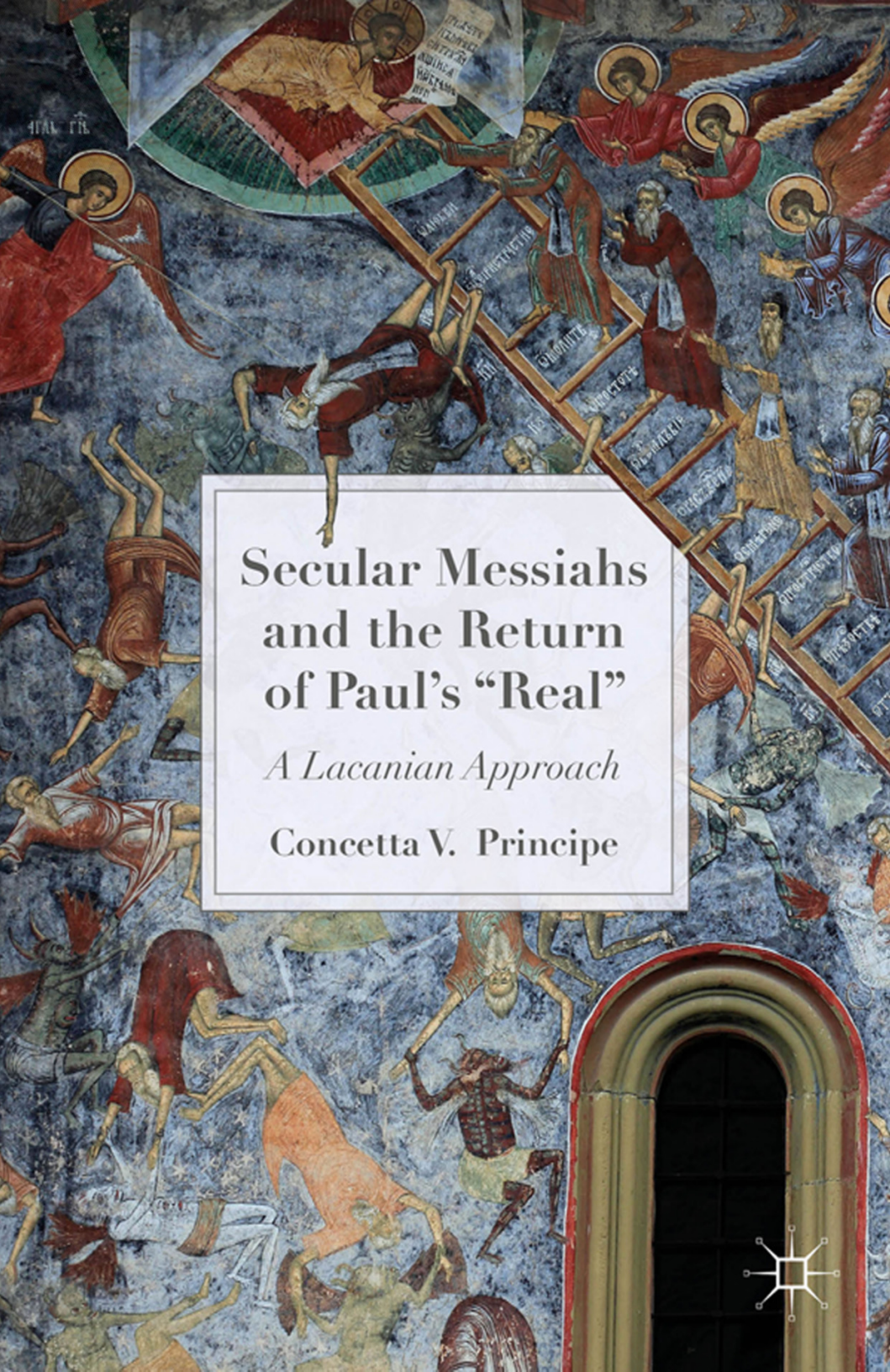

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A Lacanian Approach

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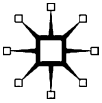

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Contents

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Introduction

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (also referred to as "On the Concept of History" and included in the bibliography under this title), Walter Benjamin provokes the dwarf from out of hiding its theological hand by naming the instigator of the revolution "messiah." Benjamin's messiah reflects a notably ambiguous relation to the Christian messiah (against the Antichrist in Thesis VI) and the Jewish figure (B), as a vague entity associated with "now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time" (397). The messiah figure prevails in post-World War II Marxist thinking in various forms. There is Étienne Balibar's passing suggestion that the universalistic in nationalism is possible through the secularized "messianic notion of brotherhood."[1] Jacques Derrida's adaptation of Benjamin's inhuman abstract vision of revolution becomes associated with the promise of justice in the noun "messianicity."[2] Meanwhile, Catherine Malabou aims to deconstruct Christianity's transcendent notion of transformation by arguing against messianic interference entirely (*Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 2010, 18 and 44). In his extended meditation on Paul's legacy, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, Slavoj Žižek seems to take his cue from Benjamin's use of the dwarf in reacting to Derridean deconstructionism by putting the messiah back into play as a Christian figure (3). In his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, he responds to the attack of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001[3] by drawing loose associations between catastrophe, Benjamin's "messianic now" (7), the "messianic dimension" of Agamben's *homo sacer* (100), and Paul's "end-time" (107).

