious" or "subconscious." (127)

What we have here, then, is essentially a temporal distinction that presupposes a rather narrow conception of consciousness: during a given moment in time, only those mental contents that the subject consciously apprehends are properly *conscious*, whereas those (consciously accessible) contents that fall outside of this limited purview are *preconscious*. Insofar as the explicit memories formed on the basis of the subject's lived experience are comprised of consciously accessible mental representations that remain distinct from the "manifest mental contents" of consciousness (since only so many of

these representations can be apprehended at a given time), the synchronic and diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness would seem to correspond to Freud's distinction between the conscious and the preconscious. During a given moment in time, however, the phenomenal experience of these aspects entails a kind of superposed psychical imbrication, and thus exceeds the basic temporal partition that underlies this distinction. For the mental representations that make up the backdrop of consciousness subtly pervade and colour each successive moment of the subject's conscious existence, swarming on the outskirts of her conscious awareness, and exerting a profound and ubiquitous influence on her perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and desires. And yet these mental representations also remain distinct from whatever happens to occupy the subject's full conscious attention, such that, as soon as one of these representations is brought to the forefront of the subject's mind, it undergoes a qualitative transformation, crossing over into the synchronically limited bounds of working memory proper, coming to be explicitly "known in the consciousness process," and calling up another host of mental representations that partially reconfigures the backdrop of which it previously formed a part. As such, the backdrop of consciousness is a constitutive (if phenomenologically elusive) feature of the conscious state itself, and the mental representations that animate it at a given time function always at the fringes of conscious awareness—or, in Freudian terms, at "the limit between the conscious and the preconscious" (Laplanche and Leclaire 129). As mentioned above, moreover, although these mental representations collectively exert a profound influence on the subject's phenomenal experience, the means by which they exert this influence is not always directly accessible to conscious awareness—an arrangement which can be recognized (1)

in elaborate emotional responses that we seldom recognize in the moment, and that seem to arise almost spontaneously, partaking of causal factors that we can often only speculate about, (2) in habitual patterns of thought and behaviour that we can only recognize at one remove, and (3) in the backdrop of consciousness itself, the functional organization of which prevents us from experiencing its contents directly. In many respects, then, the imbrication of the synchronic and diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness extends well beyond the “manifest mental contents” that occupy center stage in the theatre of the conscious mind, allowing us to take a step back, as it were, and obtain a more expansive view of the conscious state itself, one that includes many of the more subtle facets of phenomenal experience, and that therefore circumscribes a rich site of analysis for our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation.

Of course, while this conception of subjective consciousness is certainly expansive, including within its purview certain aspects of phenomenal experience that could, in the terminology of cognitive science, be described as *nonconscious*, it cannot properly account for change and transformation on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious.¹⁷ And yet, in spite of this inherent shortcoming, I believe that subjective consciousness constitutes an important level of analysis in its own right. One reason for this importance concerns the practical consideration outlined at the end of the last chapter: namely, that Butler and Žižek’s preoccupation with the condition of subjection leads them both to neglect the level of subjective consciousness and, as a consequence, to largely overlook the question of precisely what their models of subjective transformation might entail for the subject’s lived experience of herself and her world. The decision to explore the dynamics and implications of subjective transformation from a different

perspective therefore brings with it the promise of a gain in meaning, which is in itself an eminently justifiable ground for shifting our attention to the level of subjective consciousness. Perhaps more importantly, this level is not only the medium through which we experience the world, but also the seat of our most treasured faculties—from reason to empathy, from determination to imagination—faculties which enable us to arrive at an epistemological understanding *of* the world, as well as to act purposefully within it. As such, this level is ultimately where the phenomenon of subjective transformation must play itself out, and it is only through the faculties inherent to this level that we can possibly come to terms with the experiences which might precipitate such transformation, in the first place. And, although these faculties are susceptible to, and perhaps shot-through with, the coercive influence of ideology, they also happen to be the only means by which we can attempt to move toward a more ethical understanding both of the world and of our fellow human beings, as well as the only means by which we can hope to effect changes to the dominant socio-ideological order in which we are enmeshed. In short, then, this level is precisely *where we live*, and the truly defeatist gesture would be to dismiss its importance simply because it does not constitute a definitive level of analysis: for it is ultimately on this level that the challenges of contemporary life must be contested, and the faculties inherent to this level represent the most powerful resources at our disposal in the pursuit of “a more open, even more ethical, kind of being, one of or for the future” (Butler 131).

The Normative Equilibrium of Consciousness

In their introduction to *The Embodied Mind*,¹⁸ Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch refer to “the tangible demonstration within cognitive science that the

self or cognizing subject is fundamentally fragmented, divided, or nonunified,” even going so far as to cite this development as the “existential concern” which animates their book (xvii). Their account of what such fragmentation entails on the level of subjective consciousness concerns the sense that, although we can grasp onto “a sense of self, an ego,” this is only to mask or ignore the “penetrating impermanence of the activity of the mind itself,” an impermanence which is characterized by the “rapidly shifting stream of momentary mental occurrences” that we experience as “perceptions, thoughts, feelings, desires, fears,” etc.—each of which is dependent on the particularities of “a situation, a context, a world” (60-61). Thus, without denying that we each possess a familiar “sense of self,” they contend that it pertains to a thoroughly transient and elusive construction, a kind of psychical raft that we cling to in the hopes of keeping afloat above the “rapidly shifting stream” of mental occurrences which constitutes such a characteristic feature of our everyday experience. As we have seen, however, the “momentary mental occurrences” that make up this (ostensibly) chaotic stream correspond strictly to the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness, which are framed and coloured by the contents of the backdrop discussed above, as well as by the emotional responses and implicit cognitive patterns that the brain evokes on the basis of these contents. Indeed, one could argue that the combination of these influences not only imbues the phenomenal experience of self and world with a kind of intimate familiarity, but also constrains “the activity of the mind itself,” predisposing one to think and feel in particular ways, depending on the situation at hand.

Our objective in this section will be to acquire a more nuanced understanding of these influences, exploring both their neurobiological underpinnings and their

experiential implications, and ultimately elucidating their significance to the *normative equilibrium* of subjective consciousness. More specifically, our focus here will be on how the subject's lived experience contributes to the development and entrenchment of the most consistent features of this equilibrium, as well as on how these features not only undergird the sense of intimate familiarity mentioned above, but also shape and sustain the subject's habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. As with the "consistent set of identity records" that corresponds to Damasio's notion of the autobiographical self, moreover, these features are "consistent" not in the sense that they are somehow static or resistant to change, but rather in the sense that they persist over time, arising with a measure of consistency over the diachronic continuum of the subject's conscious existence. On a first approach, the normative equilibrium of consciousness could be described as the diachronically sedimented trace of these features, a trace which emerges, evolves, and becomes increasingly entrenched over time, and yet which also manifests itself within time, culminating in the influence that these features collectively exert on the subject's phenomenal experience. In order to elaborate on how these features eventually come to influence the subject's phenomenal experience, then, we will first need to move beyond the imbrication of the synchronic and diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness as it occurs during a given moment in time, adopting a more strictly diachronic view of the normative equilibrium of consciousness as it develops over the course of the subject's conscious existence.

For the purposes of the argument at hand, the first point to make here is that these features undergo continual modifications over time, developing through the subject's interactions with her immediate environment. Hosek and Freeman put this point

concisely when they claim that “any regularities that shape our knowledge and actions are learned through our interactions with the world, and they alter as we alter relative to the world by assimilating to the world” (515). The most consistent features of the normative equilibrium of consciousness develop precisely according to this logic, gradually emerging and evolving through a kind of dialectical, co-productive relation between mind and world. It follows, then, that these features correspond not only to the broad experiential canvas that constitutes the subject’s conception of self, but also to the particularities of the materially conditioned environments into which she is thrown, and within which her most formative experiences take place. One consequence of the co-productive relation between mind and world is that each of these experiences leaves behind a powerful mnemonic residue, and this residue continues to exert a powerful influence on the subject’s conscious existence long after the initial experience has come to pass, regardless of whether or not she can consciously recall its occurrence. As Damasio points out, moreover, the explicit and implicit records encoded during these experiences are “sedimented and continuously reclassified” in conventional memory (223), which is to say that their significance to the subject is revised on the basis of subsequent experiences. These twin processes of sedimentation and reclassification are of central importance to the normative equilibrium of consciousness—at once contributing to its gradual entrenchment and sustaining its pervasive influence—and yet they hinge on the same basic premise: namely, that of the brain’s capacity for synaptic plasticity.

As we saw in the previous section, synaptic plasticity refers to the capacity of synapses to be “changed by experience.” These changes manifest themselves primarily in the formation of new synaptic connections between neurons (or *synaptogenesis*), in the

strengthening of existing connections through learning, and, conversely, in the weakening (and eventual dissolution) of existing connections through various forms of forgetting.

All of these changes stem from the process of *synaptic transmission*, which enables the electrochemical activation of neurons: when such activation occurs frequently, it tends to result in either the strengthening of existing synaptic connections or the formation of new ones; when such activation does not occur (or occurs only infrequently), existing synaptic connections will be weakened (and will eventually break down, ceasing to function at all). When changes to synaptic connections occur during the first few years of one's life, they are grouped under the rubric of *developmental plasticity*, a term which refers to the more expansive capacity for synaptic plasticity that persists through the early stages of the brain's development, when neural circuits and systems are most susceptible to modification. While this capacity is attenuated after these early stages have passed, moreover, it nonetheless retains much of its potency—and it is the changes that occur after these early stages that are grouped under the rubric of *learning*. As LeDoux explains, synaptic plasticity always involves the adjustment of synaptic connections “by environmentally driven neural activity in specific neural systems,” and so “the line between developmental plasticity and learning is a fine one and perhaps nonexistent” (307). In both the developing brain and the mature brain, then, synaptic plasticity manifests itself primarily in the formation of new connections between neurons, as well as in the strengthening, weakening, and dissolution of existing connections; and, even though these processes are more pronounced during the early stages of the brain's development, they nonetheless persist into maturity.

This persistence is perhaps most immediately evident in the formation and reconstruction of the explicit memories encoded during significant subjective experiences. Since synaptic connections are organized into the more complex ensembles of connections that form neural circuits and systems, the role of working memory is especially important, in this regard, as it draws upon and integrates information from diverse circuits and systems, thereby not only causing their constituent neurons to fire in a certain way, but also facilitating the reinforcement of existing connections and the creation of new ones. Accordingly, explicit memories (and especially episodic memories) also play an important role in facilitating synaptic plasticity, as they each consist of an ensemble of implicit records encoded by diverse neural systems, and their reconstruction entails the reactivation (and integration) of these records. Given that significant subjective experiences necessarily involve the arousal of emotional systems, moreover, the explicit memories encoded during such an experience will include records of this emotional resonance. And, in turn, the reconstruction of these memories entails the reactivation of these records, which thereby elicit responses from the emotional systems that were active when the experience was initially encoded (unless, of course, the original pattern of emotional resonance undergoes alterations due to subsequent reconstructions of the memories themselves). To be clear, when neurobiologists speak of “emotions,” what they are referring to are not “feelings” as such, but rather the implicit processes that undergird them. LeDoux thus defines emotion as “the process by which the brain determines or computes the value of a stimulus,” and stresses that “feelings” arise only after the arousal of emotional systems, and correspond to “the representation in working memory of the various elements of an immediate emotional state” (206, 225).¹⁹

Regardless of whether a given emotional state achieves representation as a consciously accessible feeling, however, it nonetheless facilitates the release of neuromodulators from the brain stem, which then bathe the various regions of the brain, acting most effectively “at synapses that are already active when the modulator arrives” (312-13). This is important because neuromodulators not only contribute to “the enhancement of memory that occurs during emotional events,” but also and by extension “promote synaptic plasticity” in those circuits which are “actively involved in processing significant events,” such that the “interconnections between active cells in different regions and systems that fire synchronously will be linked by the plasticity that is induced” (313, 320). Since “emotional stimuli are some of the most potent activators of modulatory systems” (320), and since information concerning such stimuli is encoded in conventional memory during significant subjective experiences, the role of emotion is intimately tied to that of memory, and the conjunction of the two helps to shape the normative equilibrium of consciousness.

For the explicit memories encoded during significant, emotionally charged experiences constitute many of the most definitive features of this equilibrium, including the self-concepts formed on the basis of the subject’s autobiographical record, the plethora of significant “objects” (and others) that define the experiential contours of her immediate environment, the full range of social norms, values, beliefs, and practices that predominate within this environment, the epistemological horizons that she obtains from this environment, as well as what Damasio calls “memories of the future,” which correspond to all of the “scenarios that we conceive as desires, wishes, goals, and obligations,” and which help both to shape the subject’s understanding of her place in the

world and to guide her actions within it (225). Each of these features of the normative equilibrium of consciousness is encoded in explicit memory and imbued with emotional resonance, and whenever these explicit memories are reconstructed (whenever the explicit neural patterns of which they are composed are represented in working memory), the very process of generating the ensuing mental representations will result in the further sedimentation (and reclassification) of the records from which they arise. And this process is not only enhanced by the attendant arousal of emotional systems, but also facilitated by the “downward mobility of thought,” which pertains to the way that the convergent representations formed in working memory not only *integrate* information from diverse circuits and systems, but also *direct* neural activity in these circuits and systems, thereby providing “a powerful means by which parallel plasticity in neural systems is coordinated” (LeDoux 320). The crucial point here is that these processes of sedimentation and reclassification gradually consolidate each of the features above; that these features in turn manifest themselves with a degree of continuity, persistently imbuing the subject’s phenomenal experience of self and world with a sense of intimate familiarity; and that, as these features gradually accrue such qualities (through the frequency of their successive reconstructions), they collectively contribute to the development and entrenchment of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, as well as sustain its pervasive influence. And, since these features undergo continual modifications over time, they also subtly mask this influence by gradually adapting to the subject’s changing conceptions of herself, of her world, and of her place within it. As this discussion of the integrative role of working memory, of the formation and reconstruction of explicit memories, and of the arousal of emotional systems helps to show, then, each

of these processes not only enhances the brain's capacity for synaptic plasticity, but also proves crucial to the diachronic sedimentation of the features that shape and sustain the normative equilibrium of consciousness. However, the normative equilibrium also has a more strictly implicit aspect, and the significance of this aspect is especially evident in the subject's habitual patterns of thought and behaviour.

Though the influence of implicit memory on the subject's phenomenal experience is in many ways less immediately apparent than that of explicit memory, this influence is perhaps all the more pervasive for its relative subtlety. Indeed, the extent of this influence is enormous, encompassing the regulation of bodily functions, the modulation of emotional states, the modification of cognitive, motivational, and behavioural patterns, and the formation of individual traits and characteristics. This pervasiveness is due to the fact that implicit memory pertains to the innate capacity of synapses (and circuits and systems) to be altered by experience, rather than to systems that directly facilitate the encoding and reconstruction of explicit memories—or, as LeDoux puts it, the “systems that engage in implicit learning are not strictly speaking memory systems” (117). The implications of this pervasiveness are difficult to express, as the sheer scope of the different ways in which implicit memory influences cognition and behaviour is staggering—but one means of discussing these implications in a practical context presents itself in the study of habits and habit formation. In “Habits, Rituals, and the Evaluative Brain,”²⁰ for instance, Ann Graybiel investigates the neurobiological basis for habitual and ritualistic behaviours, not only discussing recent research on “extreme” habitual behaviour (such as addiction and OC-related disorders), but also linking the findings of this research to more everyday habits of thought and behaviour, including

those that stem from socio-cultural customs and rituals. Graybiel lists the “defining characteristics” of habits as follows:

First, habits (mannerisms, customs, rituals) are largely learned; in current terminology, they are acquired via experience-dependent plasticity. Second, habitual behaviours occur repeatedly over the course of days or years, and they can become remarkably fixed. Third, fully acquired habits are performed automatically, virtually nonconsciously, allowing attention to be focussed elsewhere. Fourth, habits tend to involve an ordered, structured action sequence that is prone to being elicited by a particular context or stimulus. And finally, habits can comprise cognitive expressions of routine (habits of thought) as well as motor expressions of routine. (361)

These characteristics illustrate the practical significance of the basic principles of synaptic plasticity discussed above, emphasizing that the repetition of such habitual patterns of thought and behaviour will eventually lead to the reinforcement of the synaptic connections (in diverse neural circuits and systems) that undergird these cognitive and behavioural patterns. In asserting that heavily ingrained habits are performed “virtually nonconsciously,” and that they “can comprise *cognitive* expressions of routine (habits of *thought*),” moreover, Graybiel provides a platform for considering the connections between these defining characteristics of habit learning and contemporary psychoanalytic theories of defence and resistance. In addition to the characteristics above, for instance, Graybiel explains that the neural circuits that control habit learning partake of “privileged interactions” with “cortically based circuits that influence social, emotional, and action functions of the brain” (359), and that,

accordingly, the “habit production system” is not only involved in the arousal of emotional systems (and thus in the enhancement of learning/plasticity), but also “strongly tied to the control and modulation of social behaviours” (362, 378). Crucial to the social significance of habit learning is the gradual organization of cognitive activity patterns into “chunked, readily releasable form[s],” a process which Graybiel describes as reflecting “a shift from mental exploration to mental exploitation as habits of thought are developed” (378). Steven Cooper provides an instructive discussion with which to gauge the psychological significance of these claims in “Changing Notions of Defence Within Psychoanalytic Theory,”²¹ where he explains that the classical Freudian view of defences (as a counter-cathetic force that struggles against “a particular [intrapsychic] conflict or impulse”) has gradually been supplemented by the predominant contemporary view of defences “as part of a set of relational and cognitive patterns that develop in the context of close relationships with important others” (949). This shift in the conceptualization of defences stems from the growing influence of intersubjective models within contemporary psychoanalytic theory, models which emphasize a view of defences less as “an encapsulated, closed-system form of enduring personality functioning” than as a psychodynamic phenomenon that is “constantly being influenced and shaped by the immediate interpersonal context” (958). Graybiel’s discussion of habit learning would seem to have important implications for this understanding of defence mechanisms, at least insofar as it not only provides a solid neurobiological foundation for considering how such “a set of relational and cognitive patterns” might develop in the first place (how they might be “acquired via experience-dependent plasticity” in early childhood), but also accounts for how these cognitive patterns are influenced by the subject’s “immediate

interpersonal context” (how the “chunked, readily releasable” representations that they comprise are “prone to being elicited by a particular context or stimulus”).

