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THE AUTONOMY OF THE NOW:
CHRISTIANITY, SECULARISM, SUBJECTIVITY

INTRODUCTION

Freud spoke of the future of an illusion, by which he meant a sort of ‘heat death’ of Christianity: a diffusion of the religious into the lukewarm waters of *Aufklärung*; a process of maturation or a slow sublimation; a neurosis cast aside.¹ If we speak therefore of the illusion of the future it is not because we have lost hope, but because hope is itself weaponized in this illusion. We did not misspeak when we said that the object of Freud’s text is Christianity. It may be objected that Freud intended to admonish religion in general—and one would perhaps be forgiven for thinking so—but this is not the case. There is, for one thing, no such religion ‘in general;’ moreover, Freud’s work was an analysis of, but also—and more profoundly—an effect of Christianity. Freud saw the essential: Christianity could not remain as it was, and it had already begun its self-transformation—to what?—to *the secular* (Freud was perhaps blind to this conversion; he nevertheless laid the theoretical groundwork for it). The Enlightenment was by no means an unimpeachable force of reason impinging on an irrational religious tradition. On the contrary: the Enlightenment was, and is, the twilight of Christianity’s metamorphosis. Freud was but one of its functionaries. That he did not see secularism for what it was *in the midst of its conversion* should not surprise us, since it is indeed rare for priests to be so circumspect.

Today we hear endless talk about the ‘return of religion,’ whether in the guise of political Islam, or the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in the global south—to cite but two examples. It is not our intention to dispute the dynamic and astonishing proliferation of religious forms during the 20th century, nor do we anticipate a deceleration of this explosive growth in the 21st century. We simply want to assure ourselves that we haven’t gotten the names wrong; that we haven’t mistaken imperialism for religion; that we haven’t affirmed liberal democracy at the expense of freedom, or sacrificed singularity to multi-culturalism; that we haven’t confused conversion with becoming. That we prefer the shadows and simulacra of the cave to the hot brilliance of the Good should not suggest any anti-Enlightenment sentiment, much less a badly concealed anti-modern rage. On the contrary. It is our opinion that one thinks and acts by inference and association, by habit and repetition, and that staring at the sun has little to do with becoming enlightened. Thinking must become thought, under certain conditions which remain to be elaborated. A counter- or alter-enlightenment may

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 55-7.

be on the horizon, or else it is itself this horizon. We have not lost all hope, but we have not, for all that, failed to recognize hope for what it is.

The following essay will therefore address itself to two problems, the first of which concerns the counter-history or genealogy of religion to which we have alluded (the great strategic identity: Christianity and secularism²). We will encounter, in this regard, Olivier Roy's theory of religion and culture, and Gil Anidjar's brilliant counter-reading of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The second problem is perhaps more pressing: the question of identity. When we alluded above to an illusion of the future it was to make clear, precisely, that the future holds no reconciliation, resolution, or justification of identity. Such is the structure of the illusion of the messianic promise to which even Freud, consummate master of suspicion, was subject. The essay hinges on the possibility of constructing or discovering a *subject of resistance*, and for this reason we will have recourse to Daniel Colucciello Barber's critique of conversion and Gilles Deleuze's theory of the fold. Our hypothesis is that, under the brutal conditions of global capitalist hegemony, resistance necessitates the affirmation of the intrinsic instability and artificiality of identity, requiring both an ethics of becoming and a radically new relation to the problems of truth and subjectivity.

The implications of our thesis will be clear: resistance to power necessitates a two-fold refusal of the authority and sovereignty of *both* Christianity and secularism, since the latter is merely a rarified version of the former. The form that this resistance assumes is that of *the struggle for subjectivity*; its site is the 'non-place' of the unconscious. The central conclusion of this essay is that if we are to speak, we must learn to speak religiously, which is to say: to let the other speak in us, to speak the truth about ourselves.

WHAT WAS ENLIGHTENMENT?

When in 1784 Immanuel Kant confronted himself with the question, 'Do we now live in an enlightened age?' he answered in the negative, but added that we do, in fact, live in an age of enlightenment.³ The upshot of this caveat is that enlightenment is an arduous, but inevitable process, albeit with certain obstacles (namely, irrational religious belief) impeding the relative progress of humanity toward freedom. "Men work themselves gradually out of barbarity," writes Kant, "if only intentional artifices are not made to hold them in it."⁴ The nineteenth century would feature numerous attempts to schematize this process of enlightenment – and in some cases to accelerate it. The broad consensus, what is known today as the 'secularization thesis,' assumed that religion would eventually flicker out and be succeeded by a (more or less) strictly rational socio-political order. Ludwig Feuerbach conceived of religious belief as a dialectical

² This brilliant hypothesis is Gil Anidjar's. Cf. Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 47-52.

³ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html> Accessed Nov. 11, 2014.

⁴ Ibid. Kant goes on: "I have placed the main point of enlightenment - the escape of men from their self-incurred tutelage - chiefly in matters of religion because[...].religious incompetence is not only the most harmful but also the most degrading of all."

projection of humanity onto a celestial being—in a sense, ‘man writ large.’⁵ Sigmund Freud, for his part, postulated a theory of religiosity as neurosis, a primitive remnant of the pre-historic trauma of a whole civilization, which had to be sublated by “education to reality.”⁶ Karl Marx characterized religion as both the symptom of suffering and oppression, and a corresponding psycho-social narcotic—the infamous ‘opiate of the masses.’⁷ These various indictments of religion can be read broadly as particular cases of Kant’s famous injunction, “*Sapere aude!*” — ‘dare to know.’⁸ From the end of the eighteenth century onward, everything seemingly indicated that the eventual dissolution of Christianity into a more enlightened *saeculum* was imminent, or at least that the irreversible process had begun.