In Giorgio Agamben's projects, there is an overabundance of interest in this figure: following Balibar, Derrida, and Žižek, there is an association of the messianic with the political future in *The Coming Community*;[4] there is a prolonged engagement with Benjamin's concept of the messianic in relation to Paul's theology in *The Time That Remains*, and there is an interest in associating "a theologico-messianic concept" with the *Muselmann*.[5]

Coined in Auschwitz by no one knows who to define the most abject of its inmates, the *Muselmann* is a striking term for several reasons: It is a religious term used to name Jewish inmates, both secular and sectarian, and has been associated by Agamben with the figure of the exception, the *homo sacer*. Furthermore, as a religious term used in a secular environment, the *Muselmann* appears homologous with the term "messiah" as being of the religious except that it is ironically opposed to key issues addressed by contemporary iterations of the messianic idea: redemption and emancipation. What do we understand is articulated in linking the *Muselmann* with the messiah? This question has bearing on the question dominating this project: why does "messiah" have currency in secular discourse at all?

The messianic phenomenon in philosophy inspired Arthur Bradley and Paul Fletcher to edit two special issues of *Journal for Cultural Research*, "On a Newly Arisen Messianic Tone in Philosophy."[6] In their introduction to these issues, they suggest "modernity's messianic fate is the outworking of its own theological origins" (187). Moreover, the "messianic turn" articulates a confluence of the political and theological aims to radically alter Schmitt's theory of secularism through Agamben's idea of the messianic promise in the community "to come" (188).[7] I would note that the "messianic turn" is not limited to philosophy and its focus on the future of politics, since we see it reflected in cultural projects as well,[8] suggesting that the use of the religious term seems to show an anomaly integral to the secular vision of the future. In this respect, I would suggest that the use of the figure in secular philosophy is the more interesting anomaly in two respects: philosophy was the site for replacing religious concepts with ethical principles and the figure in philosophy does not appear to reflect a coherent approach to a politics of the future, evident in comparing Žižek's "Jesus Christ," Benjamin's "now time," and Agamben's *Muselmann*. Hardly representative of a single ideology or even a single function, the messiah/messianic in philosophical projects is a trope that may be seen to be associated with the theological concept of the transcendent Other in either positive terms, as with Žižek's approach, or in problematic terms, as with Derrida's and Malabou's differing deconstructionist works, while Agamben's meditation on the exception at Auschwitz may be seen as an extreme example of the aporia of the messianic.

Bradley and Fletcher observe the potential hazard with the use of this messianic trope, "burdened" as it is with historical associations (188). With

full consideration of the semantic legacy of the "messiah," I am interested in addressing "why?" Why does the messiah or savior have significance in secular projects, especially since secularism was meant to erase religious signifiers from social and political spheres? Why is the messiah stripped of human attributes by some philosophers and given not only human but also specifically partisan attributes by others, where in the case of the *Muselmann*, that attribute is an ironic reaction to religiosity? Why does the messiah become associated with the turn to Pauline thinking? What is consistent about the return of the messianic trope is highlighted in Benjamin's desire to call the dwarf from out of hiding: what hides is that which has been repressed and, as such, signals the unconscious effect of some hidden cause. In that respect, my interest in the messiah phenomenon is not merely in the apparently conscious use of this figure but in the unconscious motivation that compels the anomalous return of religious terminology in our secular world. What does Auschwitz have to do with messianism? What does the supernatural force of the messiah have to do with very human political problems? What does Paul have to do with our future? These rationally posed questions foreground the irrational and unstable triangle of unconscious associations that frames my psychoanalytic approach in understanding this particular turn to the religious in secularism.

