ANAESTHETICS OF EXISTENCE

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anaesthetics of existence

ESSAYS ON EXPERIENCE AT THE EDGE

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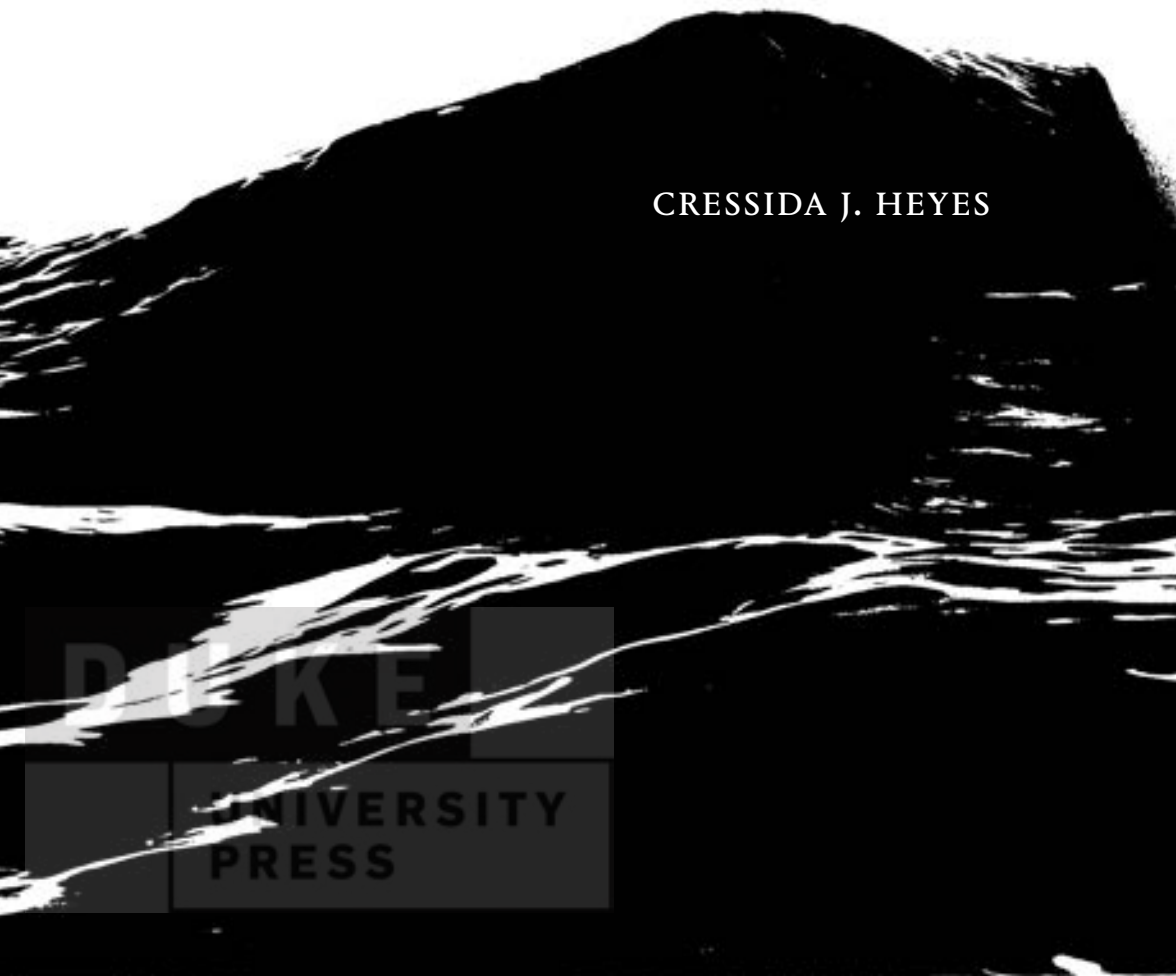