Given that Graybiel also suggests that habit learning might play an important role in facilitating the development of “personal and cultural rituals in humans” (375), moreover, perhaps we might take this line of thought one step further, extending it to Louis Althusser’s account of the subject’s susceptibility to ideological misrecognition in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”²² Indeed, for Althusser, one of the crucial ways that this misrecognition manifests itself concerns the subject’s (false) assumption that “the ideas of his belief” are somehow his own, when these ideas are actually derived from “*his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by [a] material ideological apparatus*” (243, my emphasis). With this understanding of ideological misrecognition in mind, could we not extend the constitutive features of habit learning to Althusser’s theory of ideological interpellation? That is, with regard to the archetypal scene of interpellation (where the individual responds to the voice that hails it), could we not propose that the individual’s response involves the activation of “chunked, readily releasable” cognitive (and behavioural) patterns, patterns which have been ingrained in the individual during early childhood (through the acquisition of language, as well as through the primordial staging of this scene as it plays out between mother and child)? And, if so, then could we not also propose that habit learning might provide a semblance of neurobiological support for Althusser’s claim that “individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects,” at least insofar as habit learning will necessarily play a crucial role in “the

rituals of rearing” by which the individual internalizes the ideological configuration of her status as an autonomous individual subject (246)?

Regardless of the strength of these conjectures, this brief discussion of habit learning helps to demonstrate the practical significance of implicit memory to the normative equilibrium of consciousness: for the defining characteristics of habit learning suggest that habitual cognitive and behavioural patterns exert a fundamental, defining influence on the subject’s phenomenal experience, an influence which not only contributes to the entrenchment of the normative equilibrium (through its utilization of the brain’s capacity for experience-dependent plasticity), but also forms a kind of insidious implicit counterpart to the more explicit features identified above. This influence functions on a number of different levels, and can be recognized in relatively overt habits of thought and behaviour (such as those that can be mitigated through cognitive-behavioural therapy); in the subtle schematization of knowledge that accompanies the acquisition of language (and the processes of socialization and acculturation, more generally); in the covert manifestations of defence mechanisms that form a constitutive part of one’s psychic life; and, at its most fundamental, perhaps even in the internalization of ideological constructions (such as that of the autonomous individual subject). Unlike the more explicit features of the normative equilibrium discussed above, these habitual cognitive and behavioural patterns will have developed implicitly (especially during experiences in early childhood), such that the subject will be largely unable to ascertain any causal correlations between these patterns and the autobiographical experiences that she can consciously recall. And yet, although the subject may be entirely unaware both of the origins of these patterns and of the influence

that they exert on her everyday phenomenal experience, this influence is powerful and pervasive, nonetheless.

To be clear, the normative equilibrium of consciousness neither contradicts the view of subjective consciousness as a continuous flux of “momentary mental occurrences” nor discounts the argument that one’s sense of self cannot adequately be described in terms of a singular, static “identity.” Rather, it is fundamentally in agreement with both of these positions, and provides a broader perspective on the phenomena to which they refer, a perspective which accounts for the unmistakable sense of familiarity that permeates the subject’s phenomenal experience of herself and her world, as well as for the habitual patterns of thought and behaviour that exert a constraining influence on the way that she feels, thinks, and behaves in particular situations. We have attributed both this familiarity and this constraining influence to the normative equilibrium of consciousness, and have set about accounting for them through our discussion its constitutive features. These features correspond primarily to the diachronic aspect of subjective consciousness: on the one hand, they develop over the course of the subject’s lived experience, becoming increasingly entrenched by virtue of the brain’s capacity for experience-dependent plasticity; on the other hand, they do not manifest themselves overtly during each synchronic moment of the subject’s conscious existence, but rather manifest themselves in a minimal way during the vast majority of the subject’s lived experiences. This latter point has two facets, the first phenomenological and the second temporal. Phenomenologically, the influence of these features largely exerts itself below the level of the “manifest mental contents” of consciousness: its more explicit components are consciously accessible, but they will most often manifest themselves

through the backdrop of consciousness; and, needless to say, its more implicit components are not consciously accessible, and their influence can only be recognized at one remove.²³ Temporally, this influence can exert itself in different ways, and to varying degrees, at a given moment in time: since its explicit and implicit components are diverse, and since they manifest themselves largely according to the particularities of the situation at hand, some of them will be active during a given moment, whereas others will be dormant, and this arrangement can change drastically from moment to moment, such that the collective influence of these components not only assumes different forms over time, but also manifests itself more or less acutely, depending on the situation at hand.

For methodological purposes, we have thus far divided our attention between the explicit and implicit features of the normative equilibrium of consciousness. But it is important to note that, both in the brain and in the mind, these features often manifest themselves simultaneously, such that their influence is integrated to a considerable degree. Walter Freeman's notion of "meaning structures" (and of the genesis of "private meaning," more generally) captures the neurobiological aspect of this integration. In How Brains Make Up Their Minds,²⁴ he contends that "[m]eanings have no edges or compartments. They are not solely rational or emotional, but a mixture. They are not thoughts or beliefs, but the fabric of both" (14). More specifically, meanings depend on the "entire history" of an individual (as embedded in the brain "by synaptic modifications during learning"), and they arise "as an expression of [her] particular situation," emerging "in sequences of global AM [amplitude modulation] patterns of oscillatory neural activity coordinating the neuropil [synaptic fabric] of an entire cerebral hemisphere" (114, 143).

What this means is that, in neurobiological terms, the “meaning” of a particular situation is multifaceted, arising through the simultaneous activation of records held in explicit *and* implicit memory, as well as through the concurrent activity of emotional systems. In order to appreciate the significance of this simultaneity on the level of phenomenal experience, we need only consider the example of values and beliefs. Insofar as we can contemplate the values common to our culture or rationalize our personal systems of belief, these values and beliefs clearly partake of explicit content; and yet, at the same time, they can also exert an implicit influence on our everyday phenomenal experience. When confronted with behaviour that violates our values or with an idea that challenges our beliefs, for instance, we might react defensively, disparaging the author of the behaviour or assessing the idea in a negative light, and doing so without consciously apprehending the values and beliefs at stake in our reactions, let alone the elaborate emotional responses that drive them. And these examples can also be extended to the more strictly implicit features of the normative equilibrium: for the confrontation of such behaviour might also trigger our mechanisms of defence and resistance, which are often accompanied by elaborate emotional responses of their own; and, in the process of contemplating such an idea, we necessarily utilize the implicit epistemological schemata common to our language and culture. Whether explicit or implicit, then, the constitutive features of the normative equilibrium can manifest themselves simultaneously during a given moment in time, and these manifestations are not only imbued with emotional resonance, but also marked by a kind of ontological contiguity, such that the particularities of a given situation can call up a whole host of these features, each of

which exerts an influence on the subject's phenomenal experience to a greater or lesser degree.

Some of these features will manifest themselves almost perpetually, others somewhat less frequently, and still others infrequently—but, however frequently they manifest themselves, the crucial point here is that they can do so rapidly when the need arises. As such, although many of these features will lie dormant at a given moment in time, their collective influence persists in virtual form during each successive moment of the subject's conscious existence, at least insofar as they can readily be called upon to facilitate each of her engagements with her immediate environment. The full scope of the normative equilibrium of consciousness encompasses all of these features, and can thus be characterized as a *virtual* register of the influence that they can collectively exert on the subject's phenomenal experience—a register which must of course be distinguished from the *actual* forms that this influence takes (at different moments in time and in relation to the particularities of different situations). Considered from this virtual perspective, it remains useful to distinguish these features according to whether their influence is primarily explicit or more strictly implicit, even though this distinction belies the integrated character of their actual manifestations. On the one hand, then, the more explicit features of the normative equilibrium essentially amount to complex, seamlessly integrated ensembles of consciously accessible mental representations, some of the most notable of which include: the self-concepts that underpin the subject's sense of self, identity, and personhood; the multitude of significant “objects” (and others) that fill her immediate environment; the “memories of the future” that help her to act purposefully within this environment; and the full range of social norms, values, beliefs, and practices

to which she has grown accustomed. Since these explicit features are persistent, emotionally charged, and deeply ingrained, and since they must therefore be differentiated from the more transient and emotionally *insignificant* contents that can arise in the theatre of the conscious mind, we will henceforth refer to them as the normative equilibrium's constitutive *psychical constructs*. On the other hand, the more strictly implicit features of the normative equilibrium amount to habitual patterns of thought and behaviour that predispose the subject to think, feel, and behave in particular ways, and the manifestations of these patterns can range from the relatively overt (e.g., addictions and obsessive-compulsive disorders), to the markedly more covert (e.g., defence mechanisms and implicit epistemological schemata), to the more fundamental (e.g., the internalization of ideological constructions). Since these implicit features do not manifest themselves directly in the theatre of the conscious mind, but rather exert a constraining influence on various aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience, we will henceforth refer to them as the normative equilibrium's constitutive *experiential boundaries*. That said, it is important to note that these psychical constructs and experiential boundaries both contribute to the sense of intimate familiarity that attends the subject's everyday phenomenal experience; that they both exert a constraining influence on the way that she thinks, feels and behaves in particular situations; and that they both have the capacity to evoke elaborate emotional responses during each of her engagements with her immediate environment. (Indeed, the only distinction to maintain between them is that, when they perform these functions, they do so on the basis of mnemonic structures that either are or are not accessible to the subject's direct conscious awareness.)

These psychical constructs and experiential boundaries comprise the diachronically sedimented traces of the most important episodes of the subject's lived experience (as played out within a series of specific, materially conditioned contexts and in relation to any number of emotionally significant others). As we have seen, the actual influence that they exert during a given moment in time will depend largely on the particularities of the situation at hand (and will therefore assume different forms and exert itself to varying degrees over time), but, nonetheless, this influence always sustains the sense of intimate familiarity that attends the subject's experience of self and world, as well as constrains the way that she thinks, feels, and behaves. As such, the normative equilibrium of consciousness need not correspond to a comfortable or harmonious state of psychical functioning: rather, it corresponds to a state of balance, one that reflects the subject's normative state of psychical functioning, the traces of which have been sedimented over the course of the subject's conscious existence; and its constitutive features not only define the particularity of this state, but also preserve it by attenuating the disruptive potential of the subject's engagements with her immediate environment. Although these features develop over time, moreover, they can nonetheless be considered in relation to particular, synchronic experiences, in which case they serve as a kind of normative mean or average against which the synchronic state of the subject's psyche can be assessed. That is, insofar as these features correspond to a kind of psychical and experiential homeostasis with which the subject has become familiar (if not comfortable), they provide a means of assessing the ways in which a given subjective experience might disrupt this homeostasis, contravening its psychical constructs and experiential

boundaries, and thereby constituting an exception to the normative equilibrium of consciousness.

The Dynamics of Rupture and Reconsolidation

“Subjective rupture” corresponds to moments when the normative equilibrium of consciousness is suddenly compromised, such that the idiosyncratic psychological constructs and experiential boundaries that exert such a pervasive influence on the subject’s phenomenal experience are comprehensively “ruptured,” in the sense of being “broken” or “burst.”²⁵ Instances of subjective rupture are thus inextricably tied to the particularity of the normative equilibrium, as their disruptive potential stems precisely from their capacity to challenge its constitutive constructs and boundaries. Of course, these features of the normative equilibrium are remarkably resilient, and this is why, apart from the exceptional eventualities of death and psychosis, a given instance of rupture will be followed by a process of reconsolidation. If the disruption of the normative equilibrium is sufficiently profound, however, then this process of reconsolidation will be neither perfect nor complete: for the psychological constructs may be altered, the experiential boundaries may have shifted, and the all-too-familiar terrain of the normative equilibrium may have taken on an altogether *unfamiliar* aspect. In what follows, we will endeavour to elaborate on the interrelation between these respective dynamics (of rupture and reconsolidation), focussing primarily on the disruptive potential of extreme experiences, and exploring the significance of such experiences with regard to both subjective consciousness and its normative equilibrium.

Before we begin, it would perhaps be prudent to offer some preliminary qualifications, the first of which concerns the difference between an instance of rupture

and the psychoanalytic notion of a traumatic, ego-shattering event. One could argue that these notions bear a close resemblance to one another, for they both provide a means of conceptualizing extreme, emotionally significant experiences, and, much as an instance of rupture is characterized by its capacity to disrupt the normative equilibrium of consciousness, an ego-shattering event is characterized by its capacity to overwhelm the boundaries of the ego. Despite this resemblance, there are at least two important respects in which these notions differ. Firstly, we are approaching the experiences that might give rise to such events from the perspective of subjective consciousness, and our discussion thus far has centred around an engagement with work from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology. This engagement has not only required us to depart from the traditional Freudian delineation of the psyche (id, ego, super-ego), but also enabled us to establish a conception of subjective consciousness (and its normative equilibrium) that is not readily commensurable with the notion of the ego. Secondly, although we will discuss experiences that have the potential to induce psychological trauma, our focus here is not on trauma as such, but rather on the phenomenon of subjective transformation, and particularly on the relation between extreme experiences and the changes and transformations that they can provoke. This focus will not only lead us to consider the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation in relation to a broad spectrum of extreme experiences (many of which are not necessarily traumatic), but also oblige us to show how these dynamics can account for the myriad ways in which such experiences might exert their transformative potential (for instance, not just punctually, but also gradually, and not just through radical disruptions, but also through more moderate disruptions). Without discounting the similarities between an instance of rupture and an ego-shattering

event, then, we should recognize that their respective frames of reference are different: an instance of rupture exerts itself over against the normative equilibrium of consciousness, which cannot simply be equated to the notion of the ego; and, rather than pertaining strictly to the psychological ramifications of traumatic experiences, an instance of rupture pertains to the disruptive (and transformative) potential of a range of extreme experiences, and must in any case be considered in relation to the reconsolidation that follows in its wake. These same points also help to distinguish the framework of subjective rupture from Alain Badiou's philosophy of the event. Although one could posit a resemblance between the normative equilibrium of consciousness and Badiou's notion of the "state of the situation," for instance, we should maintain that this equilibrium nonetheless partakes of its own specificity, as it pertains strictly to the subject's phenomenal experience of self and world, rather than to the remarkably broader domain of "the positive ontological order accessible to Knowledge," as Žižek puts it in The Ticklish Subject (128). And, similarly, although an instance of rupture may share certain parallels with Badiou's notion of the "evental site," we should maintain that it also partakes of its own specificity, as the experiences that it seeks to account for are profoundly variegated, and many of these experiences are not commensurable with the strictures of Badiou's set-theoretical delineation of the evental site, at least insofar as they need not emerge strictly from that which is "void" or unaccounted for within the coordinates of a given situation. Moreover, any resemblances between the framework of subjective rupture and each of the above formulations of the event are ultimately extraneous to the argument at hand, as the specificity of this framework—as well as of the phenomenon that it seeks to elucidate and of the approach through which we are

developing it—provides ample grounds for the decision to leave behind the theoretical (and terminological) baggage that attends these formulations, and to focus instead on the task of elaborating the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation. That said, we should also note that the interrelation between these dynamics is essentially conventional, as its basic premise is that of change through conflict, and this premise corresponds to one of the fundamental maxims of dialectical thought. Insofar as this interrelation is inherently dialectical, in other words, it shares a formal affinity with conventional dialectical thought, and provides a conventional means of thinking about change and transformation. At the same time, however, we will not only apply this dialectical logic to a particular phenomenon (that of subjective transformation), but also explore this phenomenon within a particular context (that of the mind, the brain, and the relation between them). As such, while the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation function according to a dialectical logic, the particularities of our inquiry will imbue these dynamics with their own particular content and significance. With these preliminary qualifications out of the way, let us turn now to a more involved discussion of the dynamic of rupture.

The “breaking” or “bursting” dynamic of rupture can be understood as a kind of formal movement, whereby the disruptive potential of a given experience manifests itself over against the normative equilibrium of consciousness; and, moreover, this dynamic not only suggests itself as a means of characterizing the disruptive potential of a vast array of experiences, but also allows for the analysis of these experiences according to diachronic aspects of subjective consciousness and its normative equilibrium. Indeed, while many extreme, emotionally significant experiences could be seen to evince this dynamic, such experiences cannot be considered in isolation: in order to more fully

articulate their capacity to disturb the normative equilibrium of consciousness, we must also consider them from a broader perspective. In other words, the temporal scope of this dynamic can be viewed in its most immediate aspect (the synchronically isolated experience in itself); in a more intermediate aspect (the concatenation of disruptions that follow in the wake of the experience); and in a long-term aspect (in relation to the diachronically sedimented totality of the subject's lived experience). This tripartite temporal perspective not only provides a multifaceted framework for considering how such an experience might exert its disruptive potential, but also situates the dynamic of rupture in the same modality as the normative equilibrium of consciousness: namely, that of subjective consciousness *qua* both synchronic phenomenal experience and diachronic experiential continuum. Of course, the above reference to a "concatenation of disruptions" carries with it the implication of a series or chain, and, insofar as the diachronic aspect of subjective consciousness is concerned, this implication is slightly misleading, as it suggests an overly determinant relation between past, present, and future. While this relation will certainly come into play, it should not be viewed as overly determinant, for a sufficiently extreme experience might well succeed in disturbing the normative equilibrium of consciousness to such a degree that it spawns an explosive network of disruption, wiping away the psychical constructs and experiential boundaries that previously defined its terrain, and thereby at once contravening the diachronically sedimented traces of the subject's lived past and provoking a comprehensive reevaluation of her lived present and projected future.