Secularism

If secularism was devised as a human-centered discourse in the public sphere aimed to resolve political conflict as well as address religious violence, its failure to be either human-centered or a political solution has been identified by its critics. In *Political Theology*, Carl Schmitt argued that secularism did not free the state from religion but was simply a sublimation of religious authority into itself; the sovereign ruled, not because of democracy, but because of a power bequeathed by the same divine source that authorized the monarch's power. Subsequent to this revelation, Schmitt, Karl Löwith, and Rudölf Bultmann brought forward the argument that the ideological foundation of secular history was determined by a Christocentric eschatology. This idea seems to shadow the secular arguments raised about religious violence as a result of the attack of the World Trade Center. This event, otherwise known as 9/11, has exacerbated an existing political confrontation between the Christian secular West and

the Muslim religious East, polarizing scholars about how to make secularism relevant in the multireligious, multicultural world. On the one hand, Gayatri Spivak takes a postcolonial approach established by Edward Said, granting that secularism may be driven by a Kantian "Judeo-Christian" prejudice but continues to be the system to withstand religious violence and so needs to be worked on; on the other hand, Saba Mahmood, confronting the putative neutrality of secular atheism, makes the case that secularism is as ideologically driven as any religious faith. Gil Anidjar argues that secularism is a system of Western imperialism that is prejudiced for Christian values. These criticisms raise questions about what in secularism can be "worked out" and in whose interest.

Within the context of the larger debate of religious politics and secularism, a politically centered strain coined as postsecularism has arisen. Hent de Vries argues that it is a term that defines the "problem" of secularism (2). On the one hand, de Vries notes that postsecularism may point to secularism's recognition that religion is not its enemy, and therefore, is trying to define a nonantagonistic relation to religion; or it may point to Jürgen Habermas's argument that secularism, fundamentally dependent on religion as a paradigm against which it works, is realizing its fragile future considering religion is diminishing in world politics: with the rise of atheism and the decline of religion proper, secularism no longer has a counterpoint for development. The key is less a new relation to religion than a new understanding of itself, de Vries suggests, which means it must focus on self-identity that is, by nature, problematic to define. I would propose that this problematic postsecular definition might find focus through the messiah: that is, the religious signifier may point to the rise of the religious turn, or it may reflect the latest strategy of secular reinvention. Whether one or the other is truer, both possibilities point to a tension within secularism that begs attention.

As an anomaly, the messiah trope signals what Slavoj Žižek highlights is the contradiction on which ideology functions. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek articulates the pervasive power ideology has in our daily lives despite an inherent contradiction in its promises: the reality it governs is fundamentally an illusion, which the subject misrecognizes as actually there (30).[9] This illusory quality of ideology and our misrecognition of it as reality is drawn from Louis Althusser's Marxist reading of Lacan's psychoanalytic Oedipalization: the subject who, facing the demand imposed

by the Name of the Father (NOF) to give up his/her desire (of the mother), accepts this prohibition and so becomes a full participant in the social order. In Althusser's terms, the subject is interpellated into ideology and the subject's consent sustains the illusion that we have a choice in how we participate in society.

Žižek offers a more sophisticated representation than Althusser's interpellating moment, by drawing on Lacan's three registers, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, to explain how ideology is a fantasy born of trauma. The symbolic order is the material by which ideology is created and sustained. In the jurisdiction of the law, it enables the linguistic strategy of signification expressed in metaphor, which gives the subject the tools needed to deal with loss (of the object of desire that is mother) through fantasy formation: by agreeing that the mother is off limits, the subject shifts her focus of desire to a replacement object found in the Imaginary. This order is associated with the narcissism of the mirror stage in which Freud's "ego" manifests in the subject and is determined by the image, reflective of metonymic strategies. The object of the subject's desire is the *objet a,* which is not just any thing, but that which remains of the subject's encounter with the third order, the paradoxical "real." The subject's relation to the *objet a* serves the symbolic organizing principle of fantasy of the encounter with the "real," wherein the encounter is the Lacanian definition of trauma.

The real has been received as an enigmatic element of Lacan's theory of the mind: variously described as "what resists symbolization absolutely" (*Seminar I* 66) and "inassimilable" of experience (*Seminar XI* 55), it has inspired several glossarial approaches. Dylan Evans, for example, references various definitions in Lacan's oeuvre, such as "the real is in itself undifferentiated; 'the real is absolutely without fissure' (*Seminar II* 97)" and "The real is "the impossible" (*Seminar XI* 167) because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way."[10] Tom Eyers highlights the "singular contribution" to psychoanalysis[11] of Lacan's "real" by remaining open to its semantic indeterminacy: "This is not to deny the possibility of *any* definition of the Real, but to signal that singular or stable definitions must be held in suspicion in favor of an appreciation of the multiplicity of ways in which the Real is figured throughout Lacan's work" (2). The reason for its essential indeterminacy, Eyers argues, is that it gains definition through its association with the other registers. Žižek "locates" the real through its paradoxical

effect on the formalizing principles of the symbolic: "the real . . . is the rock upon which every formalization fumbles. But it is necessarily through this failure that we can in a way encircle, locate the empty place of the real."[12]

