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HANNAH ARENDT'S RENAISSANCE: REMARKS ON NATALITY

Did Hannah Arendt have a Renaissance? Her historical thinking gravitates around Greek and Roman antiquity, the Enlightenment, and twentieth-century totalitarianism in its various guises – as fascism, as Communism, and as liberal mass society. Arendt's writings certainly contain references and readings of Renaissance figures (including Machiavelli, Galileo and Shakespeare), but her main touchstones remain Aristotle among the ancients, Augustine for the Middle Ages, and Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, and Marx for modernity. What, then, does it mean to speak of Hannah Arendt's Renaissance? What might we gain from turning to Arendt for elucidation of Renaissance texts, themes, or periodization paradigms? This cluster of essays, written by three advanced graduate students pursuing separate areas of literary research, opens up three distinct avenues – Shakespeare studies, American letters, and German thought – in response to the question of Hannah Arendt's Renaissance. My remarks in this introduction are designed both to curate the projects of these young scholars, and to suggest my own thoughts on the subject of Hannah Arendt's Renaissance.

In "The Sexual Politics of Pain: Arendt, Agamben, and Shakespeare's *Shrew*," Nichole Miller takes up Arendt's work from within Shakespeare studies. Miller maps Arendt's account of private life – the biological needs and processes that properly belong to the classical *oikos* or household in Arendt's view of the human condition – onto Agamben's theory of "bare life" and Foucault's notion of "biopolitics." Miller's goal is to discover the blind spots regarding gender that both trouble and connect each of these projects. Miller's theoretical exploration ends by pointing us towards a reading of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, whose relentlessly intimate staging of domestic violence discovers Agamben's formulation of "the camp as *nomos* of the modern" within the institutions and spaces of marriage itself. In Shakespeare's *Shrew*, Miller argues, marriage itself is revealed as a camp, a place where bare life is reproduced and tortured.

Paul Dahlgren, a student of American literature, takes up the question of Arendt's Renaissance from the situation of Arendt's own historical moment, as a naturalized American citizen observing political developments in and for the United States of the 1950s and 60s. Dahlgren's essay, "Reflections on a Small Island: Hannah Arendt, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the Politics of Childhood," takes as its starting point Arendt's identification of her own method of research with the pearl divers of *The Tempest*. Dahlgren uses Arendt's

foundational citation of Ariel's song from *The Tempest* in order to reflect on the politics of childhood both within Shakespeare's play and in Arendt's political writing. (I should also note that Dahlgren's essay, originally written for a graduate seminar on Shakespeare and citizenship that I taught at the University of California, Irvine in 2004, prompted my own search for Hannah Arendt's Renaissance.)

Viola Kolarov, a student of German literature, takes up Hannah Arendt's Renaissance from the position of modern German philosophy and letters in their constitutional indebtedness to Shakespeare, first via the creative translations of the Romantics in the nineteenth century, and then again through the reprocessing of Shakespeare by psychoanalysis and critical theory in the twentieth. Kolarov's essay, "Gems for Creatures: Care and Natality in Hannah Arendt's Work," uses the case of Shakespeare in Germany to test Arendt's conflicted relationships with Heidegger, Benjamin, and Freud. Goethe's allegories of Care, indebted to Shakespearean allegory and bequeathing their iconography of worry to German thought, figure in Kolarov's essay as a foundational moment in modern ruminations on subjectivity and time. Kolarov ultimately critiques the conservatism implicit in Arendt's concept of natality, and links it to subjective as well as political factors in Arendt's life and situation.