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I STARTED WORK ON THIS BOOK IN 2011, after taking a break of several years from monograph writing following the publication of *Self-Transformations* in 2007. My son was born in 2009 and the pause was deliberate—in part a privileged choice to allow me to focus on the process of having a child, and in part because I was exhausted and ill after he was born. Nonetheless, I didn't expect this book to take this long, because I didn't expect—could not have expected—the litany of painful and disheartening professional disasters that struck between 2009 and 2017. Raising a young child while negotiating an amicable end to a twenty-year relationship was plain sailing compared with all that, and I am eternally grateful to David Kahane for his generosity and commitment to easing us through. My colleagues in the Political Science Department at the University of Alberta welcomed a shell-shocked philosopher into their ranks very warmly, and I owe a special debt to Lois Harder and Catherine Kellogg, who both helped in different ways with that difficult transition, and have buoyed me with their supportive friendship and commitment to feminist intellectual life and politics.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a question of knowing how to govern one's own life in order to give it the most beautiful form (in the eyes of others, of oneself, and of the future generations for which one might serve as an example). That is what I tried to reconstitute: the formation and development of a practice of self whose aim was to constitute oneself as the worker of the beauty of one's own life.—Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth" ([1984] 1988a, 259)

To continue to counter the moral science of biopolitics, which links the political administration of life to a melodrama of the care of the monadic self, we need to think about agency and personhood not only in normative terms but also as activity exercised within spaces of ordinariness that does not always or even usually follow the literalizing logic of visible effectuality, bourgeois dramatics, and lifelong accumulation or fashioning.—Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death" (2007, 758)

I ONCE ATTENDED A CONFERENCE on the implications of Michel Foucault's philosophy for ethics and the body. Fogged with lack of sleep and the nervous exhaustion that comes from sitting in fluorescent-lit rooms and trying for hours to focus on read-aloud presentations, I heard one speaker repeatedly talk of "anaesthetics of existence." I dozily turned this mysterious phrase over in my head, wondering what it could mean, and how it fit with the rest of the

paper. Eventually, of course, I realized that the speaker was talking too fast, running together her words, and actually saying "an aesthetics of existence," a phrase that Foucault and his interpreters often used to describe a kind of self-styled ethical life and that made perfect sense of the rest. But the idea of "*anaesthetics* of existence" stuck with me. As Joan Scott recounts being provoked by a student essay in which "fin de siècle" became the enticing phrase "fantasy echo," I wanted to know more about this productive mishearing.[1] It was confusing and oblique—a mix-up that I couldn't quite make sense of, and that I was tempted to dismiss as merely an artifact of my own cerebral deficits. But the ethical work of the *aesthetics of existence*, with its implication of making oneself as art, in that moment felt grand and really tiring, while "anaesthetics" seemed more passive, curative, restful. So much of academic life is organized around the subjectivity I was trying to sustain at that conference: a self-mobilizing gumption, a sitting-up-and-paying-attention, an attitude of thinking hard about one's work and preciously representing the work as emanating from a carefully curated self. This life is both very privileged and very depleting—an interesting paradox. To have toyed with the idea of taking a cognitive vacation through some imagined *anaesthetics of existence* felt, briefly, transgressive (or perhaps, a "preface to transgression" [Foucault 1998])—transgressive enough, at least, that I held fast to the possibility and the phrase that seemed to capture it.

In a powerful and complex essay, Susan Buck-Morss argues with Walter Benjamin that the development of the human sensorium under modernity is characterized by attempts to cope with shock (1992, 16).[2] From the battlefields of the First World War to the much more everyday public spaces of shopping arcades, factories, amusement parks, casinos, and even crowded streets, our senses are neurologically overloaded. Do we attempt consciously to process this shock experience, or do we, at a certain point, need to rely on our ability to parry the bombardment of our senses, to protect ourselves as sense-perceiving subjects from the technological overwhelm of modern experience? To do so is always to manage an experience that is simultaneously objective and subjective, a set of stimuli emerging from a situation external to us and an interpretive attitude to that situation: "In order to differentiate our description from the more limited, traditional conception of the human nervous system which artificially isolates human biology from its environment, we will call this aesthetic system of sense-consciousness, decentered from the classical subject, wherein external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation, the 'synaesthetic system'" (13).

Under such conditions, Buck-Morss suggests, the synaesthetic system "reverses its role. Its goal is to *numb* the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of *an*aesthetics" (18). "Aesthetics," she reminds us, is a term that derives from the Greek *aisthetikos*—that which is perceived by feeling. The five senses form an interface between subject and world; together, they are a physical-cognitive apparatus serving "instinctual needs—for warmth, nourishment, safety, sociability" (6). The gradual appropriation of the term into modern philosophy to mean that branch of philosophical inquiry concerned with (evaluative judgments about) sense perception, and in particular our exercise of taste, thus represents an attempt to recommend the acculturation of our senses and transpose the focus of inquiry from sense perception itself to objects of art. The antonym *an*aesthetic is that which deprives us of sensibility, renders us incapable of perception. Its common usages are almost always medical, and it too is usually associated with its objects—namely, anaesthetic agents (drugs that render the patient insensible or numb).