The emptiness identified by Žižek reflects the effect on the subject of what Freud identified as the "missed" quality of trauma. How trauma can happen unexpectedly and why, when it returns, it is not immediately recognizable, is explained by Freud through his theory of how consciousness works in his seminal research in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Freud understood that the mind actively seeks stimulation, which means that what happens against the subject's conscious will, what is forced on the subject as unwanted stimuli, causes a wound in the psyche: "We may use the term traumatic to describe those excitations from outside that are strong enough to break through the protective barrier [of consciousness] . . . An event such as external trauma will doubtless provoke a massive disturbance in the organism's energy system . . . the pleasure principle is put in abeyance. It is no longer possible to prevent the psychic apparatus from being flooded by large quanta of stimulation" (68–69). In Freud's terms, the unwanted stimuli are repressed in the unconscious and return to consciousness after the fact, what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit*. In this respect, the World War I veterans' nightmares "retrospectively generate the fear" (71) that they could not apprehend consciously during wartime; that is, the "missed" event is repressed in the unconscious and returns as a nightmare or, in waking life, as compulsive behavior. What is integral to Freud's concept of this "cause" of trauma is that it is an unknown factor.

Lacan drew on Freud's idea of the indeterminacy of the "cause" of trauma for his concept of the real: "The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in the form that which was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma" (*Seminar XI* 55). The *tuché*, or the first cause, signifies the mystery of the encounter with the real, which explains how the traumatic event returns unexpectedly: "What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs—the experience tells us quite a lot about its relation to the *tuché—as if by chance*" (54). The problem is that trauma is not recognized except in its repetitive effect: "We see preserved the insistence of the trauma in making us aware of its existence. The trauma reappears, in effect, frequently unveiled" (55). By "unveiled,"

Lacan means to emphasize the non-symbolic quality of the "real" and that the indication of trauma's return is in the falling-away of the symbolic veil. In effect, trauma is a paradox: its insistence explains the compulsive nature of its return and so being "obvious" as repetitive, while its unveiled quality points to the predicament of its origin as being invisible at the time of the subject's exposure to it, which makes its return unrecognizable.[13]

Underlying Žižek's analysis of ideology is the principle that fantasy is the organizing response to the enigmatic "real," or trauma. The only real thing of the illusion of ideology is the "real, impossible kernel" hiding within ideology. This kernel is visible for what it is not: the symptom of an inconsistency. Ideology is not a constant reliable force, Žižek argues, but a function of the symbolic order, prone to structural weaknesses, but engineered to survive those weaknesses: "An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour" (50). The Jew, for example, is the symptom of fascist ideology (143); by inverting "the linking of causality," the Jew becomes the cause of "social antagonism," while hiding the fact that she/he is merely the projection of ideology's failure. "What is excluded from the Symbolic . . . returns in the Real as a paranoid construction of the Jew," Žižek asserts. That is, fascism's fantasy of unity causes the return of the Jew as the exception, whose exclusion from society is a strategy that reinforces the need for the fascistic promise of unity.

In Žižek's terms, secularism is the illusion of some original kernel of the real. Since, as I have highlighted, the messianic figure is a contradiction in secular discourse, then it stands to reason that the religious figure would be a remainder of the real, or the *objet a* of a trauma, and so serves the fantasy of secular ideology. If the messiah represents a social fantasy of a future redemption and equality and must be seen as a contradiction within secular ideology, then we are alerted to the fact that secularism promises a future of equality that it cannot, does not, will not deliver. Critics of secularism have made this point. In Žižek's terms, ideological critique involves "going through the fantasy" (132), or, moving through the interpellating structures sustained by the paradoxical nature of the social fantasy so as to isolate the "real" cause hiding inside the symptom. In this respect, questioning the "cause" of the messiah *objet a* may serve secular critique.

The messiah as a vision of the future redemption is rooted in a theological concept overdetermined by its historical origins, which date to

sometime between the first century BCE and first century CE, the period during which Paul was making a contribution to Christianity. As it happens, Paul's body of letters gives us nearly direct access to the early use of "messiah" in his naming of Jesus the "Christ." I have chosen to focus on Paul as the source of an anterior "cause" of our secular trauma for these semantic reasons in combination with being drawn to yet another contemporary unconscious phenomenon: the compulsive return to Paul's writing in twentieth-century intellectual works. Žižek references Paul in the post-9/11 world; Freud referenced Paul's part in addressing the Jewish trauma of guilt in his *Moses and Monotheism*; post-World War II historians have revisited and problematized Paul's theological and cultural contribution in the wave of scholarship dubbed New Perspectives on Paul. Moreover, the works by Agamben, Badiou, and Taubes, not to mention Žižek, which aim to contemporize Paul's message for political and social issues in secular society, are only the most famous of the ongoing work by philosophers on Paul.[14] I would suggest that this return to Paul is as symptomatic of trauma as is the compulsive return of the messiah; for that reason alone, I have reason to explore in the chapters ahead an association between Paul's "encounter with the real" of Jesus and our contemporary secular trauma.