Although each of these essays pursues Hannah Arendt's Renaissance on a separate stage of thought, several themes recur throughout them, including the subterranean vicissitudes of sexuality and religion in Arendt's thought. Although Arendt was both a woman and a Jew, gender and religion tend to enter her discourse in deferred or suspended form, and not as marks of what we now call "identity." Indeed, it may be Arendt's relative non-discussion of the Renaissance, along with her oblique and often ironic approach to sex and faith, that render her resonant to us now, as we seek to "reconstruct" the Renaissance in ways that re-encounter that world from a vantage distinct from both pre-theoretical humanism and post-theoretical identity politics. As evidenced by these essays, looking for Hannah Arendt's Renaissance invites us to return to theory, not, however, by focusing on the internal logics of specific methods and debates (the first wave of theoretical criticism) but rather by linking us to concepts, concerns and modes of reading that found worlds and cross contexts, born out of specific historical situations but not reducible to them.

As Paul Dahlgren explores at length, Hannah Arendt chose to call her style of research *Perlenfischerei*, after the fragmentary sea changes of *The Tempest*. In her Introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, she uses the phrase to capture Benjamin's decontextualizing manner of citation, exercised in the face of the breakdown of tradition. She ends the essay with an explicit commentary on the Shakespearean epigram:

And this thinking, fed by the present, works with the 'thought fragments' it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the

bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and coral in the depths, and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and dissolves what once was alive, some things “suffer a sea change,” and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as ‘thought fragments,’ as something ‘rich and strange,’ and perhaps even as *Urphänomene*.¹

Her signature directly follows: HANNAH ARENDT. After all, she has spoken of and for Walter Benjamin, whose jewel-like essays she had ferried out of France and seen into publication, but she also speaks of and for herself as an iconoclastic excavator of the classical tradition. In retrieving such classical “pearls” as the *vita activa*, citizenship, power, and the polis for twentieth century political philosophy, Arendt saw herself not as writing intellectual or political history, but as salvaging potentialities within democratic thought – what she terms here *Urphänomene*, in order to grasp both their originary and their persistent character, their status as foundational possibilities.

Natality, a word coined by Arendt in order to capture the human condition of being born, is one such pearl. Dahlgren develops natality in a political direction, while Miller and Kolarov focus on what I would call, following Eric Santner, its psychotheological dimension. In Santner’s work, psychotheology names the oblique or suspended synthesis of religion and sexuality that subtends modern Jewish thought, including the writings of Freud, Rosenzweig, Kafka, and Benjamin, a group to which I would like to add Hannah Arendt. Psychotheology is not “theology” pure and simple because it characterizes the modernity for whom God is effectively dead, the prefix “psycho-” announcing the sublimating transfer of the sovereign position from God to other instances and agencies, such as parents, the superego, the president, or the law. “What is *more than life*,” writes Santner, “turns out to be, from the post-Nietzschean perspective, imminent to and constitutive of life itself.”² Psychotheology takes up the “immanent transcendence” that haunts humanity in modernity, distilling and re-imagining, rather than dissolving or avoiding, religion’s tropes and investments. Arendt’s thought, openly hostile to psychoanalysis and ascribing to no doxa, nonetheless borders on psychotheology by virtue of the sexual and Scriptural topoi that animate her writing in deferred form, generating some of her most exasperating

1 Hannah Arendt, “Introduction,” *Illuminations*, essays by Walter Benjamin, ed. Hannah Arendt (NY: Schocken, 1969), 51.

2 Eric Santner, *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 10.

but also most productive formulations, as Nichole Miller demonstrates in her essay. And, as Viola Kolarov reminds us, Ariel's pearls were also favored by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, where they figure the psychic substitutions that accrete around the excised memory of the primal father. In Arendt's writing, sexuality and religion are most revealing not when they receive explicit thematization, but when they operate as psychotheology, opalescently reflected through figure, citation, and footnote.

Since Arendt coined "natality" in defensive response to Heidegger's emphasis on death, the portmanteau necessarily carries an encrypted erotic element above or behind its content. Circuitously retrieved from classical philosophy, especially Aristotle, the word also bears, through the idea of birth, the unremarked marks of sexuality and Scripture. Natality exists, in the title of one Arendt collection, "between past and future." It describes the way in which each birth throws the human subject into the world as the chance for a fundamentally new beginning, yet the radical newness of each birth, the sheer brightness of its futurity, also requires a world-conserving effort on the part of the guardians of public life. Arendt introduced natality as a fundamental feature of "the human condition," and any exegesis of natality must begin via a reading of the opening of the book that bears that name.