Buck-Morss points out that the aesthetic shock of modernity coincides with the development of technologies of anaesthesia. Opiates, nitrous oxide, ether, chloroform, and cocaine entered widespread and everyday use through the 1800s (Snow 2006), developing their own economy (both within and outside formal medical practice) as varied tools for coping with synaesthetic overload. No longer dependent on anaesthetic habits as quaint as daily laudanum or ether frolics, we now have an amazing array of drugs aimed at managing the ubiquitous depression, anxiety, insomnia, and other synaesthetic diseases that thrive in contemporary Western cultures. We also have addictions (in some cases to those same drugs), which have increased in both their scope and their severity. Psychotropics are used in a systemic, involuntary or pseudovoluntary way to manage daily life for whole populations—the criminally incarcerated, those in psychiatric facilities, or elders in residential care, for example. Technologies that enhance, control, deaden, or eliminate sensation are ever more central to a wide range of lives and deaths.

"Aesthetics of existence," by contrast, the phrase I originally misheard, occurs in Foucault's last work on ethics and care of the self. Volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality* evoke an ancient Greek and Roman understanding of ethics as a project of self-making in which the self is understood as an aesthetic product, a result of practicing the "arts of existence"—that is, "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men [*sic*] not only

set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (Foucault [1984] 1990, 10–11). This is an ethic that contrasts with Christian asceticism and morality as obedience to a code of rules (Foucault [1984] 1996a, 451). Returning to the ethical practices of antiquity, Foucault is writing a new genealogy of morals ([1984] 1996a, 451; [1983] 1997a, 266), which will reveal "the genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions" in which "we have to build our existence as a beautiful existence; it is an aesthetic mode" ([1983] 1997a, 266). In his response to Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?," Foucault suggests that we think of modernity less as an epoch and more as an ethos—"a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" ([1984] 1997g, 309). For my purposes, what's important in Foucault's characterization of this attitude is the relation to oneself to which it is tied: "To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (311). An aesthetics of existence, then, is a practice of ethics that takes the self as a commitment, to be made as one would make a work of art, where the project of making is paradoxical because the thing being made is also that doing the making. As Daniel Smith puts it,

> When Foucault says we should treat our life as a work of art, we should not understand him to be saying that "we" are something separate from and transcendent to this object "life" which we ought to use as the material for an aesthetic work of art. This would re-introduce exactly the kind of dualism Foucault tries to get away from in this essay. The distinction is not one of two different levels, a transcendent author-principle opposed to the substantial work of art which it produces, but one whereby the two things, the author and the work, remain strictly immanent to one another. (D. Smith 2015, 141)

The aesthetics of existence Foucault defends has a political goal: it resists the "will to knowledge" (in the context of sexuality in particular, but also more broadly) that causes us to inquire after our authentic truth, to try to work out what kind of subject we really are, particularly as defined by expert discourse. Instead, our freedom lies in being open to unanticipated transformation,

including of the very identities we have come to hold dear (Heyes 2007, ch. 5). Foucault's method here, which has behind it all his genealogical work, constitutes a "critical ontology of ourselves"—a way of bringing into question the sorts of things we previously imagined ourselves to be. This ontology "must be considered not . . . as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (Foucault [1984] 1997g, 319). This last work is part of a Kantian tradition solely in the sense that Foucault understands autonomy as the practice of critique of all things presented to us as necessary (including a transcendental subject) (Allen 2008, esp. 22–44).