The next question arising is, why does the messiah return? This question may find its next step in the paradoxical way in which ideology sustains itself. Žižek reviews the subject's relation to ideology through the subject's relation to desire through the Other. The imaginary and the symbolic orders determine how "the subject is integrated into a given socio-symbolic field" (123) through interpellation by the Other. The awkwardness of this interpellation is defined by Žižek as the "circle of a square": essentially, ideology's demand on the subject creates a leftover that leaves the subject asking, "*che vuoi*?" This question articulates the subject's desire, which is not to fulfill her own need but to fulfill what the Other lacks, a logic seeded in infancy. The infant reasons that, since the mother keeps leaving because she lacks (desires) something, then the infant wants to be for the mother what she lacks so that she will not leave: thus, the subject desires what the (m)Other wants. Žižek points out that the way to understanding what the Other wants is through assimilating the fantasies promoted by ideology. Yet, as he highlights, "The desire with regard to which we must not "give way" is not the desire supported by fantasy, but the desire of the Other beyond fantasy" (132). While ideology

helps the subject understand what is demanded of her/him socially, the subject's desire associated with that which comes from beyond ideology is that singular interference of the real; some identify it as the "call," which comes from beyond ideology and is the ethical demand that shapes desire. In some cases, the subject's desire contradicts ideological fantasy. If the uses of the messiah, registering as a contradiction within secularism, can be seen as the call of the "real" from beyond the social fantasy of secularism, then what desire is reflected in its use, and what ethical demand is referenced? That question is grounded in the impulses motivating Lacan to address Freud's reflections on the influence of religion as culture on the subject's actions.

Psychoanalysis as Method

In my objective to identify a trauma of secularism by drawing associations between the historical works of St. Paul and the unconscious use of the messiah in secular projects, a number of concerns about my use of the psychoanalytic method are raised. For one, as Lacan's "real" stresses, the original moment of crisis is unknowable and secondary to the focus on trauma's return in disguise.[15] The fact that the original event will never be found except through its substitution, the fiction, is a limitation of this project that is somewhat complicated by the fact that trauma remains a matter of debate, both in the clinic and in Humanities-based hermeneutic research of which this project is a part. For another, the viability of using psychoanalysis in the Humanities-centered discipline of history is fundamentally problematic. As with historians, Freud relied on artifacts, written texts, for analysis: his diagnosis of Paul Daniel Schreber as a paranoid-schizophrenic based on the psychotic's memoir is a case in point. While this method raises a whole host of problems for the historian, for the psychoanalyst, another set of problems is raised. Unlike the historians who use a method that relies on the benchmark of historical fact, Freud recognized that, since trauma is necessarily "missed," there is no "fact" of the trauma: there is only an indirect access to it through behavior repetition or fiction.

While, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud felt he had grounds for the "psychological probability" that "religious phenomena are to be understood only on the model of the individual . . . and therefore derive their effect on mankind from the historical truth they contain" (71), which is to follow

his argument in *Totem and Taboo* that the murder of the primordial father explains the initiation of the incest taboo with which we live today, he recognized a fundamentally weak link in his theory: the origin of monotheism being the murder of the first Moses relied on a tenuous historical element—"Sellin's suggestion concerning Moses' end." The fact is, Sellin had only a "theory" that Moses was murdered by the Israelites, which was based on interpreting a few biblical artifacts. This is why Freud's thesis that the persecution against the Jews for murdering Jesus as being symptomatic of the undocumented murder of the first Moses could not be proved as a fact in historical terms; moreover, psychoanalytically, since this murder was the "missed" event of a trauma, it could only be posited in hypothetical, or fictional, terms. Freud's effort to explain a contemporary psychological phenomenon with a historical past exposed the inherent incompatibility of two methods: the historical interest in fact and the psychoanalytic interest in fiction. The historian relies on facts and artifacts to initiate interpretations of the past and is continually haunted by the fact that what can be said about the past remains limited by degrees of unreliability. While the analyst is also limited by unreliability, she/he is less interested in the facts (of the missed event) than in the fantasy presented by the analysand about the past. The analysand's access to the missed "encounter with the real" is a retrospective rendering of it in the symbolic, which makes it a kind of fiction. It is the analysand's relation to this fiction that says everything. Where, for the historian, the focus is on the past that is inaccessible, for the analyst, the analysand's fantasy in the present is what counts.