The Human Condition opens by mapping the three types of the *vita activa* – labor, work, and action – onto three distinct conditions of human being. *Labor* corresponds to *life*, that is, to the biological processes and natural needs that physical laboring struggles to ameliorate. *Work* relates to *world*, that is, to the collection of things that man as *homo faber* brings into existence. Finally, *action* responds to *plurality*, to "the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."³ Plurality belongs most fully to the classical tradition of civic action so dear to Arendt, implying both a masculine and a Greco-Roman paradigm. Yet as soon as she unveils the classical scene of citizenship, Arendt proceeds to enunciate a Scriptural proof text with a sexual content: "in its most elementary form, the human condition of action is implicit even in Genesis ('Male and female created He them')" (HC 8). (A long footnote follows that speculates about the distinct political destinies of the two versions of Creation cobbled together in the Book of Genesis.) By immediately shadowing the classical scene of interaction among male citizens with the Hebrew creation story, Arendt implicitly makes both sexual difference and religious difference into founding aspects of plurality. By layering this particular Biblical scene atop the classical one, she also inserts a feminine element into the tableau of public plurality, but without authorial commentary or self-identification.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7. All further references to this text in this collection of essays will cite this book as *HC*, in the body of the text.

As if to draw out the psychotheological element, Arendt then turns to the “most general condition of human existence” that subtends these other conditions: namely, “birth and death, natality and mortality.” Of the three forms of the *vita activa*, we might expect natality to border most intimately on labor. After all, birth is a life process, one of those messy biological functions that Arendt suggests, with a sense of discretion bordering on prudishness, are best hidden inside the house, and the word “labor,” of course, designates parturition as well as physical exertion. Yet action, not labor, ends up revealing the deepest kinship with natality: “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something new, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought” (HC 9). Arendt, married twice but never a mother, delinks birth from maternity and the *oikos* in order to grasp instead the public significance – the significance, indeed, for the very possibility of the public as such – of human birth as a distinctive event. Natality names the advent of the new, the unpredictability and contingency of human actions qua actions (and not as habits, behaviors, or biological processes). The absolute novelty and futurity of the human infant becomes the model for the chain of historical events that true actions set into motion. Action, oriented around the public destiny of political bodies in their plurality, is the proper subject of historical remembrance and thus maps the same intersection “between past and future” that natality throws into such critical relief.

For natality involves the past as well as the future. In “The Crisis of Education,” Arendt distinguishes between life and world in the scene of birth: “The child shares the life of becoming with all living things ... But the child is new only in relation to a world that was there before him, that will continue after his death, and in which he will spend his life” (185).⁴ Implicit here is the distinction in Roman law between the “curatorial” and the “tutorial” responsibilities of guardians. According to the British jurist Blackstone, “the former ... had the charge of the maintenance and education of the minor, the latter the care of his fortune [...] the tutor was the committee of the person, the curatore the committee of the estate” (I.17.1). Natality may bear most intimately on the region of domestic care (see Viola Kolarov on the deep affinities between care and natality), but Arendt generally chose to emphasize the tutorial role at the expense of the curatorial one. Education, unlike care, is often distributed among several adults, both sexes, and the civic instance at large. Introducing children to the world through education is an act of collective responsibility, not simply on behalf of children, but on behalf of the world itself: “But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the

4 “The Crisis in Education,” In *Between Past and Future*, (NY: Viking Press, 1961, 1968.; rpt. Penguin, 1977, 1993), 185.

new that bursts upon it with each new generation.”⁵ In Arendt’s analysis, the sublime newness embodied in natality is a threat as well as a promise, and the “world” that children enter with such abandon requires its own defense plan. Hence education always exercises a conservative function, in the originary sense of “conservation,” “whose task is always to cherish and protect something – the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new.”⁶ The educator must conserve the world the child has entered with such shocking bravery and abandon. As Kolarov argues in her essay, Arendt deploys the concept of natality in part to regulate the threat of the new.