The disruptive potential of such an experience can thus be gauged (and characterized) according to the points of rupture that it opens up, according to the precise

manner in which it clashes with the subject's familiar psychical constructs and experiential boundaries (and thereby orchestrates a "breaking" or "bursting" of the normative equilibrium of consciousness). At the extreme end of the spectrum, for example, we could consider the abrupt loss of a loved one, an experience which suddenly and irrevocably severs the subject from an emotionally significant other, and which could therefore be characterized as permanently altering the subject's immediate environment (which will thereafter be marked by the absence of this other), as shattering the plethora of psychical constructs that have developed in relation to this other (be they episodic memories, abstract ideas, or "memories of the future"), and as transgressing the subject's experiential boundaries (by simultaneously eliciting a torrent of powerful emotions and overriding the subject's normative modes of defence and resistance). Considered from the tripartite perspective outlined above, then, the experience of this loss would not merely destabilize the normative equilibrium of consciousness, but also strike directly at many of its most constitutive features, such that the abrupt loss of this loved one might spawn alternate points of rupture symptomatically, potentially engendering a vast network of disruption that permeates every aspect of the subject's everyday phenomenal experience. Indeed, if the loss is great enough, it might even be characterized as instituting a state of radical *disequilibrium*, a state which comprehensively overturns its normative equivalent, and which might persist for months or even years after the initial loss has come to pass.

On the other hand, we need not look far for examples of experiences that might exert their disruptive power in a less expansive manner. Imagine the plane that suddenly undergoes a mechanical failure, tumbling earthward with such terrifying velocity that its passengers and crew are forced to confront their impending oblivion, only for the plane to

right itself at the critical moment—or, rather less spectacularly, imagine suffering a life-threatening heart attack or stroke. Such near-death experiences (or emotionally charged encounters with the radically *unfamiliar*) clearly also partake of considerable disruptive potential, and yet this potential might manifest itself in a completely different way from that of the experience discussed above. Instead of instituting a prolonged state of *disequilibrium*, for instance, a near-death experience could be characterized as inciting a relatively brief (albeit especially violent) disruption of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, a disruption which is ostensibly limited to an isolated temporal moment, and yet which might nonetheless lead to a reevaluation of the subject's very existence. In other words, by suddenly forcing the subject to confront her own mortality, a near-death experience might elicit an unremitting interrogation of the comfortable symbolic narratives that undergird the subject's familiar self-concepts and "memories of the future," potentially even casting a plague of doubt over the subject's habitual patterns of thought and behaviour.

Of course, this same basic dynamic can also be identified in less dramatic experiences, although it might exert itself more subtly than in the extreme examples above. Consider the experience of discovering something that casts a significant portion of one's lived past in a radically different light, something that decisively alters one's relation to a diverse array of past experiences, such that one's recollection of them will never be the same as it was before. For instance, imagine the experience of discovering that one's partner has been unfaithful for a number of years; that one's behaviour has exacted a painful toll on those whom one holds dear; that one's recurring feelings of rage, anxiety, or depression stem from a traumatic (and heretofore repressed) experience that

occurred during one's childhood; that one's view of the world has been founded on a slew of seemingly dubious epistemological assumptions; or even that one's life might be cut short by a potentially terminal illness. Although these experiences are arguably less extreme than those discussed above, and although the discoveries that provoke them could prove entirely unfounded, they nonetheless entail the capacity to disrupt the normative equilibrium of consciousness in significant way, and can thus be characterized according to the dynamic of rupture.

As we can see, then, the dynamic of rupture not only shares a formal affinity with an array of different experiences, but also provides the beginnings of a framework for analysing these experiences (whether they be extreme, such as the death of a loved one or a brush with the Real, or whether they be relatively commonplace). That is, beyond their formal affinity with the dynamic of rupture, these experiences share another, perhaps more important similarity: namely, that their disruptive potential manifests itself most profoundly when it strikes at the more emotionally significant aspects of the subject's normative equilibrium. When an experience opens up points of rupture that exert themselves over against the psychological constructs that sustain one's sense of "self," that substantiate one's relation to the lived past and the projected future, that grow up around one's relationships with significant others, that correspond to one's values and beliefs, and that define one's epistemological horizons, or over against the experiential boundaries that delimit one's habitual patterns of thought and behaviour—it is when these aspects of the normative equilibrium are challenged that an experience's disruptive potential is at its most redoubtable. The crucial point here is that these aspects are interrelated in such a way that a sufficiently profound disruption to one of them can have

significant ramifications for the others, which is to say that an initial instance of rupture has the potential to emanate outward, spawning a network of disruption that branches out into diverse but interrelated points of rupture, at once suffusing the theatre of the conscious mind and suspending its normative equilibrium. The neurobiological counterpart to the perturbation of these highly cathected aspects of the normative equilibrium is not only the widespread activation of emotional systems (which results in the release neuromodulators throughout the brain, thereby simultaneously facilitating the synchronous firing of an array of different brain systems and enhancing their capacity for synaptic plasticity), but also what LeDoux terms the “monopolization of brain resources,” which pertains to the way that the arousal of an emotional state “perpetuates itself,” bringing “many of the brain’s cognitive resources to bear on that state,” and thereby “ensuring that the learning that does occur is relevant to the current emotional situation” (320, 322). In a sense, then, the dynamic of rupture corresponds to a dramatic acceleration (and intensification) of a process that would otherwise be exerting itself in a minimal way: namely, that of learning itself. For, even in the absence of an instance of rupture, the normative equilibrium of consciousness necessarily undergoes minor alterations over time. And so the difference between these subtle alterations and the more palpable changes that might attend an instance of rupture is partly quantitative, at least insofar as they are both, to a certain extent, predicated on the same basic neurobiological principles (the form is similar, but the scale is different). At the same time, however, this difference is also qualitative: for, as we have seen, instances of rupture are invariably accompanied by the acute and prolonged arousal of emotional systems, and this arousal not only radically enhances the brain’s capacity for synaptic plasticity, but also (and

thereby) potentiates the eventuality of profound and lasting changes to the normative equilibrium of consciousness, changes which can dramatically reshape the subject's everyday phenomenal experience, rather than merely facilitate its subtle alteration.

One could object at this point that, while the basic principles of synaptic plasticity not only provide a degree of neurobiological support for our discussion of the formation and entrenchment of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, but also show how the psychical constructs and experiential boundaries that make up this equilibrium might be susceptible to disruption, these principles also suggest that the brain has a powerful capacity to accommodate disruptive stimuli. And, in accordance with the monist hypothesis (and speculative intentions) on the basis of which our discussion here has proceeded, one could extend this objection from the brain to the mind, proposing that the mind has an equally powerful capacity to pave over the disruptive potential of subjective experiences. This objection is valid, and it was in deference to its sound logical premise that we began this section by stating that instances of rupture are (usually) followed by a reconsolidation. The interrelation between these respective dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation has been implicit in many of the points covered thus far. Indeed, it seems indisputable that the subject becomes increasingly closed to the disruptive potential of subjective experiences as she grows into maturity, and that, accordingly, once the normative equilibrium of consciousness has become relatively entrenched, a particular experience can only partake of such potential if it is sufficiently exceptional or extreme. Although the brain's capacity for synaptic plasticity persists into maturity, in other words, it stands to reason that the more constitutive and invariant features of the normative equilibrium are ingrained to such an extent that they can accommodate all but the most

disruptive stimuli. This is why the dynamic of rupture depends precisely on the capacity of a particular experience to exert its disruptive potential over against the psychological constructs and experiential boundaries that define and delimit the normative equilibrium. And yet this is also why an instance of rupture (usually) leads to a reconsolidation: for the same principles that facilitated the formation and entrenchment of the constitutive features of the normative equilibrium continue to function in a powerful way, always attenuating the disruptive potential of that which threatens this equilibrium. The neurobiological counterpart to the interrelation between these dynamics is thus that plasticity works both ways: it not only preserves the continuity of this equilibrium, but also provides the means by which its constitutive features can undergo drastic alterations.

In his conclusion to How Brains Make Up Their Minds, Walter J. Freeman offers an insightful and highly pertinent discussion of the process of “unlearning,” a process which helps to account for the neurobiology of these dialectically opposed dynamics, as well as for their experiential implications. Freeman begins his discussion by noting that the “unquestioning adaptation that comes with cumulative learning” may fail when individuals are confronted with “catastrophic change,” whether this change be as extreme as the loss of a loved one or as ostensibly commonplace as the transition from childhood to adulthood (to parenthood)—both of which involve a series of extensive neural reconfigurations whereby “old habits, values, skills, and beliefs must be given up to make way for new ones” (148-49). For Freeman, such “radical change” cannot be accounted for simply in terms of “the growth of a new meaning structure on top of the old one”; instead, “a unique process is necessary to dissolve the existing meaning structure and replace it with a new one” (149). Freeman dubs this latter process “unlearning,” and

attributes its scientific discovery to Ivan Pavlov, the famous Russian physiologist who is perhaps best known for his research on classical conditioning. In a series of experiments conducted during the early nineteenth century, Pavlov placed laboratory dogs in a variety of stressful situations, subjecting them to extreme physical exertion, sensory stimulation, sleep deprivation, social isolation, and emotional states such as rage and fear until they “failed to respond at all and finally collapsed”; and, once the dogs recovered, he found that “all their former behavioural patterns were lost,” and that “they could be trained to perform in new ways without interference from old learning” (149). After proposing that Pavlov’s findings essentially amount to extreme examples of the process of unlearning, Freeman proceeds to elaborate on the significance of this process to the development of “private meaning,” contending that “extraordinary ordeals endured by individuals can selectively break down the stability of intentional architecture,” such that “social attitudes, values, and goals are dissolved,” whereas “general knowledge, personal history, and language and motor skills . . . are soon regained” (150). Freeman suggests that this process is brought about by the release of neuromodulators in the brain, proposing that the profusion of modulators that attends the acute arousal of emotional systems can “loosen the synaptic fabric” laid down by conventional learning processes (during past experiences), and can thereby “open the way to the dissolution of beliefs and their replacement by new ones” (151). While this process manifests itself most profoundly during extreme, emotionally significant experiences, however, it can also be observed at the less extreme end of the experiential spectrum, as its “milder” forms play a part in the “socialization and acculturation” of the individual, especially “in the first days and years”—with unlearning here “alternating with learning,” such that individuals are

“nurtured and shaped through years of repeated cycles of dissolution and rebirth” (153). This stipulation (especially “in the first days and years”) is important, as it recalls the point made above about how individuals become increasingly closed to the disruptive potential of subjective experiences as they grow into maturity, and yet nonetheless remain susceptible to such potential if the experience in question is sufficiently extreme. And therein lies a key aspect of the interrelation between the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation: for both the points of rupture spawned by a particular experience and the process of reconsolidation that attenuates their disruptive potential thus emerge as two sides of the same experiential phenomenon (as it were), operating in intimate opposition to one another, in a confluence or imbrication of dialectically charged horizons of possibility. Apart from showing how plasticity “works both ways,” then, Freeman’s discussion of unlearning illustrates how this coincidence of disruptive and adaptive potential can be understood in terms of the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation, as well as how the dialectical, co-productive relation between these dynamics can lead to change and transformation.

The interrelation between these dynamics can be characterized in a number of ways. We might begin by noting that these dynamics operate according to the logic of what Foucault termed “the limitless reign of the Limit,”²⁶ which is to say that, insofar as a given instance of rupture will generally be followed by a reconsolidation of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, it can be conceived as ultimately affirming the limits of that which it aspires to transgress. And yet, at the same time, this movement from rupture to reconsolidation nonetheless carries with it the potential to precipitate the confrontation of new (or, rather, different) limits, in the process. Deleuze and Guattari provide a helpful

means of conceptualizing this movement in A Thousand Plateaus,²⁷ where they write that, although “[s]ubjectification assigns the line of flight a positive sign, . . . it has its own way of repudiating the positivity it frees, or of relativizing the absoluteness it attains, without, however, falling back to the preceding regime” (133). But if we characterize the dynamic of rupture according to this description of the “line of flight,” then we must also add that every “line of flight” (or point of rupture) will necessarily be pursued by an “apparatus of capture” (423)—and so the key question here is not *whether* this capture (or reconsolidation) succeeds, but rather *the extent to which* it succeeds. Thus, with regard to a relatively routine, emotionally *insignificant* experience, we could say that any lines of flight opened up by this experience would be immediately reined in (such that the points of rupture are swiftly paved over, and the normative equilibrium is reconsolidated swiftly and without any perceptible change). With regard to an extreme, emotionally significant experience, however, the ensuing lines of flight might prove considerably more elusive, issuing forth with such force and in such great number that, for a time, they elude capture (such that the points of rupture are paved over only after they have comprehensively destabilized the normative equilibrium, and have thereby opened a window of opportunity for the forces of change and transformation to take effect).

In the latter of these two examples, then, although the points of rupture will eventually be paved over, the movement from rupture to reconsolidation is (temporarily) interrupted by a period of instability, and this period of instability can potentially entail a shifting of the sands (as it were), an alteration of the normative equilibrium’s constitutive psychical constructs and experiential boundaries. And, as was alluded to in our discussion of the practical examples above, the potential for change and transformation enabled

thereby will reflect the particularity of the experience in question, affecting each feature of the normative equilibrium in equal measure or striking at one feature in particular, manifesting itself swiftly or gradually, profoundly or moderately, and so on. Indeed, this potential for change and transformation might exert itself in a manner that is at once less violent and more expansive than that of the examples discussed above. Consider the experience of emigrating to a foreign country: since such an experience demands that the subject immerse herself in a radically different environment (and exist within it for a number of years), the ensuing points of rupture might be incredibly profuse and diverse, not only challenging all of the cultural, social, and political norms that she has grown accustomed to, but also tearing away the materially conditioned context that previously conferred a degree of permanence and immediacy upon her most familiar psychological constructs (by severing her from the “objects” and others that filled her previous environment, and that would otherwise imbue her self-concepts, “memories of the future,” and epistemological horizons with an immediate, materially conditioned support). And yet, despite the diversity of these points of rupture, they might arise in a relatively subtle and gradual way, not provoking a palpable onslaught of emotions that suddenly destabilizes the subject’s normative equilibrium, but rather exerting their disruptive potential more or less implicitly over a prolonged period of time (such that, if the subject remains in this new environment for long enough, she might never be able to “go home”).

As this example makes clear, even when the points of rupture opened up by a particular experience seem to be comprehensively paved over by a process of reconsolidation, they nonetheless conspire to prevent the normative equilibrium from

simply maintaining its previous form—and so the interrelation between rupture and reconsolidation always entails the potential for change and transformation, to a greater or lesser degree. And, moving from these more abstract accounts to the level of the brain, we can see that the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation share a certain formal affinity with the neurodynamics of extreme, emotionally significant experiences, at least insofar as such experiences will precipitate (1) the synchronous firing of an array of different brain systems, (2) the integration of information from these systems in working memory, and (3) the release of plasticity-enhancing neuromodulators throughout the brain—in short, a kind of explosion of neural activity which in turn facilitates the reconfiguration of synaptic connections in diverse neural circuits and systems, as well as the modification of the global linkages between them. In each of these formulations (the logic of transgression, the interrelation between lines of flight and apparatuses of capture, the neurodynamics of the brain), then, the key point is that the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation entail the capacity for change and transformation: for, if the disruptive potential of a particular experience is significant enough, then any reconsolidation of the normative equilibrium of consciousness will be *with a difference*, a kind of excess (or “indivisible remainder”) which ensures that this reconsolidation will be incomplete. In other words, while the dynamic of reconsolidation can certainly pave over the points of rupture opened up by such an experience, it can do so *only at the expense* of simultaneously failing to preserve the exact form of the psychical constructs and experiential boundaries that previously defined the terrain of the normative equilibrium—and it is precisely this failure that secures the potential for change and transformation.

Before undertaking a more detailed discussion of this potential for change and transformation, however, it would be instructive to consider a few more examples of experiences that can be characterized according to the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation. This is no small task in itself: since the normative equilibrium of consciousness is essentially a formal placeholder (much like the category of the subject), its particularity is entirely dependent on the individual in question; and, since the disruptive potential of an extreme subjective experience will manifest itself in different ways (and to varying degrees) depending both on the particularity of this equilibrium and on the particularity of the experience in question, it follows that instances of rupture are radically heterogeneous. Given this heterogeneity, perhaps the most accessible examples of such experiences present themselves in the study of the altered states of consciousness engendered by psychedelic compounds.²⁸ The study of these altered states is instructive for a number of reasons: first, the states themselves amount to experiences that are decidedly extreme and yet not inherently negative, and so they represent model instances of rupture; second, these states also temporarily override the subject's modes of defence and resistance, and so their disruptive potential cannot be simply ignored or resisted; and third, despite being thoroughly heterogeneous, these states have attracted a great deal of scientific interest, and so the study of these states constitutes a fertile ground for further exploration.

Indeed, as Rick Strassman points out in Mind-Altering Drugs,²⁹ this heterogeneity has not dissuaded researchers from attempting to characterize the wide array of subjective effects that constitute “a ‘generic’ psychedelic experience,” including profound alterations to “all those aspects of consciousness that, melded together, make us uniquely

human,” and that range from “our sense of self and body awareness” to “our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions” (54). Apart from the more obvious sensory and perceptual alterations, for instance, Strassman characterizes these subjective effects as follows:

Anxiety, terror, pleasure, tension, relaxation, and ecstasy all may be extreme, rapidly fluctuate, or coexist. . . . Cognitive freshness and novelty overlay our experience, and the significance of everyday reality takes on a new dimension.