But already in the nineteenth century there were fault lines in the theory of secularization. Marx, for example, was, in 1843, citing Alexis de Tocqueville’s study of American religion, to the effect that though the ‘separation of church and State’ was a unique constitutional achievement, North America was nevertheless “the land of religiosity *par excellence*.”⁹ True emancipation from religious illusion, Marx surmised, would require a qualitative transformation of consciousness rather than simple legislation, since religion, more than a matter of mere law and order, “is an *inverted consciousness of the world*.”¹⁰ Setting humanity’s consciousness right-side up, Marx thought, would require a disillusioning discourse, an irreligious criticism of religion. What matters is not only convincing religious persons to give up their illusions, but “to call on them to give up a *condition* that requires illusions.”¹¹ What the world needed, in short, was a transformation of consciousness that would enable the people (“the workers of the world”) to throw off not only their illusions but also the conditions of servitude that necessitated such illusions. Marx called this radical transformation the proletarian revolution, and its resolution, communism. We should credit Marx for recognizing that simply dispelling illusions is not enough: one must change the material conditions of possibility of illusion. In our age of secular liberal democracy, we need another Marx: while we have certainly dispensed with the illusions of religion, we nevertheless maintain the illusion of being, therefore, done with illusions. It is perhaps overhasty to say that, with regards to the secularization thesis, the error began with Kant; but we are dealing with illusion rather than error, and in the case of an illusion it matters little which point of origin is emphasized, since the concept of an origin *proper* is itself an illusion. Nietzsche spoke of the “history of an error,”¹² Freud of “the future of an illusion.” We shall speak, therefore, of the history of an illusion and of the

⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 12-14 and *passim*.

⁶ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 63. “Men cannot remain children forever; they must go out into the ‘hostile life.’”

⁷ Karl Marx, *Marx on Religion*, “Contribution to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” (Philadelphia: Temple Press University, 2002), 171.

⁸ Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”

⁹ Marx, *Marx on Religion*, “On the Jewish Question,” 49

¹⁰ Marx, *Marx on Religion*, “Contribution,” 171. Marx’s emphasis.

¹¹ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 18.

illusion of the future. (It is worth noting that Freud's working definition of illusion, as fundamentally concerned with wish-fulfillment, seems to us entirely plausible and useful. Moreover, Freud is careful to distinguish illusion from delusion, the latter being in contradiction with reality, whereas an illusion need not necessarily be false. This is also the root of the distinction between error and illusion, since dispelling illusion has to do with parsing and recognizing illusion, rather than abolishing it.)¹³

All of this leads us to Olivier Roy's intriguing thesis that, far from representing or effecting an eradication of religion, secularism *creates* religion.¹⁴ Roy notes that:

Two conflicting theories emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century: one contends that secularization is an inevitable process, both a condition and consequence of modernity, the other acknowledges or welcomes the comeback of religion, perceived either as a protest against an alienating or illusory modernity, or as a different way of entering modernity.¹⁵

Contrary to both of these schemas, secularization has, in fact, claims Roy, succeeded brilliantly, but not in a way that anyone predicted: "what we are witnessing today is the militant reformulation of religion in a secularized space that has given religion its autonomy and therefore the conditions for its expansion."¹⁶ In its centuries-old bid to separate religion from culture, secularization has in fact prepared the ground for the emergence of 'pure religion,' totally divorced from a cultural background, where "religion exhibits itself as such, and refuses to be reduced to one symbolic system among others."¹⁷ The 'return of religion' is an "optical illusion;" it would be "more appropriate to speak of transformation."¹⁸ According to Roy, the paradoxical result of secularization/globalization is a transformative explosion of novel, robust, religious signifiers that float—detached from their ostensibly 'native' cultures—through the global info-sphere. Roy focuses primarily on so-called fundamentalist religious groups that celebrate and accelerate the ejection of 'culture' from their ways of life. Secular culture is perceived as hostile and encroaching. "Fundamentalism," Roy claims, "is the religious form that is most suited to globalization, because it accepts its own deculturation and *makes it the instrument* of its claim to universality."¹⁹ What should we make of this instrumentalization of deculturation? More importantly: who, or what, is really performing this operation? We shall return to this question, but we should note in advance that, despite the strength of Roy's argument, it is not, in fact, the

¹³ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 38-9.

¹⁴ Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (New York: Oxford UP), 2-3, and *passim*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, my italics.

religions themselves that are doing the instrumentalizing; rather it is the progenitor of religion, secularism itself, which effects this instrumentalization.

This brings us to Gil Anidjar's inspired counter-reading of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Contrary to many readings of Said—those that claim he had little or no interest in *religion* as opposed to his better known targets, such as the pan-disciplinary discourse of Orientalism, and colonial discourses in general—Anidjar claims that Said's argument in *Orientalism* is, in fact, aimed at religion. Not religion 'in general': Said's target was, precisely, Christianity. The debate concerns the valence of the word 'secular,' both in Said's corpus and in the deployment of the word at large. On the one hand, 'secular' has served as a master-signifier for the progression (or triumph, depending on one's perspective) of universal reason, of the authority of reason; it has functioned as a privileged watchword of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, and more importantly, the term 'secular' "has operated in a differential relation with, indeed, in opposition to, the word *religious*."²⁰ Anidjar, following Talal Asad's call for an 'anthropology of the secular,' insists that the multiple valences of the word 'secular' necessitates reflection on *both* religion *and* the secular—which is to say that it is not enough to presuppose one (the secular) and levy critiques at the other (religion); something essential is obscured by this operation—namely, the genealogical conditions of their co-emergence.²¹

Anidjar's text concerns a double movement effected by Christianity in modernity, corresponding in part to the two senses of 'secular' mentioned above. On the one hand, Western Christendom "turned against itself, as it were, emancipating itself as if by fiat, by renaming itself 'religion' rather than preserving the name it had long ago given itself as *vera religio*: Christianity." Christianity presided over what Tomoko Masuzawa calls 'the invention of world religions'²² by "actively disenchant[ing] its own world by dividing itself into private and public, politics and economics, indeed, religious and secular." Christianity became one religion among others as a result of its schizoid break with itself. *On the other hand*, in the midst of this intricate and non-linear process of contortion and folding, Christianity "attempted to liberate itself, to extricate itself from its own conditions: it *judged* itself no longer Christian, no longer 'religious.' Christianity...judged and renamed itself, *reincarnated* itself, as 'secular.'"²³ Thus Christianity, the 'original' universal religion, "invented the distinction between religious and secular, and thus it *made* religion. It made religion the problem—rather than itself."²⁴ Christianity is thus one religion among others (the world religions) and simultaneously the vocal, oppositional critic and master of those religions—the secular. It is, paradoxically, inside and outside of religion. The terms 'religious' and 'secular' are not simple synonyms for one another; they are both masked and masking. They act in the Foucauldian manner of strategic devices—assemblages and deployments of discourses that