Natality may be “the central category of political ... thought,” yet Augustine, not Aristotle, provides the proof text for Arendt. At the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, her first major work in English, Arendt cites *The City of God*:

Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man’s freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est* – “that a beginning be made man was created” said Augustine. The beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed in every man.⁷

In Arendt’s writing, “natality” translates the theological conception of the creature into the secular idiom of philosophy. In monotheism, creatureliness encompasses man’s status as the creation of God, in company with other creatures and the world itself. Createdness indicates the contingency and enigma of our existence in the world at the behest of events, desires, and structures that precede and exceed us, at once determining us in advance and providing the peculiar set of coordinates around which we might exercise some form of freedom. “Creature” indicates a made or fashioned thing, but with the sense of continued or potential process, action, or emergence built into the future thrust of its active verbal form. In Latin, the verbal suffix *-ura* indicates that which is about to occur, as in *futura*, *natura*, and *figura*. As Arendt writes in her dissertation on Augustine, “Everything that is created exists in the mode of becoming: ‘the heavens and the earth proclaim that they have become, for they change and alter.’”⁸

⁵ “Crisis,” 186.

⁶ “Crisis,” 192.

⁷ *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951; 2nd Ed. NY: World Publishing, Co., Meridian Books, 1958; 3rd Ed, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1066, 1968, 1973), 479. Further references to this book in the following essays will use “OT” in the body of the text.

⁸ *Love and St. Augustine*, ed Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 52. The book has a complicated history. It first appeared in German in 1929, as her dissertation; she began revising the book in the course of translating it into English in 1962, but her involvement in writing about public affairs during the 1960s apparently prevented her from completing the task. The English edition, published posthumously by her students, is thus a distinct text from

In Arendt's secular writing, natality is creatureliness deprived of its divine reference, and hence represents an excursion into psychotheology, subsisting at the fold between Revelation and Reason. The creature is a foundational figure in Eric Santner's reflections on the Hebraic lining of literary modernism, and Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, as Kolarov reminds us, "offers us one of the most thoroughly researched data banks of the creature of the Christian allegorical pageant." Like creatureliness, natality indicates our alienation in structures that come before us, but it also proclaims the new beginning, the creation *ex nihilo*, incalculable in its consequences or direction, that each birth announces, beyond any script, testament or dowry that might be laid out for us by family, church, or state. In her essay on education, Arendt cites the predicament of Hamlet as emblematic of natality:

"Hamlet's words, 'The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right,' are more or less true for every new generation ... we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time.⁹

The reference to *Hamlet* returns us to the Renaissance. Hamlet rages against the material facts of his own createdness, but ultimately seizes the "interim" between life and death as the moment for subjectivizing action: "It will be short; the interim's mine, / And a man's life's no more than to say 'one'" (5.2.73-4).¹⁰ We might also turn with contributors Paul Dahlgren and Viola Kolarov to *The Tempest*, where Caliban's exposure to the elements, to bad foster care, to the bare life of the *animal laborans*, and to the perplexing sedimentation of new worlds and old provides a dramatic allegory of the threat and promise of natality. Natality invites us to reconsider parental care and education as not only the efforts exerted on behalf of the child against the intrusions of the world, but also the measures to which adults must go in order to protect the world from the child. Both *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* stage test-cases of worlds put at risk by the unpredictable consequences of deregulated natality.

If we think, moreover, about natality as a psychotheological pearl, that is, as the suspended crystallization of sex and Scripture within philosophical discourse,

the German dissertation, since it incorporates Arendt's interlineal additions and subtractions to the translation, plus a set of retyped revisions. She added references to "natality," for example, based on her thinking in *The Human Condition*; at the same time, the theological strands of *The Human Condition* builds on themes in the dissertation. Augustine remained a touchstone for Arendt throughout her life.

9 "Crisis," 192-3.