The sense of self undergoes an alteration in the feeling of “control” by inner and outside forces. Boundaries between self and others become firmer or looser, and our personal identity can fill the entire universe or be absolutely negated. (55)

This description of the typical effects of psychedelic compounds suggests that psychedelic experiences partake of profoundly disruptive potential, prompting drastic alterations to the visual, auditory, and tactile sensations of external stimuli, to the perception of space and time, to the arousal and fluctuation of emotional states, to one’s habitual cognitive and behavioural patterns, and to one’s very sense of self and conception(s) of self-identity. Taken together, these alterations could be characterized as enacting a remarkably comprehensive destabilization of the normative equilibrium of consciousness; and, moreover, the episodic memories formed on the basis of this experience might continue to disrupt this equilibrium long after these initial alterations have come and gone. While psychedelic experiences therefore constitute exemplary instances of subjective rupture in their own right, they also open up connections to various other sites of experiential analysis. For the alterations associated with psychedelic experiences are not strictly limited to those induced by exogenous psychedelic compounds (such as LSD and psilocybin); and, as Strassman explains, it has long been

recognized that “the altered mental states brought on by psychedelics” share striking similarities with various “*naturally occurring* unusual states of consciousness,” including near-death experiences, psychoses (such as schizophrenia and acute mania), and mystical experiences (55-56, my emphasis). DMT is of particular interest, in this regard, as it is an endogenous, naturally occurring compound in the human body and has powerful psychedelic properties, which suggests that it might play an important role in mediating each of these “unusual states of consciousness.”³⁰ Whether or not the similarities between psychedelic experiences and these naturally occurring states of consciousness are attributable to DMT, however, the similarities themselves speak to the broader significance of the drastic alterations identified above, both in terms of their occurrence in a wide range of different experiences (beyond the bounds of the prototypical psychedelic experience) and with regard to their redoubtable disruptive potential (insofar as they can be seen to constitute a kind of episodic psychosis).

Indeed, one might even go so far as to posit a link between these drastic alterations and the question of subjective transformation. In “Psychedelic, Psychoactive, and Addictive Drugs and States of Consciousness,”³¹ for instance, Ralph Metzner assesses the broader significance of psychedelic and mystical experiences in terms of a simple but useful distinction between “expanded” and “contracted” states of consciousness (34-35). Thus, after aligning such experiences with “expanded” states, on the one hand, and characterizing addictions, “obsessive fixations,” and “defensive rigidities” as “contracted” states, on the other, Metzner proceeds to foreground a variety of clinical studies in which the former have been used to treat a variety of “consciousness-contracting compulsions and addictions” (40, 42).³² Although Metzner

considers the significance of the drastic alterations that attend psychedelic and mystical experiences for treating individuals who suffer from “compulsions and addictions,” his discussion nonetheless implies that the experience of such drastic alterations might also facilitate change and transformation in individuals who do not suffer from such pathological conditions. And this implication would seem to be corroborated by a recent study on “Mystical-type Experiences Occasioned by Psilocybin,” which not only involved a group of volunteers who were “medically and psychiatrically healthy,” but also found that, even 14 months after participating in the initial drug sessions, a large proportion of these volunteers considered their “psilocybin-occasioned, mystical-type” experiences “to be among the most personally meaningful and spiritually significant experiences of their lives and to have produced positive changes in attitudes, mood, altruism, behaviour and life satisfaction” (622, 631).³³ But perhaps more convincing evidence for a link between such extreme, mystical-type experiences and the phenomenon of subjective transformation comes from the field of lower frequency neurofeedback, or electroencephalogram (EEG) alpha-theta training; and this evidence suggests that the human brain has an innate capacity for facilitating such experiences on its own, without the introduction of exogenous psychedelic compounds. In “The Subjective Response to Neurofeedback,” the authors explain that alpha-theta training basically involves monitoring the neural activity of brain networks (as reflected by the “amplitude and frequency distributions of the EEG”), relaying this information to the individual through (tactile or auditory) instrumental feedback, and then gradually guiding the individual into an alpha- or theta-dominant brain state (350, 358).³⁴ Upon successfully entering these states, “the brain seems to end up doing a kind of random walk through the

unconscious, but since the person is in fact in a wakeful state, this material can be consciously experienced and even appraised”; and, needless to say, the subjective experience of such an encounter “with one’s own personal unconscious” often constitutes a “critical, gully-washing, bench-clearing, shaken-to-one’s-roots transformative event” for the individual in question (358, 361-62).

Of course, this is not to equate psychedelic or mystical-type experiences with some kind of revolutionary or emancipatory panacea, but rather to suggest that they present particularly promising sites for the analysis of the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation. For, regardless of whether or not they happen to facilitate the eventuality of lasting change and transformation, and despite the broad range of subjective effects that ensure their heterogeneity, these experiences nonetheless constitute exemplary instances of rupture. On the one hand, they can precipitate a sudden and remarkably expansive disruption of the normative equilibrium, dramatically altering even the most long-standing psychical constructs that animate the backdrop of subjective consciousness, and overriding the subject’s habitual cognitive and behavioural patterns to an extent that is equalled only by acute psychosis; on the other hand, this disruption is followed by a relatively swift and painless reconsolidation (at least as compared to the loss of a loved one).³⁵ While the long-term transformative potential of these experiences is debatable, their capacity to temporarily transform the subject’s phenomenal experience of self and world in such a radical way is remarkable in itself. And, perhaps more importantly, the relative ease with which these experiences can be induced not only sets them apart from other extreme experiences, but also makes them a truly fascinating area of research, one

that could well yield new insights into the dynamics of subjective transformation over the decades to come.

Subjective Transformation

In discussing the phenomenon of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, we might begin with the obvious (but important) qualification that this phenomenon necessarily manifests itself within a horizon of conscious potentiality, which is to say that the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation function within limits, and that whatever transformative potential they might engender will ultimately be expressed within these limits. This qualification harkens back to a point made at the very outset of this paper: namely, that “subjective transformation” partakes of two distinct meanings, depending on whether it is considered on the level of subjective consciousness or with regard to the condition of subjection. Broadly speaking, subjective transformation on the level of subjective consciousness entails significant and lasting changes to the subject’s sense of self, experience of the world, and understanding of her place within it. With regard to the condition of subjection, however, such transformation entails a kind of radical undoing of that which constitutes the subject as a subject, in the first place—an undoing of that which not only installs the subject in a condition of subjection, but also ensures that this condition is maintained. The horizon of conscious potentiality helps to maintain the distinction between these meanings: on the one hand, it allows for the countless variations that might attend subjective transformation on the level of subjective consciousness; on the other hand, it imposes definite limits on such transformation, limits which enfold it within an endlessly receding horizon. While the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation enable lasting changes and transformations to

the normative equilibrium of consciousness, then, they do so only within the limits of the horizon of conscious potentiality—and, depending on the perspective from which they are viewed, these limits could correspond to memories that have been permanently repressed (Žižek’s “traumatic kernel”), to that which cannot be conceptualized (death, the infinite, linguistic desubjectivation), and to stimuli that are intangible to the sensory modalities through which we experience the world around us. And yet, even within these limits, the sheer extent of the potential for change and transformation is remarkable, encompassing a near-infinite array of possible alterations to the psychological constructs and experiential boundaries that collectively define and delimit the normative equilibrium of consciousness.

We have already begun to see how the constitutive features of the normative equilibrium are susceptible to change and transformation. In terms of conventional processes of learning and memory, information stored during significant subjective experiences will be encoded in both explicit and implicit memory, a process which essentially involves the modification of synaptic connections in diverse neural circuits and systems, and which is enhanced by the arousal of emotional systems. Moreover, the reconstruction of the memories encoded during such experiences not only facilitates the (re)arousal of emotional systems, but also necessitates the synchronous firing of diverse neural circuits and systems in which the records of these memories are stored—and the conjunction of these two processes (emotional arousal and synchronous firing) in turn coordinates parallel plasticity in these neural circuits and systems, which can further enhance (and alter) the synaptic changes that took place during the experiences in question. Although these processes contribute to the development and entrenchment of

the normative equilibrium of consciousness, they also ensure that its constitutive features are inherently susceptible to change and transformation. But it is only when the subject is confronted with a profoundly disruptive experience, an experience which overrides her experiential boundaries and forces her to reevaluate the psychical constructs that previously defined her experience of herself and of her world—it is only then that the potential for change and transformation truly comes to the fore. As we have seen, such an experience carries with it the potential to spawn a vast network of disruption, comprehensively destabilizing the normative equilibrium for months and even years after it has come to pass. And, as the subject gradually comes to terms with such an experience, the potential for change and transformation is enhanced both by the “monopolization of brain resources” and by the “downward mobility of thought”—with the former at once perpetuating the emotional resonance of the experience and ensuring that the resulting synaptic modifications are relevant to “the current emotional situation,” and with the latter directing neural activity in diverse neural circuits and systems (including emotional and motivational systems), and thereby coordinating parallel plasticity in a way that might even precipitate alterations to the subject’s habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. If an instance of subjective rupture is especially significant or extreme, moreover, the resulting potential for change and transformation can be enhanced still further by the process of unlearning, which enables the dissolution of some of the normative equilibrium’s most constitutive psychical constructs, including “social attitudes, values, and goals” (as well as the elaborate emotional responses that undergird them). And, should this dissolution succeed, it in turn clears the way for the formation of new (or different) psychical constructs, at least insofar as it leaves behind a kind of

vacuum for conventional processes of learning and memory to fill—processes which are here influenced by the particularity of the experience that prompted this dissolution, by the network of intersubjective relations that the subject can call upon in the wake of the experience, and by her “general knowledge” and “personal history,” which are “soon regained” after the experience has reaped its destructive toll. As such, in each of the examples discussed above, the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation find their neurobiological counterparts not only in conventional processes of learning and memory (as *enhanced* by emotional arousal and *accelerated* by the disruptive potential of a significant subjective experience), but also in the process of unlearning (as *provoked* by still more acute emotional arousal and *supplemented* by the conventional processes that follow in its wake). And the combination of these respective neurobiological counterparts conveys the extent of the potential for change and transformation enabled thereby, showing how the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation entail the capacity to reshape the emotionally charged terrain of the normative equilibrium.

That said, we must recognize the sense that such change and transformation is not always for the best—the sense that, especially when an experience is profoundly stressful or traumatic, the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation may well give rise to changes and transformations that are wholly undesirable and even potentially devastating. In other words, we must recognize that extreme subjective experiences can prove so profoundly disruptive that they might completely escape the adaptive capacities of the dynamic of reconsolidation, precipitating the onset or development of devastating psychopathological conditions (such as schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder). Even if such experiences remain amenable to these adaptive capacities, moreover, they might

nonetheless bring about entirely detrimental changes to the normative equilibrium of consciousness, changes which might correspond to less severe conditions (such as chronic depression and various anxiety disorders). While the eventuality of such conditions illuminates the fundamental ambiguity of the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation (by emphasizing their negative/traumatic extreme), however, it does not detract from the sense that these dynamics also help to explain how extreme, emotionally significant experiences can lead to more desirable changes and transformations on the level of subjective consciousness. And nor does the eventuality of such unfortunate conditions detract from the *potential* for positive change and transformation, which might arise even when an otherwise traumatic experience occurs under more favourable circumstances, such as when the subject can rely on a strong (intersubjective) support system in the wake of the experience, or when she has the time (and courage) to reflect upon the experience, and thus to consciously influence the way that it affects her personal system of beliefs. (The question remains as to how one can distinguish between a change for the better and a change for the worse; and, since we cannot hope to answer this question without becoming entangled in a morass of ethical and ideological quandaries, we will refrain from addressing it here.)

Of course, the extent to which a given experience can even be characterized as an instance of rupture will largely depend on the disposition of the individual in question. Whether we consider an experience that is clearly extreme or one that is relatively commonplace, for instance, we must recognize that its disruptive potential will vary depending on the individual who experiences it, and that its capacity to facilitate change and transformation through the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation will therefore

partake of considerable variation. These variations are largely attributable to the sense that the particularity of the normative equilibrium of consciousness will differ from individual to individual, and so, in discussing the most important features of this equilibrium, we have already enumerated many of the factors that can either enhance or diminish the disruptive potential of a particular experience. But there is a more intuitive factor that we have yet to mention: namely, the extent to which an individual is willing to recognize (and perhaps even to facilitate the realization of) this potential. Françoise Dastur puts this point concisely in “Phenomenology of the Event,”³⁶ where she claims that, even though one “does not decide freely to change one’s world,” the “reconfiguration of possibilities” that attends the experience of a “new and unexpected event . . . can change us and even ‘happen’ to us only if we are in the right disposition,” only if we choose “to open [ourselves] to what happens” and to “welcome the unexpected” (186-87). To illustrate the significance of such an “open” disposition to the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation, we might return briefly to the example of emigrating to a foreign country. It is not difficult to see that the disruptive (and transformative) potential of such an experience will largely depend on the disposition of the individual in question. For an individual who is relatively “open” to the radical novelty of that which she encounters in this new environment, the experience might prove profoundly turbulent, in which case the potential for change and transformation would be all the more significant. On the other hand, an individual who is comparatively “closed” to this novelty might successfully ignore (or even actively resist) the disruptive aspects of this experience, in which case the potential for change and transformation would be drastically diminished. And the distinction between these respective

dispositions can also be applied to more extreme experiences, at least insofar as an individual can of course react to the disruptive potential of a particular experience in a multitude of different ways (recognizing and confronting it, ignoring and resisting it, etc.), and each of these reactions will in turn exert an influence on the experience's transformative potential (enhancing or diminishing it, as well as expanding or limiting the possibilities that it might entail). Although the above example is admittedly reductive, then, it at least helps to show how the disruptive potential of a particular experience will necessarily partake of a scale of intensities, manifesting itself to different degrees depending on the disposition of the individual in question, as well as to show how the enhancement of this potential can in turn lead to an expansion of the attendant possibilities for change and transformation. While this scale of intensities implies that the question of whether or not a given experience constitutes an instance of rupture is often arbitrary, moreover, this arbitrariness does not detract from the transformative capacity of the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation. For the crucial point here is that the *potential* for lasting change and transformation remains, regardless of whether or not it happens to be realized.

One further qualification needs to be mentioned here, and it concerns the potential for change and transformation to the subject's habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. That is, while this potential extends both to the constitutive psychological constructs of the normative equilibrium and to its experiential boundaries, we must recognize that changes to the latter are not only more difficult to assess than changes to the former, but also considerably more difficult to bring about. On the one hand, these changes are more difficult to assess because the influence of the subject's habitual patterns of thought and

behaviour is strictly implicit, manifesting itself primarily in the way that the subject thinks, feels, and behaves in particular situations; and, accordingly, any changes to this influence can only be recognized at one remove, and then only imperfectly, such that any claims about the precise nature of these changes are often fraught with error. On the other hand, these changes are more difficult to bring about because of what LeDoux describes as “an imperfect set of connections” between cognitive and emotional systems in the brain, which he sees as the result of a kind of evolutionary lag between the relatively recent (and rapid) development of the human prefrontal cortex and the more ancient brain structures implicated in human emotion and motivation (322).³⁷ For the purposes of our discussion in this chapter, what this means is that the interrelation between explicit and implicit forms of learning and memory is ultimately imperfect, such that the influence of the subject’s habitual patterns of thought and behaviour can not only conflict with that of her psychological constructs, but also persist independent of any lasting or semi-permanent changes that might transform these constructs in the wake of rupture. As such, we must recognize that changes to the more implicit features of the normative equilibrium are inherently elusive and unpredictable: for, even when the subject is forced to come to terms with an extreme, emotionally significant experience, these features may prove considerably less malleable than their explicit counterparts, and changes to the influence that they exert on the subject’s phenomenal experience need not bear any tangible correlation to the consciously accessible changes that occur in the theatre of her conscious mind.

And yet, as we have seen, the influence of these features is incredibly pervasive, and partakes of many different levels and degrees. Whereas the implicit epistemological

schemata that we acquire during early development might prove profoundly resistant to change, for instance, the same cannot necessarily be said for the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural patterns associated with addiction, anxiety, or depression—patterns which the subject can not only cultivate an awareness of, but also implement consciously devised strategies to prevent against (as the successes of cognitive-behavioural therapy have shown). If we accept that habit learning can facilitate the internalization of ideological constructions, moreover, then it stands to reason that these constructions can range from the more fundamental (such as that of the autonomous individual subject) to the less fundamental (such as those that stem from racist, sexist, nationalist, and religious ideologies, as well as those inherent to the values and beliefs of late capitalism itself). And, following the distinction between epistemological schemata and more overt patterns of thought and behaviour, could we not propose that the influence of these less fundamental constructions might prove considerably more susceptible to change than that of their more fundamental counterparts? That is, could we not propose that an instance of rupture might lead the subject to interrogate the ways in which her ideological commitments (to discursive constructions of race, of sex/gender, and of national or religious identity, for instance, as well as to the values of hard work, material wealth, and “enlightened” self-interest) have come to exert an influence on her habitual patterns of thought and behaviour? And, if the psychological constructs that previously defined the subject’s relation to these commitments have undergone significant changes or transformations, then could we not take this line of thought one step further, proposing that these more explicit changes might throw the implicit influence of these commitments

into sharp relief, and that the subject might in turn make a concerted effort to resist this influence (regardless of the extent to which she succeeds)?