²⁰ Anidjar, *Semites*, 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Cf. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²³ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

are obfuscating and self-blinding.²⁵ This is the crucial link to Said: these discursive strategies precisely characterize the trans-disciplinary practices of Orientalism. “Secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented ‘religion,’ named its other or others as ‘religions.’” Which is to say, “Orientalism is secularism.”²⁶

We can therefore attenuate Roy’s admirable thesis, and we can better formulate the question of instrumentalization raised above. With regard to Roy, it is evident that his point about secularization is true (and that it has a peculiarly Foucauldian ring to it): the process of secularization is generative and productive, rather than being simply repressive. Secularism does not push religions to the margins where they become radicalized, rather secularism invents margins everywhere and anywhere; secularism insinuates itself into all of the fissures of the *socius*, which have become constitutive, and religions (either more or less irrational, or, indeed, ‘fanatical’) proliferate in these newly minted liminal spaces, which grow like rhizomic grasses, increasingly co-extensive with the social field. The interstitial space of the secular is not a mere gap between two terms (religion-culture), it is the strategic *non-place* of the operation of what Jacques Derrida famously called ‘globalatinization’ [*mondialatinization*], “the globalization of Christianity.”²⁷ The strength of Roy’s thesis lies precisely in its demonstration that we cannot simply locate secularism ‘on the side of’ culture. Rather, secularism determines both religion and culture by officiating their divorce. But as Anidjar shows, it was Christianity that first split itself into the religious and the secular. The confusion that Roy attempts to dispel has its roots in this originary Euro-Christian obfuscation: the religion-culture split is Christianity’s strategy of forgiveness. Christianity pardons itself by making each term of the divide *an instrument of its absolution*:

Christianity invented (or fashioned or produced or enforced, or yet definitely institutionalized by way of knowledge and law – whichever of these you think is better to describe the massive power of hegemony and its operations) Judaism and Islam...as religions...and made Islam the paradigmatic religion, the religion of fanaticism. Doing so, Orientalism – which is to say, secularism – became one of the essential means by which Christianity *forgot and forgave itself*.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid. Also, cf. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92. “It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies”

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁸ Ibid., 48-9.

Who makes the deculturation of religion an instrument of universality? Who or what are these instruments? Whose universality? *Pace* Roy, it is not fundamentalism that takes its deculturation as the instrument of its claim to universality—it is Christianity that invents instruments (religions) to ratify its own universality *qua* secularism. Secularism uses religion as so many foils, so many barbaric and irrational others, against which it presents itself as either the ideal aim or the actual culmination of the Enlightenment. At the same time it distributes to the variety of cultures a shroud of consistency and legitimacy—it subsumes them under the hegemony of the political model of liberal democracy and deploys them as the socio-economic engine of global capital. Secularization is the strategic means by which the West (which is to say, Christendom, or European colonialism, or, simply, Christianity²⁹) effects its accumulations, its appropriations, and its dominations. “To uphold secularism today,” writes Anidjar, “is to erase the fact that secularism continues to serve inequality.” Secularism is “the discourse of power that legitimates itself and presents itself as secular, as if *indifferent* to religion yet *producing religion as a (generic) problem*.”³⁰ Christianity’s hegemony has not waned; it has metamorphosed and metastasized.

We can discern the emergence of a religion-culture spectrum: at one pole the fundamentalist (personified by the Islamic jihadi) militates against the inimical secular world; at the other pole, the cosmopolitan liberal bans religious expression in the name of freedom and democracy (the burqa debacle in France). In reality, however, the spectrum is infinitely divisible; that is, at each infinitesimal point along the line from religion to culture, an interstice prevails and distributes on either side, and in new dimensions, religious and cultural signifiers. The split that Roy perceives everywhere in the globalized world is by no means merely metaphorical, but neither is it singular. There is not a single split (between culture and religion) but an infinite process of splitting, of multiplying bifurcations (between religion and culture, between religious sects, between competing cultural mores, between theory and praxis, between special interest groups, between rich and poor, and so on *ad infinitum*). Everywhere the ‘between’ reigns, invisible, supreme. What is absolutely crucial to understand about this interstitial operation of secularization is that *the interstice distributes identities on either side of itself*. It is not that there are already, on either side of the ‘split,’ well-constituted identities (be they religious or cultural or otherwise) that pre-exist the split; on the contrary, the split is itself constitutive of identity as such.³¹ The strategic brilliance of secularism lies in its self-deployment in the

²⁹ One could, and by all means should, add *Capitalism* to this chain of metonyms. It is beyond the scope of this essay to trace the specific social and economic transformations that both conditioned and resulted from Christianity’s self-transformation, but it nevertheless seems to us incontrovertible that there is a genealogical link between Christianity and capitalism. In this regard, Philip Goodchild’s two volumes, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and *Theology of Money* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) are eminent and singular proof-texts. One should also note Giorgio Agamben’s evocative phrase, “God didn’t die, he was transformed into Money,” as emblematic of this Christology of capital.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51

³¹ I have adapted this argument from Gilles Deleuze’s arguments in his books on cinema as well as his masterpiece, *Difference and Repetition*. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-*

function of this invisible caesura, which produces friends and enemies on either side of itself and assures each and all of *their* universality. Universality is a trap that Christianity sets for its enemies. That is to say, the claim of fundamentalist religions to universality, their militant resistance to secularism, their religious rituals, their acts of terror, their apparent barbarism and blind faith—all of these act as a smokescreen for the covert action of secularism and all of its metonyms: Christianity, Orientalism, Imperialism. The Enlightenment, far from being the herald of an irreversible progression to a more rational, tolerant, multi-cultural world, was itself the fan for the explosive flames of religious fundamentalism. The Enlightenment was the hearth in which Christianity seized its opportunity for sublimation. Everywhere the smoky, ambiguous haze of ‘religious expression’ and ‘fanaticism’ obscures the war-machines of secularism, its imperial extensions, its discursive violence, its ‘white mythology.’ When called to account, Christianity shrugs and says, ‘We didn’t start the fire.’