10 I am building on Christopher Pye's reading of the subjectivizing "interim" of *Hamlet*: "The 'interim' that Hamlet speaks of is the split and pause that haunt the male revenger's act, now miraculously transformed into the enabling measure of his life." *The Vanishing* (Duke UP, 1999), 112.

then we can further unpack the psychoanalytic dimensions of natality in the direction of both religious subtexts and sexed scenarios. The theme of natality draws me, for example, to the iconography of Mother and Child in Renaissance art. An image such as Piero della Francesca's Brera Altarpiece (<http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/p/piero/francesc/altar/mntefelt.html>) exposes the sleeping child to the most strenuous public view on the altar formed by his mother's not-so-sheltering lap. By refusing to let liturgical structure disappear into sentimental naturalism, Piero makes natality as such appear in the public space and act of worship. Like Arendt, Piero delinks natality from maternity as a domestic and biological function, choosing to display instead the eventual character of birth. Piero's grave Mary, surrounded by representatives of the City of God, is more tutor than curator, representing the world of meanings into which the child enters rather than maternal attention to the needs of life. The pieta-like pose of the sleeping Jesus already throws the infant forward into the death to come. The pale blue rectangles of trompe l'oeil marble predict the cold opacity of the tomb from which the crucified Christ will later rise; shot through with veins of pink and white, their reflective surface promises a glimpse of sky, a window on some other vista. It is, perhaps, a vista of dreams: if the child is on display, lying undressed and over-exposed to our view, the absorption of the infant in his own sleep shelters a hidden subjectivity, echoed in the melancholy of Piero's austere angels, that crystallizes the painting as dramatic moment, not theatrical ostentation.

Suspended above the scene is an ostrich egg, dangling pearl-like from a plaster shell -- a singular mobile for this most singular of babies. The egg, hanging close to the edge where shadow yields to light, becomes an emblem of the temporal, emotional, and iconographic condensations that charge this image. The painting makes us think death with birth, and invites us to embrace the interval between them as a space for action and conversation. The saints and angels gathered around mother and child form what art historians call a *sacra conversazione*, evoking the eternal community of souls assembled in Augustine's City of God. Yet the painting discloses its religious subject in the perspectival space of a classical apse that joins viewer and viewed in the *sensus communis* of a shared rationality, while the nudity of the baby's body proclaims the humanity of his, and our, condition. Arendt writes that Augustine "seems to have been the last to know at least what it once meant to be a citizen" (HC 14). If Augustine was the Last Citizen of ancient Rome, Piero is a First Citizen in the Renaissance republic of arts and letters, insofar as Piero's City of God, like Augustine's, reserves and proffers a classical political core.

Concerning the classical ideal of a public realm, Arendt writes:

unlike the common good as Christianity understood it – the salvation of one's soul as a concern common to all – the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. .. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it can appear in public. It is the

publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time. (HC 55)

This passage would make a fitting commentary on Piero's painting, which concerns itself with Christian salvation, yet does so by creating a work that aims to survive the violence of natality by making a public realm -- indeed, making publicity as such -- appear in and around the image of birth. Before this work, I remain undecided: is this the most sacred, or rather the most profane, of paintings? It is both, and as such it is a quintessentially Renaissance production, not only exemplifying Renaissance aesthetics, with its dynamic meshing of Biblical typology and classical *translatio*, but also delivering -- *giving birth to* -- the trope of birth as a scene of historical repetition, risk, and responsibility.