After all, although the subject may be unable to consciously target and alter the influence of such commitments, a particularly extreme, emotionally significant experience might lead to “bench-clearing” revaluations of the psychological constructs that underlie her conception of herself, of her world, and of her place within it. And, as we have seen, it is during this process of mental reconsolidation that her emotionally charged thoughts can exert their downwardly mobile potential most effectively, coordinating parallel plasticity in a way that can facilitate changes to the implicit memories that sustain the influence of these commitments (provided that the initial disruption is profound enough, and that the ensuing reconsolidation is sufficiently difficult and prolonged). Although the implicit features of the normative equilibrium are considerably less malleable than their explicit counterparts, then, many of these features are nonetheless highly susceptible to change through the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation, especially when they also partake of explicit content (as all of the less fundamental ideological constructions mentioned above most certainly do). And, although one could argue that such changes remain largely within the normative constraints of the dominant socio-ideological order, one must also recognize that these constraints also partake of many different forms and manifest themselves to varying degrees. For, while the potential for change and transformation engendered by an instance of rupture might fail to alter either the epistemological schemata common to the subject’s language and culture or the more fundamental ideological constructions that exert a constitutive influence on her experience of herself, this potential might nonetheless enable significant alterations to

the more overt habits of thought and behaviour that sustain the implicit influence of her ideological commitments, and might thereby provide a space of resistance against many of the less fundamental constraints imposed by the dominant socio-ideological order.

By way of conclusion, we might begin with a brief summary of the points made thus far, touching on those that are most significant to the framework of subjective rupture. Rather than being limited to what the subject happens to be focusing on during a given moment in time, subjective consciousness encompasses a vast reservoir of explicit and implicit memories, memories which are shaped over the course of the subject's conscious existence, and which not only exert a profound influence on each successive moment of her phenomenal experience, but also manifest themselves in ways that largely elude her direct conscious awareness (whether through the backdrop of consciousness or through her habits of thought and behaviour). The normative equilibrium of consciousness pertains to the most familiar, personally significant, and emotionally charged features of this mnemonic reservoir, features which manifest themselves with a degree of frequency and tend to become deeply ingrained over time, and which include complex ensembles of explicit mental representations (or psychological constructs), habitual cognitive and behavioural patterns (or experiential boundaries), and the elaborate emotional responses that they respectively evoke. The dynamic of rupture manifests itself when a sufficiently extreme, emotionally significant experience disrupts the normative equilibrium, compromising its constitutive psychological constructs and experiential boundaries, and potentially spawning a network of disruption that can affect diverse aspects of the subject's everyday phenomenal experience and persist for a prolonged period of time. The dynamic of reconsolidation manifests itself in dialectical opposition

to the dynamic of rupture, working always to preserve the normative equilibrium, and thus to attenuate the disruptive potential of that which threatens its psychological constructs and experiential boundaries. If this disruptive potential is great enough, however, the dynamic of reconsolidation will succeed in attenuating it only at the cost of simultaneously failing to preserve the exact form of these constructs and boundaries, and so the newly consolidated equilibrium will differ from the one that held sway when the initial disruption came to pass. As such, the interrelation between these dynamics entails the potential for subjective transformation (on the level of subjective consciousness), and the extent to which this potential is realized depends on the capacity of a given experience to exert itself over against the constitutive features of the normative equilibrium, opening up points of rupture that orchestrate a sustained clash with these features, altering many of them suddenly and decisively, compromising others by implication, and thereby helping to ensure that the ensuing reconsolidation will be incomplete. Although the particularity of a given instance of subjective rupture will differ depending on the means by which it is induced, the context in which it occurs, and the disposition of the individual in question, moreover, the same *formal* principles of the framework persist, providing us with an effective means of both characterizing the disruptive potential of an extreme experience (with attention to the variables involved) and of evaluating the attendant potential for change and transformation.

We have elaborated this framework over the course of our inquiry into the dynamics and implications of subjective transformation, and this inquiry has entailed a crucial shift of perspective, an attempt to explore the phenomenon of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, and to avoid Butler and Žižek's

preoccupation with the condition of subjection. As this inquiry has shown, moreover, the framework of subjective rupture provides a means of addressing the questions that we posed at the beginning of this paper: namely, that of how such change and transformation might come about, and that of what it might entail for the subject's experience of self and world. That said, it is worth reiterating that this framework is intended as a heuristic tool, one that might not only help to characterize the dynamics and implications of such change and transformation, but also be deployed in relation to disparate models of subjective transformation. Whereas we set out to accomplish the first of these objectives in this chapter, the second has yet to be addressed. As such, we will now extend our inquiry to the work of Bataille, Foucault, Butler, and Žižek, engaging with their respective efforts to think subjective transformation in terms of the condition of subjection, and showing how the framework that we have established here could be used to enrich these efforts, to enrich them by elucidating what they might entail on the level of subjective consciousness.

Chapter Three

Our primary objective in this chapter will be to demonstrate the theoretical utility of the framework of subjective rupture, to demonstrate various ways in which it can be deployed to enhance disparate efforts to think the eventuality of subjective transformation. In pursuing this objective, we will engage both with Bataille's notion of the movement of sovereignty and with Foucault's conception of the limit-experience, before returning to Butler and Žižek's respective discussions of subversive resignification and the authentic act. The decision to focus on these thinkers in particular is justifiable in light of both the stature of their intellectual reputations and the influential contributions that they have made to the extant criticism on subjective transformation. Since these thinkers conceive such transformation primarily in terms of the condition of subjection, moreover, our engagements with their contributions will require us to extend the inquiry that we conducted in the previous chapter, considering the theoretical utility of subjective rupture in relation to their respective understandings of the condition of subjection, rather than focussing strictly on the level of subjective consciousness. For our engagements with Bataille and Foucault, we will begin with a brief discussion of their understandings of the condition of subjection, turn subsequently to the task of elucidating their models of subjective transformation, and then suggest how subjective rupture could contribute to a more expansive understanding of these models, how it could help to flesh out their implications for change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. Given that we have already dealt extensively with the notions of subversive resignification and the authentic act, our engagement with Butler and Žižek will build on our discussion in Chapter One, not only returning to some of the issues raised there, but

also showing how subjective rupture could serve as a useful supplement to the forms of subjective transformation that they respectively endorse. Despite the many differences that set each of these models of subjective transformation apart, there are important formal similarities between those proposed by Bataille and Foucault, on the one hand, and between those proposed by Butler and Žižek on the other. These similarities stem primarily from each thinker's understanding of the condition of subjection. More specifically, whereas Bataille and Foucault locate the condition of subjection on the level of subjective consciousness, Butler and Žižek locate it on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious; and, as we will see, this distinction between their understandings of the condition of subjection has significant implications for their efforts to think the eventuality of subjective transformation, as well as for their appraisals of the possibilities for change and transformation, more generally. This distinction also means that, of these four distinct models of subjective transformation, two concern the level of subjective consciousness, whereas the other two concern the psychoanalytic unconscious. Apart from the individual differences between each of these models, then, our endeavour to demonstrate the theoretical utility of subjective rupture will also have to deal with these divergent orientations, each of which will require us to deploy this framework in a different way. The work of these thinkers is therefore especially well suited to our discussion in this chapter, for their efforts to delineate possible means by which subjective transformation might come about are not only exemplary in themselves, but also variegated in a way that will allow us to consider the theoretical utility of subjective rupture from a number of different perspectives. As such, rather than elaborating on the full range of possible connections between these models and the framework of subjective

rupture, we will merely identify some aspects of each model that could benefit from further elucidation, and then suggest how this framework could be deployed to that end; and, although the resulting demonstration of the theoretical utility of subjective rupture will by no means be comprehensive, it will at least help to convey the extent of this utility by illustrating some of the framework's potential applications.

Bataille and the Movement of Sovereignty

Bataille's understanding of the condition of subjection can be approached through his distinction between the *profane* world and the *sacred* world. The profane world is governed by the principles of utility, accumulation, individual autonomy, and rational enterprise, and it encompasses every aspect of social life that is tainted by these principles, including work, the law, politics, religion, and authorized knowledge. Conversely, the sacred world is governed by the principles of intimacy (a unified, immediate relation with the totality of "that which is") and consumption (*qua* profitless expenditure), and it encompasses all that exceeds the influence of the profane world. Following Bataille's discussion in "The Sacred,"³⁸ the nature of the sacred world is fundamentally ineffable, and its manifestations can be recognized only in "privileged moment[s] of communal unity," moments "of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled" (242). As he explains in The Accursed Share,³⁹ moreover, this stifling of the sacred stems from "the reduction of 'that which is' to the *order of things*," a reduction which in turn relegates the subject "to the level of *things*," and which can be attributed to the advent of labour: "[f]rom the start, the introduction of *labour* into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matters is no longer the truth of the present moment, but, rather,

the subsequent results of *operations*” (1: 57). Broadly speaking, then, the advent of labour heralded the rise of the profane world, bringing with it the predominance of the principles of utility, accumulation, and rational enterprise, and thereby suppressing the sacred world (by replacing intimacy and “the truth of the present moment” with “rational progression” and the primacy of the “results of *operations*”). Although the predominance of these principles is engendered by a shift in material conditions, moreover, the principles themselves come to permeate the psychic life of the subject, not only reducing her to the status of a disparate “*thing*” (to an individual with a capacity for “servile use”), but also sundering her from the totality of “that which is” by instilling in her an almost perpetual concern for the future (1: 55). The degradation of human existence to its capacity for “servile use,” the reification of the subject into an alienated “*thing*,” the imprisonment of the subject within “the *order of things*”—these features of the profane world convey the crux of Bataille’s understanding of the condition of subjection. And yet, despite its pervasive influence, the profane world does not completely suppress the sacred world:

The world of *intimacy* is as antithetical to the *real* world as immoderation is to moderation, madness to reason, drunkenness to lucidity. There is moderation only in the object, reason only in the identity of the object with itself, lucidity only in the distinct knowledge of objects. . . . *I submit that madness itself gives a rarefied idea of the free “subject,” unsubordinated to the “real” order and occupied only with the present.* The *subject* leaves its own domain and subordinates itself to the *objects* of the *real* order as soon as it becomes concerned for the future. For the *subject* is consumption insofar as it is not tied down to work. (1: 58)

As such, although the concern for the future is to some extent perpetual—indeed, Bataille even goes so far as to describe “the projection of oneself into a future time” as “the precondition for conscious individualization” (3: 218)—it is by no means all encompassing, and the “domain” of the subject is essentially that of intimacy and profitless expenditure, even though she dissociates herself from this domain through her subordination “to the *objects* of the *real* order,” succumbing to the world of moderation, reason, and lucidity that bewitches her with the promise of accumulation through productive undertakings (i.e., work). While the bulk of the subject’s conscious existence plays itself out within the purview of the profane world, then, the subject remains intimately tied to the sacred world, and this world can irrupt into her everyday phenomenal experience, but only during isolated moments, and only insofar as it decisively contravenes “the *order of things*,” temporarily overturning the constitutive principles of the profane world (and, by extension, the “precondition for conscious individualization”).

This is where Bataille’s notion of the movement of sovereignty comes to the fore; and, as we shall see, this notion has nothing to do with national sovereignty or international law, but should rather be understood as a model of subjective transformation that builds on the above distinction between the sacred and the profane. In introducing this notion, Bataille states that sovereignty (or “sovereign life”) is directly opposed to “the servile and the subordinate,” that it manifests itself during moments when “the possibility of life opens up without limit,” and that its domain is ultimately that of life “*beyond utility*” (3: 197-98). This distinction between sovereignty and servitude extends the distinction between the sacred and the profane into the realm of everyday phenomenal

experience, such that “the movement of sovereignty” amounts to an irruption of the sacred on the level of subjective consciousness, an irruption which forcefully contravenes the profane principles that otherwise pervade the subject’s conscious existence (3: 204). The sovereign moment is thus one in which the subject of the profane world (the subject of labour, of utility and accumulation, of individual autonomy and authorized knowledge) is suddenly extricated from the “*order of things*,” freed from concern for the future, exposed to the “truth of the present moment,” reconnected with the totality of “that which is,” and thereby temporarily transformed into a “*free*” or sovereign subject. Since the influence of the profane world is so redoubtably pervasive, however, this movement from servitude to sovereignty comes at a price: “[c]onsciousness of the moment is not truly such, is not sovereign, except in *unknowing*. Only by cancelling, or at least neutralizing, every operation of knowledge within ourselves are we in the moment, without fleeing it. This is possible in the grip of strong emotions that shut off, interrupt or override the flow of thought” (3: 203). In other words, the principles of the profane world contaminate “every operation of knowledge within ourselves,” such that the (conscious) exercise of our cognitive capacities is always marked by “anticipation” (or “the unavoidable calculation of reason”); and, consequently, our subordination to the “*order of things*” can only be mitigated if this anticipation is comprehensively dissolved (3: 210). Such dissolution can be engendered through the powerful effusions of emotion that Bataille describes as examples of “virtual sovereignty,” and that he identifies in the experience of laughter, tears, “play, anger, intoxication, ecstasy, dance, music, combat, the funeral horror, the magic of childhood, . . . crime, cruelty, fear, [and] disgust” (3: 229-30). As with the scale of intensities discussed in the previous chapter, these experiences do not

constitute examples of “virtual sovereignty” in themselves, but rather provide an index of experiences that *might* constitute such examples, depending on whether they are sufficiently extreme or emotionally significant. Although these experiences can range from the banal to the profound, then, and although the question of whether they conform more with the former or latter is largely arbitrary (depending on a host of heterogeneous variables), the point here is that they have the potential to “override the flow of thought,” transgressing the limits of “conscious individualization” (by annulling both our anticipation of the future and our sense of self), and thereby “detaching us from the ground on which we were grovelling, in the concatenation of useful activity” (3: 203). That said, because the transition from servitude to sovereignty entails a departure from “the domain of positive and practical knowledge of objects,” what we encounter in the sovereign moment is “the subjective experience of an objectlessness: what we experience henceforth is NOTHING” (3: 234). This “NOTHING” is correlative to Bataille’s notion of “*unknowing*”: rather than signifying an empty void or nothingness, it conveys the sense in which the sovereign moment is fundamentally intangible to the operations of knowledge—the sense in which it can neither be comprehended as the object of these operations nor attained as “the anticipated result of a calculated effort” (3: 226). As such, the movement of sovereignty constitutes a kind of absolute transgression: on the one hand, it suddenly and decisively contravenes the “*order of things*,” freeing the subject from the coercive influence of the profane world, and enveloping her in the sacred experience of life “*beyond utility*,” wherein “the possibility of life opens up without limit”; on the other hand, this movement is so antithetical to the principles that undergird the subject’s experience of self and world that it cannot properly be incorporated into the

realm of her everyday conscious existence, at least insofar as it does not represent an end that she can consciously work toward.⁴⁰

Although Bataille contends that the subject cannot hope to prolong the sovereign moment indefinitely (without suffering the loss of her own identity), it would be wrong to conclude that he thereby refuses to countenance the eventuality of subjective transformation. Indeed, at the very outset of the third volume of The Accursed Share, Bataille admits that his argument “considers the movement of sovereignty only in a general way” (204), and so it is perhaps unsurprising that he deals with the more absolute aspects of this movement, without properly elucidating their practical significance to the sentiments that he expresses in “The Sacred Conspiracy,”⁴¹ which are concisely summed up by his assertion that “it is necessary to become completely different, or to cease being” (179). Despite the fact that he does not explicitly address this significance, moreover, one could argue that it is implicit in his discussion as a whole, at least insofar as he presents sovereignty as a movement that contravenes the influence of the profane world, and that thereby secures the possibility of becoming “completely different,” if only for a moment. The unstated implication here is that the subject can at least cultivate an appreciation for the importance of sovereign life, and that such an appreciation might constitute an initial step toward the eventuality of more lasting change and transformation. In other words, although the subject cannot hope to permanently attain the eventuality of sovereign life—for such a hope remains bound by the principles of accumulation and rational progression (and is thus inherently profane)—the very notion of sovereign life can nonetheless help her to gauge that which she lacks, prompting realizations that might in turn provide her with a means of resisting the influence of the profane world, if only in a minimal way.

And, similarly, while the experiences that Bataille equates with “virtual sovereignty” offer no hope of permanently overcoming the influence of the profane world—for this influence is too deeply ingrained to be cast off entirely—these experiences nonetheless have the potential to enhance the above realizations, further bolstering the subject’s capacity to obtain a more progressive (and perhaps even subversive) understanding of her relation to the profane world (through the lived experience of sovereign moments).

Subjective rupture provides a useful supplement to Bataille’s discussion, in this regard, at least insofar as it could help to flesh out these unstated implications. Indeed, Bataille’s understanding of subjection to the profane world shares significant parallels with our discussion of the normative equilibrium of consciousness: given that he cites “the ceaseless operation of cognition” as one of the primary manifestations of the influence of the profane world (3: 208), for instance, one could easily align this influence with the gradual entrenchment of the subject’s experiential boundaries, especially with regard to the more fundamental forms of implicit learning, including both the appropriation of implicit epistemological schemata and the internalization of ideological constructions (such as that of the autonomous individual subject, which is correlative to “the positing of oneself as a thing”). As for the implications above, moreover, if the subject were to develop both an appreciation of the importance of sovereign life and a recognition of her own subjection to the influence of the profane world, then these notions could not only become important psychological constructs in themselves, but also engender the reevaluation of other psychological constructs, such as those that pertain to the subject’s self-concepts and epistemological understanding of the world. And, in turn, the movement of sovereignty could not only facilitate the development of such an

appreciation for these notions, but also enhance the ensuing process of reevaluation, manifesting itself in privileged moments of “virtual sovereignty” that function largely according to the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation—at least insofar as such moments can themselves be described as experiences that disturb the normative equilibrium of consciousness, before subsequently being paved over by a process of reconsolidation. Although it might seem to foreclose on the eventuality of subjective transformation, then, Bataille’s conception of sovereignty (and the experiences that it circumscribes) might nonetheless serve as a locus for (less radical) changes and transformations on the level of subjective consciousness, and the framework of subjective rupture helps to substantiate this possibility, thereby providing a useful supplement to his discussion as a whole. But this is not all that subjective rupture brings to Bataille’s discussion: for, insofar as it enables us to elaborate the dynamics and implications of the movement of sovereignty on the level of subjective consciousness, it also provides a means of extending this discussion in important ways—a means of conceptualizing what his model of subjective transformation might entail for the subject’s experience of self and world, and of thereby potentially enhancing his effort to think such transformation in terms of the condition of subjection.