EXCURSUS: THE FOLD

We must conceive of the world topologically—as a pure surface. This surface has only a single side, but is structured like a Möbius strip, where a torsion produces the optical effect of two or more heterogeneous and autonomous sides, thereby giving rise to multiple illusions. The single side is the outside; it is on this outside, and through its torsions, that power relations play out their differential distributions; it is under the conditions of this outside that power relations undergo the integrations of knowledge.³² Deleuze claims that the “profound Nietzscheanism” of Michel Foucault lies in the fact that, in Foucault’s thought, power exists on, or is the immanent effect of, the topology of this surface. Power is not, therefore, repressive, but rather productive; power “is practiced before it is possessed,” and it “passes through the hands of the mastered no less than through the hands of the masters.”³³ Power is a relation between forces; it is not a form of exteriority or of interiority; it does not lie between forms (of knowledge), but rather, force “exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power: force has no other object or subject than force.”³⁴ Power appears in various guises in Foucault—as a ‘microphysics,’ and as affectivity (“the power to be affected is like a *matter* of force, and the power to affect is like a *function* of force.”³⁵); but most profoundly, power manifests in the ‘diagram,’ of which the infamous Panopticon is perhaps the example par excellence.³⁶ But the diagram is itself a pure, unformalized function that “must be ‘detached from any specific use,’ as from any specific substance.”³⁷ The diagram is not universal, since it is itself produced by the contingencies of the forces of the

Image (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989), esp. 156-188, and Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), esp. 64-5, and 88-91.

³² Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988), 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 195-228.

³⁷ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 72.

outside, but it is nevertheless co-extensive with the social field; it traverses and determines all of the forms of exteriority/knowledge. Hence, the heterogeneity of power and knowledge: whereas the latter concerns, and is constituted as, strata (substances and formalized functions, forms of exteriority, i.e. sayability and visibility), power is, on the other hand, diagrammatic and distributive; power relations are non-localizable and constitute “anonymous strategies” which, though they differ in kind from stratifications of knowledge, are primary in relation to the latter and constitute the latter, effecting thereby the general organization of the social field in which the forms of knowledge are located.³⁸ This logical primacy of power over knowledge is crucial: “No doubt power, if we consider it in the abstract, neither sees nor speaks...But precisely because it does not itself speak and see, it makes us see and speak.”³⁹ A ventriloquism of power. Or, as Deleuze suggests, a question of truth: “If power is not simply violence, this is not only because it passes in itself through categories that express the relation between two forces...but also because, in relation to knowledge, it produces truth, in so far as it makes us see and speak. It produces truth as a problem.”⁴⁰

It is crucial to understand that when power is said to come from the ‘outside,’ this does not imply a beyond or a transcendent plane upon which power struggles play out, and of which our own knowledge and struggles are mere reflections or representations. Power *is* the formless form of the outside: “The relations between forces, which are mobile, faint and diffuse, do not lie outside strata but *form the outside of strata*...it is each stratified historical formation which refers back to a diagram of forces as though it were its outside.”⁴¹ Deleuze insists on this dimension of Foucault’s thought: force refers to an irreducible outside, “an outside which is farther away than any external world.” The two forms of exteriority (sayability and visibility) are external to one another and heterogeneous, which is to say that seeing and speaking do not converge on a given object (this is Foucault’s transformation of phenomenology into epistemology). There is necessarily a disjunction between speaking and seeing. Seeing and speaking are forms of knowledge, but “thinking addresses itself to an outside that has no form.”⁴²

Seeing is thinking, and speaking is thinking, but thinking occurs in the interstice, or the disjunction between seeing and speaking...thinking belongs to the outside in so far as the latter, an ‘abstract storm,’ is swallowed up by the interstice between seeing and speaking...thinking is not the innate exercise of a faculty, but must become thought. Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal.⁴³

³⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁴¹ Ibid., 84, my italics.

⁴² Ibid., 87.

⁴³ Ibid., 87.

Thought always operates in relation to the outside, but the thought of the outside is doubly genitive: the thought *of* the outside. The thought of the outside is the unthought.

The question arises: there is an outside, there is power, there are sets of forces that act upon one another—but is there, therefore, an inside? An inside “deeper than any internal world, just as the outside is farther away than any external world?” Deleuze’s reply: “The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside *of* the outside.”⁴⁴ This inside of the outside is the subject: the subject is an effect of the folding of the outside. The subject is constituted as the ‘double’ of the outside, or rather the subject is the doubled-over-ness of the outside, as if a living torsion, or a vortex possessed by a duration. Deleuze notes that the theme or the concept that haunted Foucault was, in fact, the idea of the double. The passage is so profound that it is worth quoting Deleuze at length:

[T]he double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an ‘I,’ but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, *it is a self that lives me as the double of the other*: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me.⁴⁵

Foucault’s brilliance lay in discovering a subjectivity that is derived from power and knowledge, but which is irreducible to them, which does not depend on them.⁴⁶ On the contrary, everything depends on the fold. To think is to fold, “to double the outside with a coextensive inside,”⁴⁷ but it is never the subject that folds; rather it is thought that folds—a fold is a differential relation of force to force. “Force is what belongs to the outside, since it is essentially a relation between other forces: it is inseparable in itself from the power to affect other forces (spontaneity) and to be affected by others (receptivity). But what comes about as a result [of the fold] is *a relation which force has with itself, a power to affect itself, an affect of self on self.*”⁴⁸ The subject is not the founding, intentional subject of phenomenology; neither is the subject merely given as such, as if pre-determined by a transcendent power. The subject is constituted *within the given*:⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid., 96-7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 98, my italics.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 107. And see also pages 112-13: “To the extent that principles sink their effect into the depths of the mind, the subject, which is this very effect, becomes more and more active and less and less passive. It was passive in the beginning, it is active in the end. This confirms the idea that subjectivity is in fact a

subjectivity is a struggle, a psycho-bio-cosmic battle of forces, what Foucault calls “a politics of truth.”⁵⁰ “The struggle for subjectivity presents itself,” writes Deleuze, “as the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis.”⁵¹ Foucault himself asked the crucial question: “At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?”⁵² What are the sets of forces that allow a truth to be produced? What or where is the fold from which one can speak truthfully about oneself? More profoundly: to what extent can such a ‘speaking truthfully about oneself’ be considered a form or a mode of resistance to power? A fold of the outside, folded back against itself—against power?