Freud's research indicates where my project intends to avoid shaky ground and where it aims for firm footing. Paul's letters are the earliest extant witnesses to the formative years of Christianity, contextualized by other works we have access to, such as those by the Judean historian, Flavius Josephus, the Judean philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, and the scribes of the recently accessed library of Qumran. While historians have developed a reliable library of scholarship about this period, the interpretations associated with the material of this time are hotly debated and attest to the fact that our accumulated knowledge of the "facts" of the first century is incomplete and arguably will remain that way as long as we continue to do history as we have done. Thus, with respect to the historical method, my research is only slightly less weak than Freud's historical material in *Moses*. What my research can offer, however, is the same hermeneutic approach

that Freud used in relying on testimonies as witnesses to the unconscious, which explains my interest in analyzing Paul's first-century letters for the trauma that inspired them: his encounter with Jesus.

If Freud's research could have isolated a problem with the use of history in psychoanalysis, the use of psychoanalytic theory in the Humanities has had its own share of problems, which reflect current ambiguities in defining trauma in physiological and psychic terms. Critics of the method of Trauma Studies, both from the perspective of clinical practice and from inside Humanities itself, highlight that question. For example, in response to Cathy Caruth's seminal project introducing trauma as a theory in the Humanities, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), the Freudian historian, Ruth Leys, criticizes Caruth for conflating posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with Freud's idea of trauma.[16] Leys's critique is well defended though problematic in light of the fact that Freud's research on war neuroses as part of his initial work on traumatic neuroses has served current research on PTSD. Dominic LaCapra, a scholar of History and Literature, indirectly references Leys's critique of Caruth's research when warning against the use of trauma theory in Holocaust Studies for fostering a culture of victimhood. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra makes some interesting points about the psychoanalytic approach in interpreting texts of Holocaust Studies, wherein the figure of the perpetrator is a constant reminder of the traumatic conditions of surviving. Based on the understanding that the perpetrator has an unambiguous role in trauma studies as the cause of trauma, La Capra uses the figure to emphasize a serious concern with trauma as a method in historical research: "As a consequence one encounters the dubious ideas that everyone (including perpetrators or collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere or 'wound culture'" (64). While his is a valid concern since one hopes that research does not promote pathology, it is valid only on the assumption that trauma is bad.[17] Implicit in his warning is that trauma is a negative experience of torture; that it has a perpetrator and that humanity should ensure no one suffers this in the future.

Paul's letters inspired by his encounter with the "real" of Jesus is a perfect case for dispelling the assumptions that trauma is only a bad experience and that dwelling on it promotes victimhood. Since trauma is of the real, proving that the trauma serving secular ideology categorically originates in Paul's encounter with the real of Jesus is not the goal of this

project. I also do not intend to argue that the trauma of secularism is a product only of Paul's real and what I mean by this shall be discussed in the chapters ahead. The fact that Paul's trauma is worlds apart from the trauma endured by the Holocaust victim, makes possible thinking the first question: what is trauma? This question is underscored by the next question: how does the trauma of the individual connect to the trauma of the collective? How does Paul's trauma become a trauma of secularism? Exploring a relationship between the uses of messiah in works determined by secular ideology and Paul's letters of the first century is to limit the extent to which I speak about trauma of secularism in this project.

One last qualifying point needs to be made about my objectives. Since trauma is only apparent in its effect on the symbolic structure of fantasy as return and, in Žižek's terms, the interference of the real, this project is limited to evidence of the trauma, which are the fantasies inspired by the *objet a* of the messiah. This limitation is qualified by the fact that, since secularism's strategy of secularization involves transposing Christian paradigms into seemingly neutral paradigms, a form of sublimation, the *objet a* of the messiah may be considered symptomatic of some kernel of the real in secularism; that is, since the "compulsive return" of obviously religious concepts counters the rule that the "real" is consistently invisible and never returns the same way, then the various ways in which the messiah returns suggests that there is reason to believe that this variety is rooted to a factor that is common to all. Discovering what that factor is drives my reading of Paul's messiah with the secular messiah, not as an inversion of the causal links diachronically, from now to an original first "cause," but as an inversion of the causal links synchronically within each *tuché* (cause) of the *objets a,* by bringing these "causes" together in a comparative sense, to see what may be consistent in the "kernel" of the trauma between then and now.

The project has been divided into three movements; the first centers on the debates within secular scholarship and clarifies my debt to Freud and Lacan on the psychoanalytic method and Trauma Studies and is found in chapter one. In the second movement I engage in a dialectical reading of the philosophers' and the historians' scholarship on Paul's letters, through three of his terms: "messiah," the "Law," and "conversion." For example, in chapter two, I review the significance of the messiah in Paul's texts beginning with the premise of Agamben's disclosure in *The Time that Remains*,

that Benjamin's "weak messianic power" is "a quote without quotation marks" of a Pauline passage. In chapter three, I focus on the concept of Paul's Law by reading the philosopher with the historian; I review and take issue with Badiou's and Žižek's focus on Paul's law of love at the expense of ignoring the other laws; then I review the historians' quandary about the variety of and inconsistencies apparent in Paul's laws and offer an interpretation of the Law of Christ by returning to the philosophers. In the fourth chapter, I focus on Paul's concept of conversion in relation to his "encounter" with Christ and the "call"; in aid of understanding his personal trauma, I conduct a comparative analysis of his letters with the contemporary Greek novel *Joseph and Aseneth*.