Foucault and the Limit-Experience

Whereas Bataille conveys his understanding of the condition of subjection in relatively absolute terms, Foucault’s understanding is comparatively diffuse, encompassing an expansive array of different forms of subjection that arise through manifold relations of power-knowledge, relations which permeate the social realm in its entirety, and which represent the primary means by which human beings come to be

constituted as subjects.⁴² Insofar as power at once produces and is dependent upon knowledge (or discourses of “truth”), there is a kind of circular interrelation between the two: the exercise of power is not possible without the simultaneous production and dissemination of knowledge, just as the functioning of knowledge always entails the implementation of specific effects of power. Thus understood, knowledge pertains not to an idealistic notion of universal “truth,” but rather, as Foucault puts it in “Truth and Power,”⁴³ to the particular discourses which a society “accepts and makes function as true,” and to the multifarious rules and mechanisms “according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power [are] attached to the true” (131-32). Although these specific effects of power sustain the hegemonic influence of these discourses, they are nevertheless not strictly repressive: rather than simply prohibiting that which does not accord with a given society’s “régime of truth,” these effects are inherently productive, collectively constituting “a productive network which runs through the whole social body” (131, 119). Perhaps more importantly, this network should not be understood as a wholly external web in which the individual is enmeshed: for, while its most obvious manifestations can be recognized in a society’s material (and ideological) apparatuses, this network is also in many respects constitutive of the individual herself. Indeed, as Foucault explains in one of his lectures,⁴⁴ “it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals”—which is to say that the individual “is not the *vis-à-vis* of power,” but rather “one of its prime effects” (98). In order to clarify the significance of this claim to Foucault’s understanding of the condition of subjection, we need look no further than his comments in “The Subject and Power,”⁴⁵ where he

describes the “form of power which makes individuals subjects” as one that “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (212). The context in which this form of power exerts itself is that of the networks of power-knowledge relations that permeate modern Western societies, and one of the primary effects of these networks consists in the delineation of a domain of objectivity, a domain in which human beings are marked by their status as autonomous individual subjects and henceforth become subjects of knowledge. In becoming subjects of knowledge, moreover, individuals are exposed to the specific effects of power that are attached to those discourses that their society “accepts and makes function as true,” and these effects of power can be recognized in the individualizing tactics and disciplinary practices that not only categorize individuals (dividing the mad from the sane, the sick from the healthy, and the criminal from the law-abiding, for instance), but also attach them to their own identities (attach them both to their status as individuals and to the categorizations that have been imposed on them, which they recognize as self-evident “truths”). And this final point leads us to what is perhaps the most insidious aspect of these effects of power: rather than merely exerting a unidirectional influence on the individual, they elicit the individual’s participation in the means of her own subjection, as is clearly demonstrated by the processes of subjectivation through which the individual comes to terms with the “law of truth” that has been imposed upon her, thereby not only enhancing her subjugation to this law, but also to some extent internalizing the very context of her subjection.⁴⁶ As this brief discussion of the way in which the individual is categorized, attached to her own identity, and coerced into recognizing the “law of truth”

that is imposed on her helps to show, then, each of these phenomena conspires to tie the individual “to [her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (212); and, although these phenomena cannot provide a comprehensive account of Foucault’s understanding of the condition of subjection (since the particular characteristics of this “conscience or self-knowledge” differ from individual to individual, and therefore constitute different forms of subjection), they at least help to sketch the basic outlines of this understanding, providing a rough approximation of the key means by which “human beings are made subjects” (208).

In a series of interviews that he conducted with Duccio Trombadori in 1978,⁴⁷ shortly after the end of his genealogical period, Foucault proposes a model of subjective transformation in his conception of the “limit-experience,” a conception which gestures toward the possibility of altering the individual’s relation to particular discourses of “truth” and counteracting the specific effects of power that are attached to these discourses. After relating that “Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot . . . try through experience to reach that point of life which lies as close as possible to the impossibility of living, which lies at the limit or extreme,” Foucault claims that it is “this de-subjectifying undertaking, the idea of a ‘limit-experience’ that tears the subject from itself, which is the fundamental lesson that I’ve learned from these authors” (31-32). For Foucault, the limit-experience is “something you come out of changed,” an experience which “clear[s] the way for a transformation,” and which “isn’t simply individual but which has a character accessible to others: that is, this experience must be linkable, to a certain extent, to a collective practice and to a way of thinking” (27, 38-39). Foucault illustrates this point with reference to his books, noting that the “lesson [of the limit-experience] has always

allowed me to conceive them as direct experiences to ‘tear’ me from myself, to prevent me from always being the same” (32); and, further, he relates that the “success” of Discipline and Punish is, for him, conveyed in the sense that “it is read as an experience that changes us, that prevents us from always being the same, or from having the same kind of relationship with things and with others that we had before reading it” (41). Clearly, then, the “de-subjectifying undertaking” of the limit-experience should be distinguished from the “critical desubjectivation” that Butler’s notion of resignification aims to accomplish: for this “de-subjectifying undertaking” does not entail “a willingness *not* to be,” but rather pertains to experiences which tear the subject from herself and thereby “clear the way for a transformation,” creating the conditions of possibility for the subject to emerge “changed.” In other words, whereas Butler and Žižek articulate models of subjective transformation that are focussed almost exclusively on the possibility of mitigating the condition of subjection, Foucault’s conception of the limit-experience is expressly concerned with the possibility of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, with the possibility of preventing the subject “from always being the same” by transforming her “relationship with things and with others.” In illustrating this possibility with reference to his books, moreover, Foucault imbues the limit-experience with an eminently practical significance: rather than offering any hope of utopian liberation, the limit-experience opens the possibility of destabilizing the subject’s relationship to the “law of truth” that has been imposed upon her, of obtaining a subversive understanding of the particular discourses of “truth” and processes of subjectivation through which she has been chained “to [her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.” Instead of freeing the subject from the insidious influence of this

“conscience or self-knowledge,” then, the limit-experience enables her to recognize the sense in which it has not only been constructed through relations of power-knowledge, but also come to sustain her subjection to a particular “law of truth”—and it is precisely in the experience of this recognition that the potential for change and transformation inheres.

Given that the limit-experience is not geared toward the more radical possibility of transforming the condition of subjection, Foucault’s position here could certainly be characterized as a stoical one. But this is not to say that it is one of resignation. On the contrary, it entails both a recognition of the problems that beset any attempt to decisively liberate the subject from that which sustains her subjection and a determination to act in spite of them. Indeed, Foucault’s comments on the limit-experience cannot help but remind us of the “philosophical ethos” that Foucault proposes in “What Is Enlightenment?,”⁴⁸ an ethos which he characterizes “as a *limit-attitude*,” and which entails a genealogical critique that “will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (45-46). If it is to have any hope of success (of giving “new impetus” to “the undefined work of freedom”), however, Foucault wagers that “this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one,” such that “this work done at the limits of ourselves” must not be confined to speculation, but must rather “put itself to the test of reality” (46). Recalling that the French *expérience* carries with it the connotation of experimentation, one could argue that the limit-experience is precisely what Foucault has in mind here, that this experimental “work done at the limits of ourselves” allies the limit-experience with “a collective practice” and “a way of thinking.”⁴⁹ In affirming that this

work “must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical,” moreover, Foucault effectively refuses to endorse the possibility of comprehensively transforming “what we are, do, or think”; and yet, at the same time, he suggests that this work should certainly aim to engender more “specific transformations” in various areas that “concern our ways of being and thinking” (46). Indeed, the whole thrust of Foucault’s discussion is directly concerned with exploring (and affirming) the possibility of moving beyond our present “ways of being and thinking,” and in this sense it echoes (and expands upon) his claim in “Revolutionary Action”⁵⁰ that we must work toward “the simultaneous agitation of *consciousness* and institutions,” that we must “attack the relationships of power through the *notions* and institutions that function as their instruments, armature, and armour” (228, my emphasis). Whereas Bataille’s notion of the movement of sovereignty entails a comprehensive (albeit temporary) transgression of the deeply ingrained principles that sustain the subject’s subjection to the profane world, then, Foucault’s conception of the limit-experience entails a more specific, targeted form of transgression, one that aims to facilitate a concerted interrogation of particular relations of power-knowledge that not only predispose the subject to particular “ways of being and thinking,” but also conspire to make her “conscience or self-knowledge” conform with a given “law of truth.”

Since Foucault does not elaborate on the precise manner in which the experience of such transgression can lead to change and transformation, the framework of subjective rupture could be deployed as an instructive counterpart to his discussion. In light of his claim that Discipline and Punish is read “as an experience that changes us,” transforming our “relationship with things and with others,” for instance, we could characterize the

limit-experience as a predominately epistemological disruption of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, a disruption which confronts the subject with a set of conceptual stimuli that contravenes her habitual patterns of thought and challenges her most familiar psychological constructs, and which thereby potentially tears her from herself in a violent moment of realization. As such, this disruption might not merely constitute a temporary disturbance, but also persist for an extended period of time, setting in motion a prolonged and wide-ranging process of interrogation, and perhaps even compelling the subject to question the very foundations of her epistemological understanding of self and world. And, although this disruption might lack the thought-stopping power of a “sovereign moment,” it might nonetheless be accompanied by a tumult of emotions, especially if the realization in question strikes at the subject’s most highly cathected psychological constructs, such as her self-concepts, her values and beliefs, or her “memories of the future.” While the potential for change and transformation engendered thereby is already significant in itself, moreover, this potential seems all the more impressive when one considers that Foucault links the limit-experience to an *ethos* of transgression, to a “*limit-attitude*” that might lead the subject to experience an incremental series of these transgressive realizations, each of which could play out along the lines of the singular disruption described above, thereby contributing to a more prolonged (and potentially quite profound) process of change and transformation. As we can see, then, the framework of subjective rupture helps us to conceptualize the dynamics of Foucault’s conception of the limit-experience, illustrating how the experience of such transgressive realizations might lead to partial transformations of the subject’s “ways of being and

thinking,” and thereby providing a means of both extending his discussion and enriching the model of subjective transformation that he sets forth.

Return to Butler and Žižek

As we saw in Chapter One, Butler’s and Žižek’s respective discussions of subversive resignification and the authentic act evince a problematic preoccupation with the condition of subjection. More specifically, their discussions evince a preoccupation with a “fundamental” level of subjection, and, although they define this level differently, they both use it to establish the radical potentiality of their models of subjective transformation. Thus, whereas Butler defines this level as that of the subject’s (unconscious) “passionate attachment to subjection,” an attachment which is cultivated and sustained by the injurious interpellations that undergird the subject’s symbolic identity (and that therefore govern the terms “by which subjection is installed in the very formation of the subject”), Žižek defines this level as that of the “fundamental fantasy,” the primordially repressed “phantasmic core” that masks the gap or void at the heart of the subject, and that not only serves as “the ultimate support of the subject’s being,” but also constitutes the precondition for the process of symbolic identification that Butler addresses in her discussion of injurious interpellations. Despite the differences between their respective formulations of this fundamental level of subjection, moreover, both Butler and Žižek explicitly orient their models of subjective transformation toward the possibility of mitigating this level: for Butler, subversive resignification constitutes a means by which the subject might “rework and unsettle” her passionate attachment to subjection, enabling her to resist and performatively reconfigure the injurious interpellations that sustain this attachment; for Žižek, the authentic act is defined by its

capacity to “traverse” the fundamental fantasy, to disturb the disavowed “phantasmic core” of the subject’s being in a way that alters “the ultimate framework of [her] world-experience.” By presenting each of their models as a means of addressing the condition of subjection, Butler and Žižek imbue them with an emphatically radical character; and yet, as we have seen, the manner in which they accomplish this raises three important issues. The first issue concerns the overly negative bent of their argumentation: although this negativity is most immediately evident in the disproportionate amount of energy that they expend in distinguishing their positions (both from that of one another and from that of Foucault), this negativity can not only be attributed to their respective ideological commitments, but also be seen to inflect the very models that they endorse, to limit them by making them serve the purposes of these commitments. The second issue concerns the sense that the radical potentiality of their models results in a kind of theoretical impasse, at least insofar as both Butler and Žižek end up situating the eventuality of subjective transformation in an as-yet-unimaginable beyond, and thereby paradoxically detract from the capacity of their models to characterize change and transformation in the present. And the third issue pertains to the way that their shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection (and the problems that it entails) leads them to elide the level of subjective consciousness, and thus to overlook an important aspect of the models that they set forth.

The crux of Butler and Žižek’s disagreement stems both from their respective ideological commitments and from their shared determination to articulate a radical form of resistance, but the apparent intractability of their disagreement obfuscates the sense that their models are largely commensurable and share much in common. On the one hand, Butler’s disagreement with Žižek centres around what she sees as his problematic

reification of the Lacanian Real into an “indeterminate,” “originary power of negation” which “forms the condition and constitutive ‘principle’ of every object constituted within its field,” and which therefore amounts to a kind of formal a priori that decisively undermines the efficacy of mounting a determinate inquiry into the questions of “why and how certain kinds of unspeakabilities structure the discourses that they do” (CHU 272). Following Mikko Tuhkanen’s analysis in “Performativity and Becoming,”⁵¹ however, one could argue that this reading (and rejection) of the Lacanian Real exhibits both her determination to preserve “a certain calculability of change” (which the Real “does not sustain”) and her consequent reluctance to “relinquish the future” to the profound unpredictability of properly radical change (14). Although Butler’s preoccupation with the condition of subjection (and with the need to articulate a radical form of resistance) ultimately leads her to endorse subversive resignification as possible means of precipitating a “critical desubjection” (and thus of emancipating the subject from her passionate attachment to subjection), in other words, she remains committed to preserving (and theorizing) the possibility of calculable change, change which the subject can conceptualize and consciously work toward (by recognizing and subverting the constitutive exclusions that sustain normative constructions of sex/gender/identity). On the other hand, and in keeping with his own ideological commitments, Žižek takes issue with Butler’s criticisms of Lacan, such that the thrust of his argument is concerned with showing how Lacan’s notion of the authentic act allows for “a much more radical subjective intervention” than the one proposed by Butler: for, rather than merely facilitating a “displacement/resignification of the symbolic coordinates that confer on the subject his or her identity,” the act aims to bring about “the radical transformation of the

very universal structuring ‘principle’ of the existing symbolic order” (CHU 220). Thus, while Žižek understandably takes pains to defend the radical potentiality of Lacan’s thought against Butler’s criticisms, he does not attempt to dispute either the theoretical validity or the political efficacy of her notion of subversive resignification, and he freely admits that her position is “in fact very close to the Lacan of the early 1950s” (CHU 220). What Žižek does take issue with, however, are the radical credentials that Butler ascribes to her notion of subversive resignification, and it is to this end that he repeatedly aligns his own position with that of the later Lacan, with the Lacan who emphasized that “*the notion of Real as impossible . . . reveals the ultimate contingency, fragility (and thus changeability) of every symbolic constellation*” (CHU 221). Whereas Butler’s notion of subversive resignification is oriented toward calculable (and hence less radical) change, then, Žižek’s reading of the authentic act is oriented toward *incalculable* (and hence more radical) change. And yet, at the same time, these models share much in common, as they are both predicated on a determination to mitigate the condition of subjection, they both seek to do so by precipitating change and transformation on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious, and they are both essentially commensurable with the broader scope of Lacan’s thought. As such, and without discounting the differences of opinion that sustain it, Butler and Žižek’s disagreement is far less intractable than it might at first appear, as the crux of this disagreement pertains not to any inherent incommensurability between their respective models of subjective transformation, but rather to their respective ideological commitments and claims to radical potentiality.