CONVERSION THROUGH CONVICTION (AND ITS DISCONTENTS)

It is of the essence of power to dissimulate, to conceal its paths and its stratagems, so as to increase and intensify itself. In tracing Christianity’s self-transformation into secularism and its rendition of its others as ‘religions,’ we have been able to account, in part, for the emergence of what Roy calls ‘neo-fundamentalisms,’ which arrive apparently pre-packaged with their claims of universality and their perceived barbarisms; we have not, for all that, accounted for *Christianity itself*, which is to say, Western Christendom, which is to say, secularism, and so on down the metonymic chain. The pertinent question is not the general or vague ‘what is Christianity?’ Rather, the question is: by what means did Christianity become the privileged instrument of power? We must not think of power as vested in a specific personage, and we must not think that strategy requires an active or founding subject as its condition of possibility. On the contrary, a strategy generates its subjects and distributes them in a social field; a strategy is not a conspiracy. Power speaks and acts through its subjects as though they were conduits or singular points of expression, which is to say that these subjects are inseparable from the social field in which they are distributed. Power sees and speaks through its structures. Power comes from the outside.⁵³

We saw that Christianity distributes identities on either side of the interstice or fold of which it is the agent.⁵⁴ “The religious marker,” writes Roy, “serves as an identity marker.”⁵⁵ Religion becomes a subculture, or a minority culture, and

process, and that an inventory must be made of the diverse moments of this process. To speak like Bergson, let us say that the subject is an imprint or an impression, left by principles, that it progressively turns into a machine capable of using this impression.”

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Picador, 2007), 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, “Structuralism and Post-structuralism: An Interview with Michel Foucault” (New York: The New Press, 1999), 444.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 86.

⁵⁴ Clayton Crockett notes, in *Deleuze Beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), that Deleuze seems to hesitate, throughout his career, between the cut and the fold: “One way to read Deleuze is to privilege an alternative and force a solution to the question: fold or cut, form or break? A better way to read Deleuze is to realize that Deleuze never finally chooses one over the other, but constantly works between the two,” (86). We have here followed Crockett’s advice and attempted to think in terms of cuts, splits, caesuras and folds.

⁵⁵ Roy, *Holy Ignorance*, 142.

arrays itself against the hegemonic or dominant culture. Thus, identity is not “the usage of a modern concept that helps to understand the past better: it is a ‘performative’ concept which creates the thing it names.”⁵⁶ Hence the paramount importance of conversion: one converts in order to assume, by the very act of conversion, a new identity. This is why Roy’s emphasis throughout his text on the emergence, in the globalized world, of “conversion through conviction” is absolutely crucial.⁵⁷ Conversion through conviction takes as its object, rather than populations or masses of people, the solitary or autonomous individual. Its effects—instead of the forced conversion of an entire village, due to, say, an imperial conquest—the abstract conversion of a specific person. As Daniel Colucciello Barber observes, the logic of conversion mediates our identities by constructing a narrative, but we shall see that conversion performs this mediation *for itself*, for its own sake or story. Conversion says: “you are this, but you can, and should, become this other thing; or, you are now this other thing, and you can be sure you are this other thing by knowing that you were that.”⁵⁸ Conversion not only operates according to a strict onto-logic of being (you *are* this, you *were* that), but it also distributes a temporality (what amounts to a vulgar succession of presents) to the identities in question. In a single movement conversion flattens time into succession and fetishizes an identity corresponding to each present. That is to say, as will become clear, conversion through conviction is no less a forced conversion than are its counterparts. One is compelled to convert: whether we ‘undergo’ conversion or ‘perform’ conversion, it is always as an operation *of the outside* that conversion occurs; it is always in order to substantialize, legitimate and indenture an identity that conversion deploys itself.

This is why we should, in every instance, oppose conversion to becoming. As Barber insists, “conversion never happens now...conversion *denies the now*,”⁵⁹ and this is because conversion operates according to what Carl Raschke calls “the metalogic of *difference as identity*,”⁶⁰ by which he means, precisely, the fetishization of difference—the postulation of an identity based upon one’s difference(s) from others (for instance, national or religious exceptionalism) and abstracted from the dense web of signification and sociality. This abstraction coincides with a disavowal of the social-semiotic field that is itself generative of the aleatory identities that are in question, which are thereby erroneously taken as independent and substantive. The individual is an abstraction. Conversion is the performative process *of* abstraction. Identity is the illusion generated at either pole of the conversion process and is the ‘substance’ of the individual. (Individuality is a trap. Individuality and universality are the two faces of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 143. We should note the resonance of Roy’s language of ‘performativity’ with Judith Butler’s theory of the performativity of gender, especially since, for Butler, gender performativity is a privileged site of the construction of identity. Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge: 1990), esp. 22-34.

⁵⁷ Roy, *Holy Ignorance*, 34, and *passim*.

⁵⁸ Daniel Colucciello Barber, “The Immanent Refusal of Conversion” (JCRT Winter 2014), 142-3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 142, my italics.

⁶⁰ Carl Raschke, *Postmodernism and the Revolution in Religious Theory: Towards a Semiotics of the Event* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 20.

illusion of transcendence—the Janus-face of a dead God.) If we insist on opposing conversion to becoming, it is because becoming eludes the present in order to affirm the now. Becoming is undetermined by the past, the present or the future; it distributes a chaotic and nomadic now to each of these temporal dimensions. Becoming *splits* or *folds* time in a complex double movement. Take, for example, Deleuze's reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice*:

She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once.⁶¹

The now is not the present; it is rather the untimely or the intensive. The now is the *disjunctive synthesis* of time that refuses the logic of conversion.⁶² Whereas conversion concerns a former present (what I *was*), a present present (what I *am*), and a future present (what I *will be*) according to a logic of succession, becoming concerns the future anterior (how I *will have been*). The paradox of the Nietzschean injunction ("Become what you are!") here acquires its unique sense: what we are *is* our becoming, "that is to say, the Other, our becoming-other."⁶³