Chapter five signals the last movement of this project by applying an interpretation of the trauma that inspired Paul's gospel to two case studies of the use of the messiah in works that have responded to key twentieth-century events. By identifying these analyses as "case studies," I mean to allude to Freud's work in the simplest sense: texts under review represent "fantasies," which I consider exemplary of the trauma indicated by the use of religious *objets a* within limits of the research accomplished to date. These works reflect a groundswell of thought on issues of citizenship, emancipation, and equality as raised by twentieth-century political events. The first case study is a comparative analysis of messianic representation in Franz Rosenzweig's theologically driven response to World War I, *The Star of Redemption* with Derrida's political treatise on the collapse of Russian communism in *Specters of Marx*. The second case study offers a consideration of the paradox of the absent *Muselmann* in Sarah Kofman's philosophical meditation on and memoir of Auschwitz, *Smothered Words* (*Paroles suffoquées*). In focusing on these messianic fantasies, I am driven by the ambiguous search: what has returned of Paul's real?

Chapter One
The Trauma of Secularism

Introduction

If secularism began as a doctrine devised by enlightenment scholars to counter religious violence and to free scientific and intellectual inquiry from the superstitions of religion,[1] and then became interpreted as the manifestation or sublimation of Absolute Spirit in the self-conscious subject,[2] its contribution to leveling inequalities of (Marx), race (Said), and gender (Spivak et al.) exemplified its universal aspirations.[3] Secularism's promise to be applicable to all, to be a "universal" paradigm in the political sphere of equality, has been the mantra used to maintain its value for European states for several centuries. Thus, Slavoj Žižek's salient point that ideology maintains its power by utilizing a contradiction in its promise applies to secularism as a putatively rational system, which maintains an irrational resistance to sectarian presence in the public sphere. How does a secular state justify interfering in how a citizen practices her faith by imposing a prohibition on what she can wear? In Quebec and Paris, the justification is framed as liberating Moslem women from patriarchal oppression.

This narrative of liberation in the modern state is, according to Wendy Brown in "Civilizational Delusions: Secularism, Tolerance, Equality," a delusion since it is based on perpetuating the inequality of genders while feigning neutrality for other religions.[4] Secularism's profession of tolerance belies manipulation: "Tolerance does not resolve but rather manages these inequalities and exclusions" (Paragraph 20). As exemplified in the issue of the hijab in French public schools, and most recently in the niqab issue in courtrooms in Canada,[5] secularism's promise to rectify conditions of oppression, persecution, discrimination, and nonrepresentation is based on all citizens agreeing that private religion is subordinate to public secularism.

That agreement must be enacted by Muslim women and ironically perpetuates the gender discrimination in Islam and in Western secularism. The equality promoted by this prohibition is based on secularism's ideologically based prejudice that equality can be enforced only through "sameness," but behind it is the principle that all religions are equally inferior to secularism. Those who do not agree with this, that is, those who do not give up their religious difference for the benefits of a secular life, are not only seen as outsiders but as betrayers or "heretics." Brown has correctly isolated a very troubling dynamic of gender inequality in the public sphere. I would suggest that this dynamic, centered around the Muslim woman, points to a correlation between secularism's renewed sense of responsibility and the alleged attack of the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001, otherwise known as 9/11.

It goes without saying that 9/11 was a threat to American security, evident in President Bush's response to "wage a war on terror" and manifested in targeting Muslims at American border crossings. This security response signaled that the threat was not simply violence but Islamic violence. In academic circles, the conviction that secularism was necessary to combat events of religious violence, such as 9/11, inspired counterarguments pointing to secularism's reactionary prejudice against religion. It is by way of the debates circulating about secularism as a result of 9/11 that I outline the details of the ideological fantasy driving contemporary Western secularism in preparation for the focus on the use of the messiah in Paul.