Although Butler and Žižek's main concern is with mitigating the condition of subjection, moreover, they both countenance the eventuality of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, and their models implicitly accommodate this eventuality (even though they themselves seem to undervalue its significance, to discount it as somehow not radical enough). Indeed, if we move beyond their claims to radical potentiality, we can see that their models do not necessarily exclude less radical forms of change and transformation, and are thus not strictly limited to those that directly concern the condition of subjection. Moving beyond Butler's discussion of the subject's passionate attachment to subjection, for instance, we might consider her description of the unconscious as "*an ongoing psychic condition,*" which is grounded on her claim that the primordial foreclosures through which the subject comes into being in turn produce the unconscious as "*a certain mode in which the unspeakably social endures*" (CHU 153). In other words, Butler views these foreclosures as inextricably interrelated to particular social norms, such that these foreclosures are "articulated through trajectories of power, regulatory ideals which constrain what will and will not be a person," and which thereby not only bring the subject into being on the basis of a battery of constitutive exclusions, but also demand that we interpret the productive power of particular social norms "as part of the very action of unconscious psychic processes" (CHU 153, 154). In articulating this view of the unconscious as an "*ongoing psychic condition*" in which "*the unspeakably social endures,*" Butler delineates an expansive space in which the transformative power of subversive resignification might exert itself, a space which is determined by a co-dependent relation between social norms and unconscious psychic processes, and which is therefore not only

in keeping with her commitment to the possibility of calculable change (since the influence of such norms can be conceptualized and perhaps even consciously resisted), but also not strictly limited to the fundamental level of the subject's passionate attachment to subjection. Considered within this more expansive view of the unconscious, then, the possibilities for change and transformation opened up by Butler's notion of subversive resignification seem incredibly diverse: rather than being limited to the radical eventuality of unsettling the subject's passionate attachment to subjection, these possibilities extend to a wide array of unconscious psychical processes, including those (less fundamental) processes that we have associated with the expression of deeply ingrained social values and beliefs, and that not only exert a pervasive influence on the subject's phenomenal experience, but are also indirectly accessible to consciousness (at least insofar as their influence can be recognized at one remove). Žižek's notion of the authentic act also accommodates the eventuality of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, although it does so in a much less direct way than Butler's notion of subversive resignification. Given that the authentic act cannot be divorced from its radical potentiality, Žižek is doubtless correct to characterize it as "a much more radical subjective intervention" than the one proposed by Butler; however, one might add to this characterization that the act, for all its radical potentiality, need not be seen as necessarily incompatible with the less radical changes and transformations that we have just identified with regard to subversive resignification. Without discounting Žižek's distinction between "the mere endeavour to 'solve a variety of partial problems' within a given field and the more radical gesture of subverting the very structuring principle of this field," in other words, perhaps these less radical changes and

transformations might help to create the conditions of (im)possibility for such a radical subversion to occur (CHU 121). That is, perhaps a series of less radical changes or transformations might prepare the ground of a given symbolic field (as it were), facilitating alterations to certain aspects of the subject's psyche and thereby creating more favourable conditions for the eventual realization of an authentic act (even if the act itself remains strictly inconceivable after the alterations in question, and thus retains its radical potentiality). Indeed, considered from this perspective, there is a definite sense in which subversive resignification and the authentic act are not only commensurable, but also mutually reinforcing, at least insofar as the (less radical) transformations brought about through subversive resignification might eventually engender the conditions of (im)possibility for an authentic act, and the (more radical) transformations brought about through an authentic act are ultimately what the notion of subversive resignification seeks to achieve. (And, of course, it also stands to reason that the transformations brought about through subversive resignification could serve some purpose even after an authentic act has come to pass.) In any case, since mitigating the condition of subjection necessarily implies the eventuality of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, we could even take the claims above one step further, proposing that Butler and Žižek's respective models of subjective transformation not only accommodate this eventuality, but are also inherently tied to this eventuality, at least insofar as the radical transformations that they gesture toward could not come to pass without also precipitating change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness.

Whether we consider these models on the level of subjective consciousness or with regard to the condition of subjection, however, we are nonetheless confronted with Butler and Žižek's shared reluctance to elaborate on precisely *how* the forms of subjective transformation that they endorse might come about, and on exactly *what* they might entail for the subject's experience of herself and her world—and this is where the framework of subjective rupture might be of some assistance. Indeed, the unconventionally expansive conception of subjective consciousness on which we predicated this framework is especially pertinent, in this regard, as it encompasses aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience that function largely (and often entirely) outside the bounds of her immediate conscious awareness, including the elaborate emotional responses that undergird her values and beliefs, as well as the various habitual patterns of thought and behaviour that we have associated both with her modes of defence and resistance and with her internalization of particular socio-ideological constructions. What this means is that, although the framework of subjective rupture cannot properly account for the dynamics of change and transformation on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious, it nonetheless shares a minimal affinity with the psychoanalytic unconscious, at least insofar as the above aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience could be characterized as manifestations of unconscious psychical processes (in the specifically socio-ideological sense that Butler ascribes to them). As such, this framework does provide a *vicarious* means of characterizing the dynamics of such change and transformation, as it can account for the manifestations of some of the less fundamental aspects of the psychoanalytic unconscious, and it also provides an expansive platform for considering what such change and transformation might entail on the level

of subjective consciousness. With this qualification in mind, we might begin by addressing the question of precisely how the forms of subjective transformation that Butler and Žižek endorse might come about, and the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation can usefully be deployed to this end, as they help to account for the manner in which the experience of subversive resignification or of an authentic act might both disrupt and transform the normative equilibrium of consciousness. Given that Butler emphasizes that subversive resignification functions according to a logic of iteration, for instance, we could gauge the transformative potential of such resignification according to the tripartite temporal perspective that the framework of subjective rupture entails, proposing that the full extent of this potential emerges not through a single instance of resignification, but rather through the disruptive effects that an incremental concatenation of resignifications might exert over a prolonged period of time. And, similarly, although Žižek characterizes the transformative potential of the authentic act in singular terms (as a miraculous “*tuche*” that suddenly transforms a given symbolic field), we could perhaps suggest that this characterization would be enhanced by the same temporal perspective, for the disruptive repercussions of such a radical reconfiguration of the subject’s symbolic identity would doubtless persist for long after the act in question had initially come to pass. Whether we consider a series of subversive resignifications or a singular authentic act, moreover, the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation provide a means of accounting for how their transformative potential might be realized on the level of subjective consciousness: for, in either of these cases, we encounter a more or less profound disruption of the normative equilibrium of consciousness, one that can conceivably engender a network of disruption, spawning interrelated points of rupture

that are imbued with emotional resonance, contravening the constitutive psychical constructs and experiential boundaries that sustain this equilibrium, and thereby ensuring that the eventual reconsolidation of this equilibrium will be with a difference. And the framework of subjective rupture can also be used to address the question of what the resulting changes and transformations might entail for the subject's experience of herself and her world: from the emotionally charged psychical constructs that animate the theatre of the subject's conscious mind to the habits of thought and behaviour that function outside the bounds of her immediate conscious awareness, the normative equilibrium of consciousness delineates an expansive experiential background against which the transformative potential of a series of subversive resignifications or a singular authentic act might exert itself.

In surveying our engagements with each of the thinkers discussed above, we can recognize some important similarities and differences between their understandings of the condition of subjection, their models of subjective transformation, and their appraisals of the possibilities for change and transformation, more generally. For Bataille, the influence of the profane world exerts itself in a way that is fundamentally nonconscious, at least insofar as this influence manifests itself in operations of cognition that function largely outside the bounds of conscious awareness. Whereas the influence of the sacred world is an *innate* and *primordial* feature of human existence, one that is largely stifled in the psychic life of the subject, but that can nonetheless irrupt into the realm of her everyday phenomenal experience, moreover, the influence of the profane world is a *historically contingent* feature of human existence, one that the subject internalizes and gradually succumbs to, such that it becomes increasingly entrenched over time and

eventually comes to pervade her experience of self and world. Although Foucault would doubtless take issue with Bataille's privileging of the sacred as a primordial or originary aspect of human existence, his understanding of the individual as "one of the prime effects" of relations of power-knowledge suggests that, like Bataille, he views the historically contingent, materially conditioned shaping of nonconscious cognitive processes as a fundamental aspect of the condition of subjection, for this shaping doubtless plays a crucial role in binding the subject "to [her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." (Although, again, instead of casting the results of this shaping as perversions of a primordial order of being, he conceives them as specific effects of particular relations of power-knowledge and processes of subjectivation.) As such, there is a certain formal affinity between Bataille and Foucault's respective understandings of the condition of subjection, an affinity which concerns their mutual location of the condition of subjection on the level of subjective consciousness, and which extends also to their models of subjective transformation, at least insofar as these models both privilege the eventuality of change and transformation on this level, and therefore encourage us to view the possibilities for change and transformation in an inherently optimistic light. Then, with Butler and Žižek, we encounter a kind of radicalization. On the one hand, Butler's position is arguably less radical than Žižek's, for, while she endorses the psychoanalytic notion that the subject comes into being on the basis of foreclosure, she does so in a way that simultaneously affirms her Foucauldian leanings, such that she imbues this notion with a specifically social dimension. On the other hand, Žižek's position is arguably more radical than Butler's, as his view of the subject of lack (and the empty core of subjectivity proper) is more exclusively concerned

with the Lacanian Real, with the “traumatic ‘bone in the throat’ that *contaminates* every ideality of the symbolic, rendering it contingent and inconsistent” (CHU 310). Despite these differences, Butler and Žižek’s respective positions nonetheless constitute a clear departure from those of Bataille and Foucault, for their understandings of the condition of subjection are located firmly on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious; their models of subjective transformation, in attempting to address this level, are necessarily more radical than those endorsed by Bataille and Foucault; and their appraisals of the possibilities for change and transformation are arguably more pessimistic, at least insofar as they privilege more fundamental (and as-yet-unimaginable) alterations to the condition of subjection over the eventuality of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness.

That the framework of subjective rupture can be deployed in relation to the models of subjective transformation set forth by each of these thinkers—serving as a useful supplement to their respective discussions, and contributing to these discussions in different ways, despite the range of idiosyncrasies that render each of them distinct—speaks not only to its inherent inclusiveness and flexibility, but also to the extent of its theoretical utility. For both Bataille and Foucault, the emphasis is precisely on *experience* as a potential site of change and transformation, and this emphasis differentiates their models from those set forth by Butler and Žižek. And yet, although their models privilege the eventuality of change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, their discussions of these models centre around their respective understandings of the condition of subjection, and are thus primarily concerned with elucidating the significance of these models in relation to the influence of the profane world (Bataille)

and to processes of subjectivation (Foucault), rather than with elaborating on precisely how they relate to the level of subjective consciousness. As we have seen, the framework of subjective rupture provides an effective means of addressing this latter relation: for, during our engagements with both the movement of sovereignty and the limit-experience, the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation allowed us to conceptualize precisely how these forms of subjective transformation might come about, and the normative equilibrium of consciousness allowed us to consider what they might entail for the subject's experience of self and world. While this framework is perhaps less directly applicable to Butler and Žižek's respective notions of subversive resignification and the authentic act, it provides a vicarious means of engaging with each of these notions, as it encompasses certain aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience that could be viewed as manifestations of unconscious psychological processes, and it also proves useful in considering the ramifications of these forms of subjective transformation on the level of subjective consciousness. In other words, although subjective rupture cannot properly account for the more radical transformations that Butler and Žižek gesture toward, it nonetheless enables us to characterize the changes and transformations that subversive resignification and the authentic act would necessarily give rise to on the level of subjective consciousness, and thereby helps to elaborate the dynamics and implications of the models of subjective transformation that they set forth. Whether we consider the models proposed by Bataille and Foucault or those advanced by Butler and Žižek, then, the crucial point here is that none of these thinkers properly account for the dynamics and implications of their models on the level of subjective consciousness, and that it is precisely this deficiency that makes their models amenable to interpretation through the

framework of subjective rupture. Given that subjective rupture provides a means of elaborating these dynamics and implications, moreover, it seems fair to suggest that it not only constitutes a useful supplement to these thinkers' respective discussions, but might also help to extend these discussions by facilitating the exploration of their models in a different context, as well as to enrich these models themselves by contributing to a more expansive understanding of what they might entail for the subject's experience of self and world. Ideally, it would have been possible to conduct a more thorough examination of the precise correlations between the models proposed by these thinkers and the framework of subjective rupture; but, since such an undertaking would require a more comprehensive discussion of their work in general, and is therefore beyond the scope of the argument at hand, I must apologize for failing in this regard and humbly suggest that these correlations might constitute productive avenues for further inquiry.

Conclusion

Our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation began with a shift of perspective, a shift away from the effort to conceive such transformation strictly with regard to the condition of subjection, and a turn toward the task of exploring it from the perspective of subjective consciousness. We established the need for this shift through our opening engagement with Butler and Žižek, where we identified a number of problems that arise from their shared preoccupation with the condition of subjection, before proposing a different approach as a means of both avoiding these problems and investigating aspects of subjective transformation that their discussions respectively overlook. After establishing the basis for this approach through our delineation of an expansive conception of subjective consciousness, we initiated our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation, focussing primarily on the disruptive (and transformative) potential of extreme, emotionally significant experiences, and elaborating the framework of subjective rupture along the way. As we have seen, the principal components of this framework include the normative equilibrium of consciousness and the dynamics of rupture and reconsolidation, and, whereas the former provides us with a means of characterizing the subject's normative state of psychological functioning (and its implications for her everyday phenomenal experience), the latter help us to account for how this state can be disrupted by particularly extreme or exceptional experiences, and for how such disruption can in turn lead to change and transformation. As such, this framework constitutes the main fruit of our inquiry, the hermeneutic end-result of our efforts to conceptualize how such change and transformation might come about and to contemplate what it might entail for the subject's experience of self and world—and it

was in order to demonstrate the theoretical utility of this framework that we undertook our closing engagement with the work of Bataille, Foucault, Butler, and Žižek.

Of course, this framework is also beset by numerous limitations, and perhaps the greatest of these limitations concerns the sense that subjective consciousness is a thoroughly private and heterogeneous phenomenon, one that can be “known” only by the individual who experiences it, and that assumes different forms for other individuals, such that it cannot be adequately accounted for by a general framework or system. As Antonio Damasio puts it, “[t]he mind and its consciousness are first and foremost private phenomena, much as they offer many public signs of their existence to the interested observer”; and, accordingly, these phenomena “must be investigated as the personal, private, subjective experiences that they are” (308). Given that these words also ring true for the (equally private) phenomenon of subjective transformation, they raise the question of whether it was prudent to investigate extreme subjective experiences from a general perspective, in the first place—let alone to elaborate a general framework on the basis of this investigation. Here I must stress again that subjective rupture amounts to nothing more than a heuristic device, one that might help us to conceptualize the dynamics and implications of the transformations that such experiences can provoke, but that does not pretend to account for the irreducible particularity of the experiences themselves. Nonetheless, the inability to account for this particularity represents one of subjective rupture’s most significant limitations, as it illuminates the framework’s failure to investigate extreme subjective experiences as the private phenomena that they are, and to thereby contemplate the relation between the general and the particular. Without discounting this limitation, however, one could argue that it is attributable more to the

scope and focus of this paper than to the framework itself. After all, depending on the individual in question (and on the particular character of her normative equilibrium), almost any experience could constitute an instance of rupture, just as any given reconsolidation could proceed in a multitude of different ways. In light of the vicissitudes that attend such radical heterogeneity, it seems understandable that our discussion of subjective rupture focussed on the general characteristics of extreme experiences: for, given the limited scope of our inquiry in this paper, it would have been impossible to explore the significance of such experiences to the phenomenon of subjective transformation while simultaneously engaging with particular ways in which they are experienced by different individuals. But this is not to say that subjective rupture is inherently incapable of engaging with the more private and idiosyncratic aspects of this phenomenon. On the contrary, it provides a means of reflecting on these aspects within a more expansive context, and so it would have been interesting to consider subjective rupture's potential correlations with various personal accounts of subjective transformation, both literary and autobiographical. Although subjective rupture's privileging of the general over the particular represents a significant limitation, then, this limitation could perhaps be mitigated through the pursuit of further avenues of inquiry.

In a similar way, the scope and focus of this paper also precluded a more concerted meditation on the potential applications of subjective rupture, both in relation to other models of subjective transformation and in itself. Although our engagement with the work of Bataille, Foucault, Butler, and Žižek served as a preliminary demonstration of subjective rupture's theoretical utility, for instance, this engagement was far too brief to capture the full extent of this utility. Indeed, it seems fair to suggest that subjective

rupture could, by way of a sufficiently rigorous analysis, further the effort to think the eventuality of subjective transformation on a much broader scale, not only enriching the models discussed above, but also potentially bolstering an array of other models (both within the field of critical theory and beyond it), at least insofar as it might aid in elaborating their dynamics and implications on the level of subjective consciousness. But subjective rupture also possesses considerable theoretical utility in itself, and its potential applications as a heuristic device extend beyond the relatively narrow spectrum of extreme experiences that we focussed on in this paper. As we began to suggest with the example of emigrating to a foreign country, subjective rupture not only helps us to conceptualize the disruptive (and transformative) potential of a wide array of different experiences, but also provides a means of accounting for how the subject can change over time, for how concatenations of novel experiences can gradually alter the subject's experience of herself and her world, even if they lack the extreme character of more profoundly disruptive experiences (such as the loss of a loved one). Another example of such gradual alteration arose in our discussion of the limit-experience, where we engaged with Foucault's view that even the experience of reading a book can change our "relationship with things and with others," and that such experiences can, when allied with a certain ("*limit-*")attitude, potentially even transform our "ways of being and thinking." Since subjective rupture helps to account for how such change and transformation might come about (and to elaborate its practical implications on the level of subjective consciousness), its utility as a heuristic device extends beyond the more extreme experiences that dominated our inquiry into the phenomenon of subjective transformation. While it is important to recognize the limitations of this inquiry and the

framework that arose from it, then, these limitations should be weighed against the wealth of the framework's potential applications. And, given that the phenomenon of subjective transformation has enjoyed a rich cultural and intellectual history, figuring as a prominent theme in literature and the arts as much as in psychology, philosophy, and critical theory, the possible range of these applications seems quite promising.

With that said, and by way of conclusion, I will merely add that the framework of subjective rupture corroborates the key claims that we insisted upon at the outset of this paper: namely, that the subject emphatically is susceptible to lasting change and transformation; that the phenomenon of subjective transformation should be considered both on the level of subjective consciousness and with regard to the condition of subjection; and, more generally, that the effort to elucidate the dynamics and implications of such transformation is a matter of theoretical importance. Subjective rupture supports the first of these claims inherently, as its very purpose is to provide a means of understanding how the subject's lived experience of self and world can undergo lasting transformations, how particularly extreme experiences can incite such transformations, and how certain of these experiences are necessarily endowed with more transformative potentiality than others. Whereas our opening engagement with Butler and Žižek problematized their preoccupation with the condition of subjection, moreover, it was our elaboration of subjective rupture that justified the decision to pursue a different approach, and that ultimately bore out the claim that subjective consciousness constitutes an important level of analysis in its own right. As the direct result of this approach, in other words, the framework of subjective rupture not only demonstrates the efficacy of exploring change and transformation on the level of subjective consciousness, but also

establishes a productive dialogue with the work of thinkers who have focussed on the condition of subjection, and thereby shows that we might arrive at a more expansive understanding of the phenomenon of subjective transformation by taking both of these levels into account. Insofar as subjective rupture contributes to the extant criticism on subjective transformation, it in turn highlights the theoretical importance of the effort to elucidate the dynamics and implications of such transformation, as it represents a preliminary attempt to consider these dynamics and implications on the level of subjective consciousness, an attempt which identifies and begins to address certain gaps in the extant criticism, and yet which is ultimately far from conclusive, gesturing toward many avenues of inquiry that demand further critical attention. Although subjective rupture helps us to address the questions of precisely how subjective transformation might come about and of exactly what such transformation might entail for the subject's experience of self and world, then, it also reminds us that these remain open questions, and that the effort to address them remains as pertinent as ever.