"The movement of conversion's narrative has nothing to do with the autonomy of the now," writes Barber, "On the contrary, it puts the now to work for the narrative—the now is always working out the relation between the old and new...the now works for conversion. It is never now as such, it is always now as work."⁶⁴ We can see this play out quite clearly in Christianity, where even in the first century CE, the apostle Paul was obsessed with how to determine the identity of the Christian body, and deployed the logic of conversion to this end. The figure of unity in Christianity is the crucified Christ, who overcomes the difference between the universal and the particular. "The logic of conversion is, at its essence, an attempt to construct a unity out of difference."⁶⁵ Thus, in Christianity "difference is recognized, but only as that which is overcome through the unifying achievement of conversion."⁶⁶ This overcoming is what we call an illusion of transcendence. The autonomy of the now is *interiorized, instrumentalized and put to work* by the logic of conversion. This is why Christianity is the identitarian religion par excellence: it ceaselessly works to individualize, legitimate and commoditize one's identity.⁶⁷ By the same token,

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1.

⁶² For an extended treatment of the concept of the disjunctive synthesis, cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, esp. 85-91.

⁶³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia, 1994), 112.

⁶⁴ Barber, "The Immanent Refusal of Conversion," 143.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ It is important to note that it could have been different. Christianity could have emerged as an emancipatory dissolution of one's identity rather than as an instrument of power, a

this is how Christianity was constituted as a privileged instrument of power: the very process of abstraction by conversion is, in itself, power at work. *Power creates the individuals and institutions through which it flows*, and is inseparable from them, even if it determines them. Identities are taken as given rather than produced, and the now, being enlisted to mediate the incessantly disavowed instabilities of these identities, is thereby denatured, since the now is, in truth, nothing other than this instability.⁶⁸ Resistance to power necessitates, therefore, a restoration of the autonomy of the now, which in turn requires a two-fold counter-strategy: on the one hand, an acceptance of the instability of identity and the concurrent affirmation of our becoming-other; on the other hand, a refusal of power, which, in the era of global capitalism amounts to a critique of the secular, or, again, a critique of Christianity. To resist is to refuse conversion, which is to refuse identity as such, since identity is itself a tool of power.

We must understand that Christianity tells a conversion story about itself. Christianity narrates its own conversion in order to displace and obscure its genetic contingencies, its historical role as an instrument of power. Christianity became secularism to assure itself of its own inevitability, and to weaponize its doubles in order to deploy them against one another. Secularism is, according to the conversion narrative, an oasis of civilization in a vast desert of barbarism and menacing backwardness. A shining city besieged by nomad armies: this is the image that secularism projects into the heavens and injects into the discourse. Neocolonialist states spread their violence everywhere, and everywhere religious 'extremism' takes the blame. "Secularism," writes Anidjar, "continues to be fostered by the same institutions, and structurally identical elites, out of the same centers of power that earlier spread their 'civilization' and continue to expand their mission, be it economic, military, cultural, or whatever. It still has the bigger bombs—it is the history of bombing."⁶⁹ Religion, or what is called religion, is a strategic foil for the secular, "a discursive device that enables the workings of power."⁷⁰

We did not invoke the concept of the fold for nothing. Christianity/secularism is the historically privileged instrument of power, but these institutions are not originary, they are stratified, historical formations—they are just as contingent as the religions they claim to master, since they have their common being in their constitutive relation to the diagram of power. Thus we can say that Christianity is power, but that power does not merge with Christianity, just as the outside

differential flesh in the process of becoming rather than a stratified, unified body. A good deal of the impetus for the 'return to St. Paul' in philosophical and theological publishing in the two decades has centered on this question of displacing or reinventing Christianity as a religion of resistance to power. There are many examples, but to cite a few, cf. Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, Secularity* (Eugene : Cascade, 2011); Ward Blanton, *A Materialism for the Masses: St. Paul and the Philosophy of Undying Life* (New York: Columbia, 2012); Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). It could have been different, which is to say, *it can become different*. Hence the imperative to learn to fold, refold, unfold.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁹ Anidjar, *Semites*, 50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

does not merge with the diagram. Christianity is a fold; secularism is a qualitatively different fold that nevertheless maintains a genealogical and constitutive relation to Christianity. Christianity's others, the *religiones*, are likewise folds, but they are condensed by power into historical strata, according to the forms of integrated knowledge: religion is discovered or invented as an object of discursive knowledge, whereas secularism remains discursively underdetermined, since it posits itself as the originary rational condition, or *logos*, of knowledge. Secularism wishes to establish itself as the rightful claimant to universality, but requires competitors to this claim. This is why Christianity had to invent its others as doubles of itself, but as bad copies or simulacra. It is absolutely crucial to understand that Christianity represents this projection of its interiority onto its phantasmal others as the imperative of conversion (that is, conversion to the putative universality of the secular); but, on the contrary, "*the double is never the projection of the interior...it is an interiorization of the outside.*"⁷¹ We insist on this point for three reasons: first, it is necessary to acknowledge the contingencies of secularism, its existence as a historical formation, and to demonstrate how it "refers back to a diagram of forces as though it were its outside;"⁷² secondly, it is necessary to show that "there is an emergence of forces which doubles history,"⁷³ i.e. "the space of the Outside, where the relation is precisely a 'non-relation,' the place a 'non-place,' and history an emergence;"⁷⁴ and finally: the topology of the fold is manifold, it is aleatory, mobile and multiple; the outside can fold over itself—over against itself—and it is in this folding that we may seek modes of resistance to power. *Our* imperative is to join the struggle for subjectivity, to struggle to speak truthfully about ourselves, to discover that relation to the outside which allows us, in accordance with Nietzsche's injunction, to become what we are—to become, in a word, anti-Christian.

"Where there is power, there is resistance," writes Foucault, "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power."⁷⁵ When Foucault published these words in 1978, he was still wrestling with the question of how to escape or to resist the power relations he had uncovered and identified everywhere. In the subsequent volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, he explored the 'technologies of the self' proper to the Greeks and to the Christians, seeking a way out of power, a line of flight from the diagram.⁷⁶ In 1986, two years after Foucault's death, Deleuze wrote a book on Foucault's work, and took as his impetus this same question.