Postsecularism and Antisecularism

In the face of religious violence exemplified in the event of 9/11, Aamir Mufti highlights in his introduction to the *boundary 2* (2004) issue dedicated to Edward Said, that scholars need to reclaim secularism: "The recognition of the need to declare oneself for secularism appears now, in light of the escalating forms of religious politics and violence that have come to dominate political life in multiple locations and across the globe, to have been anachronistic in a double sense, both behind and ahead of its time" (2). The threat inspired by 9/11 evident in Mufti's call is echoed in Spivak's contribution to the same issue, "On Terror." In this article, she calls on readers not to see 9/11 as "just about religion,"[6] highlighting the first response by Western thinkers to dismiss the event as a terrorist

act committed by religious fundamentalists. In this move, Spivak positions herself as "for" secularism and initiates her deconstructive practice of exposing and pulling at the binary of religion vs. secularism. Secularism is "a mechanism to avoid violence,"[7] Spivak claims; at the least, it promotes the "soft option of 'teaching tolerance'" (106), even though it is riddled by Kant's Christocentrism,[8] which needs to be worked through. Fully conscious of secularism's weaknesses, what Žižek would identify as the inconsistencies in its social fantasy, Spivak stands by it as the procedure in Humanities discourse that can deal with religious violence.

What I want to highlight about the secularist response to 9/11, by Mufti and Spivak and others, is not its reaction to the terroristic violence of 9/11 but its branding of religious fundamentalism as something secularism is obligated and equipped to fight against. If Spivak may be said to have already articulated her ambivalent favoring of secularism against the violence of religious rite by both condemning and condoning the white imperialist move to prohibit *Sati* as violence against women in, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she hides her ambivalence behind a passivist's dismissal of violence as chauvinist. The fact is, Spivak's deconstructive project is activated by patriarchal discourse; as a woman, and a Marxist, she can point to the Eastern subaltern she claims is being silenced by Western imperialism, herself exemplifying the emancipation of that subject to speak by using imperialist culture (as a Marxist feminist), but ultimately, she colludes with the culture that creates the subaltern's silence. Spivak knows her collusion. Perhaps it is the paradox of her privilege that leads Spivak to resist reading 9/11 for its political message against American imperialism, using the same excuse in 2004 as she used when speaking about *Sati* in the 1980s: that being a personal abhorrence of the violence of suicide. Spivak's anti-imperialist politics would align her with the anti-imperialistic ideals that fomented 9/11, and she knows that; this is why she tries for an "ethical encounter" with the politics of the suicide bombers, but the closest she can get is to parallel them with liberation theologists. In this parallel, we "Americans" have an essentially partial but ultimately ineffectual view of the politics behind the alleged twin towers attack. Through the sieve of this Christian movement, something of 9/11 is erased, and it is not its leftist-like politics but its religion. That is, by the end of the article, Spivak's request that we not see the event as "just religion" does not let us see the religion at all.[9] Spivak's strategy suggests that 9/11 stands out as a

threat to secularism not because of its violence, but because of its religion. What Spivak is not cognizant of is the fact that her strategy identifies the threat of 9/11 not for being religious but for being non-Christian.

Is Spivak at all aware that, in attempting to look at the Muslim alleged hijackers from the perspective of a Christian religious fundamentalism, she has simulated and even updated Kant's pietistic influences at the core of secularism, even after having admitted that the Christianness of secularism needs to be addressed (105)? What is fascinating about 9/11 in the post-event environment is that, being a specter of the religious turn, it has drawn out prejudices and anxieties by secularists, as Spivak's response exemplifies. In contrast to anxious scholars like Spivak, there are scholars like Žižek who embrace religious terms for secular purposes: "the theological dimension is given a new lease on life in the guise of the 'postsecular' Messianic turn of deconstruction" (*Puppet* 3). What has been called post-secularism ostensibly coincides with the religious turn that has infiltrated the strictly secular domains of politics, philosophy, and culture. That turn, anecdotally represented by Jeffrey Robbins as the "death of God" movement in the 1960s in the United States, echoed by the liberation theology movement in South America, was coincidental with the rise of poststructural thought known as deconstructionism. As deconstructionism gained importance with the rise of postmodernism, a shift occurred, and scholars, theorists, and philosophers with deep ties to secularism recognized a need to reconsider the religious. In effect, Robbins points out, by the 1990s, Derrida, Vattimo, and Caputo were proclaiming the death of the death of God (*After the Death of God* 13).

According to Hent de Vries, postsecularism is not articulated to the "historical amnesia" of postmodernism but to the paradox of the self-conscious ceding to the place of religion in the public sphere, reflected in the move by Derrida et al.: "…if one understands the term post-secular not as an attempt at historical periodization (following upon equally unfortunate designations such as 'the post-modern', 'the post-historical', or 'the post-human') but merely as a topical indicator for—well, a problem. In the words of Hans Joas: 'post-secular doesn't express a sudden increase in religiosity, after its epochal decrease, but rather a change in mindset of those who felt justified in considering religious to be moribund'" (de Vries 3).[10] This would clearly explain how atheists such as Derrida and Žižek could produce secular projects with explicit religious content, and thereby