Notes

¹ Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).

² Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology (London: Verso, 1999).

³ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (London: Verso, 2000). Henceforth cited in text as CHU. That said, it is worth noting that this approximation of Butler's and Žižek's positions pertains to a specific aspect of their respective arguments, rather than to their arguments as a whole. Indeed, in discussing these notions of radical/subversive resignification and the authentic Lacanian act, both Butler and Žižek devote considerable attention to the possibilities for broad socio-political transformations, as well as for more specific alterations to the dominant socio-ideological order, and so the significance of these notions extends well beyond the eventuality of subjective transformation as such. Nonetheless, Butler and Žižek do discuss this eventuality during their debate over the relative merits of subversive resignification and the authentic act, and it is this aspect of their respective arguments that we will engage with in this paper.

⁴ Jennifer Ruth Hosek and Walter J. Freeman, "Osmetic Ontogenesis, or Olfaction Becomes You: The Neurodynamic, Intentional Self and Its Affinities with the Foucaultian/Butlerian Subject," Configurations 9.3 (2001): 509-542.

⁵ This is not to discount the “two meanings of the word *subject*” that Foucault outlines in “The Subject and Power”: namely, “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge,” both of which “suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (212). In the present chapter, we will deploy the minimal (and admittedly reductive) understanding of the “subject” as a formal category pertaining to the “*conscious or thinking subject*,” the “self or ego” to which “all mental representations or operations are attributed.” In the next chapter, however, we will endeavour to account for the two meanings that Foucault identifies, above, not only considering the different interpretations of these meanings as set forth by Žižek, Butler, Foucault, and Bataille, but also exploring the significance of these respective interpretations to each thinker’s understanding of the condition of subjection.

⁶ Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

⁷ Damasio’s use of the term “organism” stems from his attribution of both core consciousness and the less complex manifestations of extended consciousness to various species of animal life; however, he is also careful to note that the more complex manifestations of extended consciousness are specific to humans. Indeed, he even goes so far as to align these human-specific manifestations of extended consciousness (and the autobiographical self) with conventional definitions of human “subjectivity,” which “requires a subject—a sense of self” (338-39). Since our concern in this chapter is with the human subject, and since the thinkers that we will be engaging with use the term “organism” in essentially the same way, we will, for the purposes of comparison, use the

terms “subject,” “individual,” and “organism” interchangeably, without thereby misrepresenting the ideas that these thinkers set forth.

⁸ Although Damasio’s notion of the “autobiographical self” is all his own, it builds on an extensive body of cognitive-psychological research concerning autobiographical memory. For a detailed discussion of this research, see M. A. Conway and H. L. Williams, “Autobiographical Memory,” Learning and Memory: A Comprehensive Reference, ed. John H. Byrne, vol. 2 (Oxford: Academic Press, 2008) 893-909.

⁹ Joseph LeDoux, Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are (New York: Viking, 2002).

¹⁰ Mental representations and objects should thus be understood in an expansive, abstract sense: representations are “mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities” (including the “visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory”), and so both representations and objects can as easily refer to “a specific pain or an emotion” as they can to “a person, a place, [or] a tool” (318, 324). That said, the question of precisely *how* mental representations arise from explicit neural patterns “is a problem that neurobiology has not yet resolved” (322), and this problem is roughly correlative to the explanatory gap identified at the beginning of this chapter.

¹¹ For a brief introduction to the battery of additional mnemonic categories that follow from this broad distinction between implicit and explicit memory, see Endel Tulving, “Are There 256 Different Kinds of Memory?,” The Foundations of Remembering: Essays in Honour of Henry L. Roediger, III, ed. James S. Nairne (New York: Psychology Press, 2007) 39-52.

¹² For a comprehensive review of the history and development of this distinction between episodic and semantic memory, see Endel Tulving, “Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 1-25.

¹³ There are, of course, important exceptions to be noted here, perhaps the most obvious of which include all of those memories that are potentially, but not immediately or readily, accessible to the subject’s mature, conscious mind, including the majority of those that occur during the earliest stages of the subject’s development (or what cognitive psychologists refer to as “the period of childhood amnesia”), those that have been temporarily forgotten, and those that have been repressed. For a discussion of the period of childhood amnesia, which spans “from birth to approximately 5 years of age,” and which has been attributed to everything from “mother/child interactions” to “the role of language development” and the “emergence of narrative abilities,” see Conway and Williams, “Autobiographical Memory,” esp. 904-05. For an overview of contemporary cognitive-psychological theories regarding the different “mechanisms of forgetting”—including *decay* (or forgetting that “occurs spontaneously with the passage of time”), *interference* (or forgetting due to the occurrence of “other mnemonic events” that “interfere with the storage or recovery of target memories”), *retrieval-induced inhibition* (which is “synonymous with suppression”), and *motivated forgetting* (or “active repression” that prevents “anxiety-inducing memories, usually traumatic, from entering the sphere of conscious awareness”)—see J. S. Nairne and J. N. S. Pandeirada, “Forgetting,” *Learning and Memory: A Comprehensive Reference*, ed. John H. Byrne, vol. 2 (Oxford: Academic Press, 2008) 179-194.

¹⁴ In terms of the brain's neural architecture, moreover, much of the processing that underlies the integrative capacity of working memory is thought to take place in the prefrontal cortex, such that "the various component executive functions are achieved by a set of interconnected circuits that are spread over several brain regions in the frontal cortex" (LeDoux 188). That said, these regions are *convergence zones* "where information from diverse systems can be integrated," and they share critical links with other convergence zones (such as those in the hippocampus and the medial temporal lobe)—an arrangement which makes possible the formation and reconstruction of "consciously accessible memories that integrate elements being encoded separately and implicitly in other systems," including those involved in the modulation of emotional states and the formation of habitual patterns of thought and behaviour (315, 318).

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious," 1915, The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989).

¹⁶ Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study," trans. Patrick Coleman, Yale French Studies 48 (1972): 118-175.

¹⁷ That is, since we have elaborated this conception of subjective consciousness through an engagement with work from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, these nonconscious aspects of the subject's phenomenal experience pertain not to the *psychoanalytic* unconscious, but rather to the *cognitive* unconscious. The distinction between these respective understandings of the unconscious is complex, but it stems from the fact that they have evolved from very different conceptions of the human mind. Although both of these understandings are concerned with describing and differentiating unconscious mental phenomena, the psychoanalytic unconscious is predicated on a

psychodynamic conception of the mind, one that conceives such phenomena in terms of complex psychical forces (e.g., repressed memories, unconscious drives and desires, mechanisms of defence and resistance), whereas the cognitive unconscious is predicated on a computational conception of the mind, one that conceives such phenomena in terms of processing hierarchies and various forms of unconscious cognition (e.g., executive functions, implicit memories, habitual patterns of thought and behaviour). As such, while we can certainly speculate about the interrelation between these understandings, we should recognize that they are in many ways conceptually distinct, and that one cannot simply posit a direct or necessary correlation between the aspects of the unconscious mind that they respectively describe. For a more involved discussion of the distinction between these understandings, see J. Melvin Woody and James Phillips, “The Unconscious Mind in the Era of Cognitive Neuroscience,” Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology 2.2 (1995): 123-134.

¹⁸ Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁹ For instance, LeDoux’s research into fear is not concerned with the subjective experience of “fear” as such, but rather with the processes that induce fearful and/or defensive behaviour—just as similar research into love is not concerned with the subjective experience of love, but rather with the processes that induce pair-bonding and attachment (again observed from a behavioural perspective).

²⁰ Ann M. Graybiel, “Habits, Rituals, and the Evaluative Brain,” Annual Review of Neuroscience 31 (2008): 359-87.

²¹ Steven H. Cooper, “Changing Notions of Defence Within Psychoanalytic Theory,” Journal of Personality 66.6 (1998): 947-964.

²² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 1970, trans. Ben Brewster, Critical Theory Since 1965, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: UP of Florida, 1986) 238-50.

²³ In cognitive terms, although these more explicit components can make up part of the composition of this backdrop, they are not to be confused with the backdrop itself, for they arise on the basis of records stored in conventional memory; and, as we established in the previous section, although this backdrop facilitates the activation and integration of records stored in conventional memory, it does so strictly as a function of working memory, and must therefore be distinguished from the convergent mental representations that animate it at a given time. That said, this distinction stems from the taxonomy of cognitive science, and has no tangible bearing on the phenomenal realm of everyday lived experience—with which our discussion here is most directly concerned.

²⁴ Walter J. Freeman, How Brains Make Up Their Minds (New York: Columbia UP, 2000). Freeman’s notion of the growth of “private meaning” is roughly correlative to Damasio’s understanding of the development of the autobiographical self, at least insofar as “private meaning” forms through an individual’s “action into the environment,” encompasses “the richness and complexity of [the] fabric of past growth,” and is thus crucially dependent on conventional processes of learning and memory (144). That said, whereas Damasio’s discussion is more directly concerned with the explicit aspects of the self, Freeman takes a more holistic approach, and he is careful to emphasize that the

expression of “private meaning” extends well beyond the purview of conventional understandings of “consciousness” as such.

²⁵ The OED definition of “rupture” offers a helpful starting point, even though it takes us no further than the received understandings of the term: “rupture” is defined as “[t]he act of breaking or bursting; the fact of being broken or burst.” For the purposes of the argument at hand, this definition implies a “breaking or bursting” of the normative equilibrium of consciousness.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 1963, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 32.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).

²⁸ For an introduction to the pharmacology of these compounds, with regard both to their mechanisms of action and to their typical effects, see Robert M. Julien, A Primer of Drug Action: A Comprehensive Guide to the Actions, Uses, and Side Effects of Psychoactive Drugs (New York: Worth, 2005), esp. 588-625. These compounds are commonly referred to both as “psychedelics” and as “hallucinogens” (although we will use the former). Rather than attempting to consider in its totality the “group of heterogeneous compounds” that falls under the category of “psychedelic drugs,” moreover, our discussion here will focus primarily on the serotoninlike psychedelics: namely, *lysergic acid diethylamide* (LSD), *dimethyltryptamine* (DMT), and *psilocybin* (the proverbial “magic mushroom”)—each of which produces “a characteristic psychedelic syndrome, with

disturbances in thinking, illusions, elementary and complex visual hallucinations, and impaired ego functioning” (Julien 588, 602).

²⁹ Rick Strassman, “Hallucinogens,” Mind-Altering Drugs, ed. Mitch Earleywine (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 49-85. Strassman is one of the pioneers of the second wave of human psychedelic research (which began in the early 1990s), and he and his colleagues developed one of the most widely used tests for quantifying the subjective effects of psychedelic drug intoxication, the Hallucinogen Rating Scale, specifically for their studies on DMT in New Mexico (62-67).

³⁰ Indeed, the studies conducted by Strassman and his colleagues in New Mexico focussed specifically on the subjective effects of DMT, and he cites its potential relevance to near-death and mystical experiences as “a major consideration in the development of [these] studies” (58).

³¹ Ralph Metzner, “Psychedelic, Psychoactive, and Addictive Drugs and States of Consciousness,” Mind-Altering Drugs, ed. Mitch Earleywine (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 25-48.

³² More specifically, Metzner discusses the use of LSD in the treatment of “neurotic patients suffering from anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive or psychosomatic disorders”; the use of LSD, peyote, and Ayahuasca in the treatment of alcoholism; and the use of Ibogaine in the treatment of cocaine addiction (42-43). That said, Metzner is also careful to point out that he is not proposing a “pharmacological ‘cure’ for addiction,” but rather advocating “treatment with psychedelic substances” only insofar as it “involves a prolonged guided experience of self-confrontation, participation in shared group ritual

experiences, and the acceptance of and support by a community of like-minded individuals” (43).

³³ R. R. Griffiths, W. A. Richards, M. W. Johnson, U. D. McCann, and R. Jesse, “Mystical-type Experiences Occasioned by Psilocybin Mediate the Attribution of Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance 14 Months Later,” Journal of Psychopharmacology 22.6 (2008): 621-632. Of the 36 volunteers who participated in the study, all were “without histories of hallucinogen use,” 97% were college graduates, and 56% had post-graduate degrees (622). During the 14-month follow-up evaluation, 58% of the volunteers “rated the experience as being one of the five most personally meaningful experiences of their lives,” 67% rated the experience as among “the five most spiritually significant experiences of their lives,” and “no volunteer rated the experience as having decreased well-being or life satisfaction” (630). Moreover, “[t]he magnitude of these effects was undiminished from similar ratings completed 2 months after the psilocybin session . . . [and] attributions to the psilocybin experience also included positive changes in attitudes, mood, altruism, and other behaviour” (630).

³⁴ Siegfried Othmer, Vicki Pollock, and Norman Miller, “The Subjective Response to Neurofeedback,” Mind-Altering Drugs, ed. Mitch Earleywine (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 345-365. These respective brain states are associated with distinct “qualities of consciousness”: in an alpha-dominant state, “visual imagery still has the quality of appropriate sequencing, of following a story line, and of a more obvious connectedness with real-world experience,” whereas, in a theta-dominant state, imagery “is more disconnected and disjointed, occasionally bizarre and not of this world, but perhaps even more closely evocative of core experiences” (358). During a given session, the individual

repeatedly shifts between these states, such that deeply “buried material is unearthed in the theta state,” and then “sloshes over into the alpha state, where one’s more organized consciousness can access it” (358).

³⁵ There are, of course, notable exceptions to the “swift and painless” aspects of this reconsolidation, at least insofar as psychedelic experiences are concerned. The first of these exceptions concerns calamities that might befall the individual while the experience is taking place (if she engages in potentially hazardous behaviour). The second involves lasting, though relatively minor, alterations to visual perception (which usually occurs only as a result of frequent/habitual use of the drug in question). And the third concerns the potential of psychedelic experiences to trigger or exacerbate “anxiety, mood, and psychotic syndromes”—although this last exception is somewhat contentious, as the evidence for this potential is based on anecdotal reports in which “the identity and purity of drugs consumed are almost always unknown” and “[l]ittle or no premorbid data or characterization of [the] individuals is available” (Strassman 58).

³⁶ Françoise Dastur, “Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise,” Hypatia 15.4 (2000): 178-189.

³⁷ For a sustained reflection on the psychological implications of this evolutionary gap, see Gary Marcus, Kluge: The Haphazard Construction of the Human Mind (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

³⁸ Georges Bataille, “The Sacred,” 1939, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985) 240-245.

³⁹ Georges Bataille, The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, 1967-1979, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols. (New York: Zone, 1989).

⁴⁰ One could argue that the relationship between the profane and the sacred bears a structural resemblance to the constant tension between the Lacanian orders of the symbolic and the real, and perhaps even that the movement of sovereignty shares some formal similarities with Lacan's notion of "subjective destitution," at least insofar as they both pertain to moments of pure subjective negation that cannot be prolonged without simultaneously threatening the loss of the subject's identity. In spite of the similarities between these notions, however, we should note an important distinction between them: namely, that Bataille's notion of the movement of sovereignty is directly concerned with the subject's experience of self and world, whereas Lacan's notion of subjective destitution is concerned more with the psychodynamics of (his particular understanding of) the psychoanalytic unconscious. This is not to privilege either of these notions above the other, but rather to recognize that Bataille and Lacan formulate these notions with reference to different levels of analysis, and that the particular content of these notions differs accordingly.

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, "The Sacred Conspiracy," 1936, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985) 178-181.

⁴² Since Foucault's understanding of the condition of subjection is not only extremely nuanced, but also a hotly contested topic of debate, our discussion here will not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of this understanding, but will rather strive to sketch its basic outlines.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 109-133.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 78-108.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” afterword, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 208-226.

⁴⁶ As with the similarities between Bataille and Lacan, above, Foucault’s understanding of subjectivation shares much in common with Butler’s understanding of the subject’s passionate attachment to subjection. However, the difference here is that Butler locates this passionate attachment on the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious, whereas Foucault avoids positing a link between processes of subjectivation and the unconscious psychological processes that psychoanalytic thinkers attribute to this level. And, as we will see, the distinction between these moves has important ramifications for their respective models of subjective transformation, as Butler casts her notion of subversive resignification as a possible means of unsettling the subject’s passionate attachment to subjection (and thereby orients her model toward the level of the psychoanalytic unconscious); and, by contrast, Foucault discusses his conception of the limit-experience in terms of its capacity to provoke partial transformations of the subject’s ways of being and thinking (and thereby orients his model more toward the level of subjective consciousness).

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” trans. Catherine Porter, The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 32-50.

⁴⁹ And Deleuze would seem to concur with this view in “A Portrait of Foucault,” where he relates that, for Foucault, “[t]hinking is always experiencing, experimenting, not interpreting but experimenting, and what we experience, experiment with, is always actuality, what’s coming into being, what’s new, what’s taking shape” (106). See Gilles Deleuze, “A Portrait of Foucault,” Negotiations: 1972-1990, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia UP, 1995) 102-118.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, “Revolutionary Action: ‘Until Now’,” 1971, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 218-234.

⁵¹ Mikko Tuhkanen, “Performativity and Becoming,” Cultural Critique 72 (2009): 1-35.

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