[Foucault's] final word on power is that *resistance comes first*, to the extent that power relations operate completely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge. This means

⁷¹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 98, my italics.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 95.

⁷⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) and Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

that a social field offers more resistance than strategies, and the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance.⁷⁷

What is this thought of resistance? It is the inside of the outside: the subject. The questions that face the subject, or the questions which the subject—whether the subject be an individual or a group, an institution or a discourse, a word or a thing—poses by encountering and inhabiting them as problems, incessantly fold, unfold, and refold the relations of the outside.⁷⁸ Power has a unilateral relation to the forms of knowledge, since it acts on them *from* the outside; but what relation does power have to itself? Power folds itself and is folded in itself, but the subject is the fold of power against itself. The subject has a direct relation to the outside. There is a subject wherever power's stratifications become intolerable. Thus, resistance to power does not refuse power as such. Resistance folds power differently, creating new 'insides,' to which a diagram corresponds as an afterthought.⁷⁹ Resistance is the *construction* of a subject as an emancipatory torsion of the outside; the subject, rather than being the receptacle of an identity assigned to it by the operations of power, is the possibility of a general reversal: the rejection of a stable identity in favor of an infinite becoming, and the affirmation of new modes of existence, unconditioned by Christianity. Resistance to power requires a capture and transformation of power. The point is not to fear—or hope—for the future, but rather “to look for new weapons.”⁸⁰

THE ILLUSION OF THE FUTURE

Barber notes that, for Jacob Taubes, the influential 20th century philologist, “the history of Christianity cannot be understood at all unless it is first understood as an attempt to come to terms with the failure of the messianic promise.”⁸¹ Christian identity is constituted by its reaction to this failure, which is, precisely, to *convert failure into survival*.⁸² And survival into hope. Taubes ultimately hedges on this diagnosis, complaining that to lose the eschatological hope of the messianic promise would have terrible consequences (“‘If the eschatological hope is illusory, then the future itself turns out to be an illusion’”), but Barber is

⁷⁷ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 89-90.

⁷⁸ “What is our light and what is our language, that is to say, our ‘truth’ today? What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance, today when we can no longer be content to say that the old struggles are no longer worth anything? And do we not perhaps above all bear witness to and even participate in the ‘production of a new subjectivity’? Do not the changes in capitalism find an unexpected ‘encounter’ in the slow emergence of a new Self as a center of resistance? Each time there is social change, is there not a movement of subjective reconversion, with its ambiguities but also its potential?” *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁹ We mean this quite literally: the diagram is produced *after* thought. No matter the extent to which we are determined by the diagram of power relations, the latter is nevertheless produced by the outside, and, therefore, can only *follow* thought.

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, “Postscript on Control Societies” (New York: Columbia, 1995), 178.

⁸¹ Barber, “The Immanent Refusal of Conversion,” 144. Wherever one locates the ‘failure’ of the messianic promise, be it the crucifixion of Christ, or the delayed coming of the Kingdom of God, or the razing of Jerusalem in 70 CE, Taubes’ observation seems to hold.

⁸² *Ibid.*

nevertheless correct to insist that we take seriously the illusory nature of this supposed future of reconciliation and peace.⁸³ The question should always be, when confronted with the messianic promise: *whose future?* The form of the messianic promise is, after all, not limited to the specifically religious forms of Judaism or Christianity. We should not be surprised to find this very same structure in the secular proclamations of liberal democracy, dating back all the way to the eighteenth century. Hence, Kant's famous '*Sapere aude!*' rings empty in our ears today. Humanity's expected liberation from its 'self-incurred tutelage' never occurred, despite the fact that there are perhaps more claims to procedures or knowledges of enlightenment published in books today than at any other point in history. In any case, the impulse to enlightenment still does the work of inspiring hope. In the same way that Christianity's disavowal of the failure of the messianic promise is constitutive of Christian identity, so are secularism's disavowals (of the failure of liberal democracy, of the deadly contradictions of unfettered capitalism, of the senseless violence of its wars, of the increasingly precarious climate, and so on *ad nauseum*) constitutive of the ubiquitous banality of the modern Western subject. The secular, no less than Christianity, lives the present on the basis of an illusory future of which the secular is both the form and the content. We need not inquire what reply the secular will make to the question, "Whose future?" Moreover, we need look no further than the various debt crises that have erupted and will continue to erupt around the globe in order to find the spirit of liberal democracy's 'hope' for the future: the future is spoken for, it has already been promised to the rich, who have but to sit and wait until what is theirs can be 'redeemed.'

If we have privileged the genealogical method in this essay, it is not in order to gain access to the 'truth' of religion, so as to essentialize, or so as to explain religion away as an epiphenomenon; on the contrary, religion is fast emerging as the paradigmatic mode of resistance to the hegemony of secularized, globalized capitalism and the whitewashed future it promises. What is crucial to understand, with regard to the future of religious resistance to secularism and neoliberal 'democracy,' is that the universal is not given. *The universal must be*

⁸³ Ibid., 146. Barber discovers a path toward refusal of the "redemptive futurity" of Christianity in the 'Oneness' of Islam, via Malcolm X. "Islam, [Malcolm] says, 'accent[s] the Oneness of Man under One God,' and in doing so it turns against racialization, here described as 'the inability of God's creatures to live as One.' We can begin to unpack these comments by noting that Oneness should be understood not as something to strive for, but rather as what is always already there. In this sense, conversion has no place in Oneness. This is because conversion requires the division of old and new identities, it requires the demand to move from one position to another. Conversion may call for a movement toward unity, toward a unification that supersedes division. Yet if there is Oneness, there can be no division in the first place. Similarly, conversion's unification may involve a process of stitching together, of constructing the union to be achieved—yet if there is Oneness, then there is nothing to stitch or construct or achieve. Oneness is thus without the need of unification. This is also to say that Oneness is without need of conversion." This avenue of thought is all the more important, as it is Islam that is increasingly becoming the model for global resistance to neoliberal and imperial hegemony. This is not to affirm the specific acts of violence perpetrated by groups such as ISIS, but it is nevertheless essential to recognize and affirm political Islam as a potentially emancipatory subjectivity.