And the Child, of course, is a Jewish child, circumcised (like St. Paul in Phillipians) on the eighth day, as ritually noted on the annual Feast of the Circumcision, which commemorates the debt of Christianity to Judaism. In many depictions of Christ's circumcision, Mary holds the infant in a sheltering manner, as if to hold the child back from an act that will forever cut through and reconfigure their bond (e.g. Michiel van Coxcie, <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/c/coxcie/michiel/circumci.html>). In other paintings, Jesus lies on a table-altar, between Mary and the *mohel*, again dramatizing the child's transition from the private life enjoyed by the *infans* in the *oikos* to his public inscription in a community (e.g., Lippi <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/l/lippi/filippo/1460/>). In still others, Mary has receded to the sidelines, observer but not participant in the proceedings (e.g., Durer, http://www.cartage.org.lb/en/themes/Arts/painting/paintings/pages/D/07_life.htm). Piero's painting, although not a circumcision scene per se, is striking in its frontal display of the naked child on the open lap of the Madonna. His Mary is less mother than *sandak*, the godfather who holds the infant on his thighs during the covenant of circumcision. Piero's excursus into natality rezones the lap from the nest, womb, or cave of the maternal imaginary into the altar, table, and stage of the maternal symbolic, celebrating the public-making function of Mary as a participant in epiphany, communion, and community. To speak psychoanalytically, the painting engages neither the maternal dyad nor the terrifying fear of its failure (in the form of castration anxiety), but rather what Jacques Lacan calls separation, the interim of protected parental withdrawal that provides the opening or *nihil* in which the genesis of subjectivization can take place. And circumcision is the primal signature of separation, re-dividing mother and infant in order to inscribe the child in the circle of citizenship.

Arendt writes, "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (HC 52). Piero's painting sets such a table, and places the figure of natality, swaddled in Christian, Jewish, and classical phenomenologies, at the center of it. If we want to extend this image's *mise en scene* of natality from

iconographic theme to period metaphor, we might note that Renaissance imagery flows along a moebius strip in which classical and religious, medieval and modern, Jewish and Christian, political and theological, regimes of thought and imagination fold into each other. Hannah Arendt's Renaissance hangs between past and future, which is perhaps why it tends to disappear in her writing. All the more reason to perform our own *Perlenfischerei*, both within the engaging terrain of her oeuvre and, through the prisms of her thought, in Renaissance texts more broadly.

But I think Arendt would want us to end in the present, not the past, as indeed each of our three contributors do. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt diagnoses totalitarianism as the foreclosure of natality. Totalitarianism, she writes, "knows neither birth nor death" (OT 473). Birth is a roll of the dice that throws us into a certain time and place, in the company of other people not of our choosing. But the contingency of birth also means that what we make of this situation is incalculable. Totalitarianism knows neither birth nor death because it cannot control the openings of action – the chance to do, make, or think something new – that natality initiates. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt begins to argue something similar for consumerism, whose vast machinery was just becoming visible in the late 1950s. "The spare time of the *animal laborans*," she writes, "is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that consumption is no longer restricted to the necessities, but to the contrary, mainly concentrates on the superfluities of life, does not change the character of this society, but harbors the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption" (HC 133). Consumerism, like totalitarianism, also knows neither life nor death, in the special sense of life and death designated by natality. The opposite might seem to be true: don't the images of consumer culture, like Piero's painting, speak of nothing but life and death? Yet the adscape operates in the opposite direction from the altarpiece, shielding us from rather than bringing us into contact with the limit points embedded in the life processes and the public world. And the more they shield us, the more our anxiety concerning these truths escalates. On the frontier of death, the multiplication of products promising to protect us from the perils of accident, aging, or just plain boredom ultimately increase our terrified sense of exposure. On the frontier of birth, every minute and mode of conception, pregnancy, infancy and childhood is anticipated by a product or service, inviting us in effect to *buy back our createdness* – to shop our way out of our condition of being in a world we have not engineered ourselves. For every pleasure, a product, for every person, a package, and behind each, the terrible spectre of bad hair days, bad business, or erectile dysfunction. The "life" sold in "lifestyle" is a service plan that promises us protection *from* life as such – from owning the traumas of birth, death and sex and acknowledging the laboring, enjoying, and suffering of other people. Natality, naming the state of our own emergency into a world that precedes us, makes war on such foreclosure, calling us to make true beginnings in the apparent seamlessness of

the object world, whether it's through art, action, teaching, thought, love, or a really great meal.

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