constructed. So long as religious sects or groups believe themselves universal as such, given as universal, they will be subject to the competing universality of Christianity (and will be forced to submit to its superior ordnance). To construct, on the other hand, a singular universality, requires thought, organization, and courage. And subjectivity. Religious theory should henceforth learn to *speaking religiously*, rather than speaking of religion 'in general.' But in speaking religiously, theorists must not neglect the conditions of such speech (that is to say, the power relations to which we are inevitably subject).⁸⁴ Religion has a history, stretching from, perhaps, the eighteenth century to the present day. It need not be bound by this history. The point of genealogical inquiry, or even of a politics of truth, is not to be done with illusion, since the greatest illusion is believing oneself free of illusion. We can surmise the reason for this: illusions of all stripes are fundamentally derivatives of the illusion of *the self*. We can therefore understand perfectly the aim of Foucault's research into the history of sexuality and the 'technology of the self,' namely, the emancipatory desire "to be free of oneself."⁸⁵ To become, so to speak, capable of speaking truthfully about oneself has no other aim than this. To acknowledge the constitutive fracture or fold of the self, in and from which we see and speak; to answer to the imperative of thought, of folding, unfolding, and refolding; to assume the necessary critical distance from oneself in order to become one's own simulacra or shadow, and to thereby discover the other in oneself. Salvation qua schizophrenia.

It would not be wrong to say that the Enlightenment, as a whole, ignored or misinterpreted the theory of the unconscious. Marx was correct to insist that religion was a form of 'false consciousness,' but he erred by assuming that there was an alternative 'true consciousness' that would or should replace religion. With regard to this error, which is, again, only the particular rendition of a generalized illusion of transcendence, Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey Robbins write, "Yes, religion is a form of false consciousness. But all consciousness is a form of false consciousness."⁸⁶ As we said above, Marx's visionary claim—that it is not enough to call for people to give up their illusions without changing the material conditions that require such illusions—should give us great pause, especially in light of the recent polemical, anti-religious works of 'secular humanists,' such as Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris—all of whom reify, in their own ways, the specious illusion of the future. *Contra* Hitchens, religion does not "poison everything," to recall the infamous subtitle of *God is Not Great*.⁸⁷ Religion is, if anything, the symptom and the auto-immune reaction to a poison—namely, the poisonous love of power. If all consciousness is false consciousness, if we are condemned to illusions of one sort or the other, then it is incumbent upon us to take seriously the theory of the unconscious, which is, paradoxically, our hope *against* hope. The unconscious is not a transcendence. It does not exist in a world beyond, from which it would determine everything. It is the differential material

⁸⁴ This is why it seems to us that Foucault's question, to which we have made constant reference, is the religious question *par excellence*: "At what price can subjects speak truthfully about themselves?"

⁸⁵ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 8.

⁸⁶ Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Religion, Politics and the Earth: The New Materialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29.

⁸⁷ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (New York: Hachette, 2007), esp. 1-13.

of our becoming. We have, in fact, been speaking of the unconscious all along: the unconscious is the outside. This is what Christianity cannot think: the immanent unconscious, reciprocally determined by the folds it produces. Christianity, and all of its avatars, can only conceive of power as transcendence, and are therefore incapable of resisting power. They can function only as conduits and operators—converters—of power. We do not wish to abolish the Enlightenment, but we do wish to become “enlightened about the Enlightenment,”⁸⁸ knowing full well that illusions cling like cobwebs even to wishes such as this one. It is not a matter of dispensing with illusions, but of fabricating or inventing superior, more supple illusions. What are the illusions that would allow us to speak truthfully about ourselves, in spite of ourselves? The unconscious is neither personal nor collective, neither transcendent nor immutable, but it is nevertheless that which causes us to see and to speak. Thus, the imperative is to construct—or, what amounts to the same thing, to become—a subject capable, in itself, of folding power against itself.

Almost universally, the process of secularization envisioned by the Enlightenment thinkers resembled the stages of development of a human being. One begins as an infant, grows into a toddler, becomes a child, an adolescent, and finally, at long last, a fully-developed adult. Needless to say, this image, so cherished by the partisans of conversion, has not borne itself out. Perhaps we should have begun this essay by quoting Kierkegaard, which might have rendered the intervening investigations unnecessary:

Whatever one generation learns from another, it can never learn from a previous generation the genuinely human factor. In this respect every generation begins afresh, has no task other than that of any previous generation, and comes no further, provided the latter didn't shirk its task and deceive itself. This authentically human factor is passion, in which the one generation also fully understands the other and understand itself. Thus no generation has learned from another how to love, no generation can begin other than at the beginning, the task of no later generation is shorter than its predecessor's, and if someone, unlike the previous generation, is unwilling to stay with love but wants to go further, then that is simply idle and foolish talk.⁸⁹

One always begins from the beginning. Which is to say, the notion of developmental progress belongs to history, and to its corresponding temporalities, all of which are no less real for being derivative and tertiary; but, more profoundly, the “passion of the outside”⁹⁰ has difference and repetition as

⁸⁸ The phrase is Jack Caputo's. Cf. John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 9.

⁸⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 145. Kierkegaard adds, “But the highest passion in the human being is faith,” by which he means subjectivity, the passion of the outside, which is the both condition of, and the leap into, resistance.

⁹⁰ The term is Maurice Blanchot's. Cf. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 120.

its modes and elements, which is why “there are always many infinite movements caught within each other, each folded in the others, so that the return of one instantaneously relaunches another in such a way that the [the unconscious] is ceaselessly being woven, like a gigantic shuttle.”⁹¹ No longer the bad conscience of historical man, but rather the innocence of becoming, the properly spiritual autonomy of the now.

To conclude we need only note that any of us who wish to construct a new world must refuse the future that has been given us. In the dual critique of Christianity and secularism, *Christianity remains the priority*. If the term post-secularism is to possess any meaning it must mean the de-Christianization of the secular, contra the Christo-Euro-centric designs of Radical Orthodoxy, et al. In order to effect this new world we must lose ourselves in it—which to say that we must be divested of our identities. We should instead become invested by the struggle for subjectivity, of which we are neither the subject nor the object, but rather both the expression and the expressed.

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⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 38.