Other critics have long implied that Foucault in his aesthetics of existence assumes a bourgeois modernist subject, and these criticisms have persisted and morphed into the challenge that his emphasis on self-stylization resonates a little too much with the discourse of human capital of which he was also critical.[3] When Foucault represents self-making as the "task" of a "worker" who refuses to accept himself as he is, no matter his philosophical intentions, he deploys a vocabulary perilously close to the corruptions and reductions of individual agency that characterize life under neoliberalism. In an interview with Stephen Riggins in 1982, he says, in response to a question about the relation of his philosophy to the arts: "You see, that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. . . . This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?" (Foucault [1982] 1997b, 131).[4]

Foucault probably understood, presciently, that globalized capitalism was starting to create and deploy a self whose individual autonomy is not the source of resistance to its subjection but rather is a key capacity in drawing it ever deeper into biopolitical power. The labor of being an agential subject (of which political resistance is part) is not outside the neoliberal regimes that incite it. Rather, the norms of agency that constrain and enable us are fully implicated in systems of postdisciplinary power. Our ambivalent commitment (I might say "attachment") to self-making remains a valuable part of our aesthetic ethics, but one of the reasons it is ambivalent lies in the anaesthetic

desire for respite from the assaults of late modernity and, now, neoliberal postmodernity.

Foucault is, of course, neither resurrecting self-sovereignty nor endorsing the disciplined subjectivity biopolitics creates—quite the contrary. One of the reasons he turns to the lives of privileged Greek and Roman men is to examine the practices of daily life—sex, diet, maintaining health, exercise, writing, marital relations—in a predisciplinary age, the better to contrast care of the self with the normalization that follows it. He died before he could fully articulate the connection between these historical sketches and the interviews he gave on a contemporary art of living. This leaves us with the open question of how Foucault imagined the contemporary subject would practice his aesthetics of existence. What is it *like*—as a matter of everyday life, of lived experience—to be the subject of this always-becoming, exemplary, critical, beautiful life? For Foucault himself the aesthetics of existence was, as the term suggests, in part a sensory undertaking, connected in a way he never quite explained to the pains and pleasures of the technologies of the self available in our age. As I considered in the final chapter of *Self-Transformations* (Heyes 2007, ch. 5), Foucault's remarks on the role of pleasure in his own life in his last interviews are oddly ambivalent. Although he once commented lightly, "A good club sandwich with a Coke. That's my pleasure. It's true," he stresses that in general he had a hard time experiencing pleasure, especially the ordinary pleasures of everyday life (Foucault [1982] 1997b, 129; also Foucault 1996b, 378). He sought out limit-experiences at the extremes of pleasure (or even at the limit of his capacity to have experience of any kind) in order to encounter the edges of his possibilities—even, as when he was hit by a car while high, of the edge of his life at the border with death (Foucault [1984] 1997b, 129)—and be transformed (Foucault [1982] 1997c, 165; Foucault [1975] 1996c, 188–89; Foucault [1963] 1998; Wade and Dundas 2017).

As Ladelle McWhorter's brilliant book *Bodies and Pleasures* (1999) shows, the forms that our pain and pleasure take are closely hooked in to practices of normalization, which cultivate our capacity to experience them both in order that we might be better rendered as docile bodies. The intensification of sensory experience Buck-Morss describes, then, provides more opportunity for such ambivalence about the pleasures of everyday life or the dramas of the limit. It also helps to make sense of our desire for the anaesthetic, the withdrawal from sensory experience, as a mode of managing pleasure and pain. Even for an individual less committed to the project of living an

aesthetics of existence than Foucault, it can sound like an exhausting ethical endeavor. The subject of late liberal capitalism is required to exercise his autonomy iteratively, expressing his individuality qua capacity to choose in an interminable series of self-determining moments. When presented in the language of political philosophy we can lose sight of the lived experience of this subjectivity: it can be exhausting, ego-driven, obsessed with irrelevant choices, and abusively self-disciplining, committed to the fantasy of organizing and rationalizing a life of freedom in political contexts in which freedom is systemically denied. As Lauren Berlant argues, in an essay with strong resonances with Buck-Morss's work, the "mass physical attenuation" that happens to working populations under late capitalism contrasts with the dominant account of autonomy, and thereby demands a rethinking: "Sovereignty described as the foundation of individual autonomy . . . overidentifies the similarity of self-control to sovereign performativity and state control over geographical boundaries. It thereby encourages a militaristic and melodramatic view of agency in the spectacular temporality of the event of the decision; and, in linking and inflating consciousness, intention, and decision or event, it has provided an alibi for normative governmentality and justified moralizing against inconvenient human activity" (Berlant 2007, 755).

By "inconvenient human activity," I take it that Berlant is referring in part to the activities that contribute to the "slow death" she theorizes: eating in particular, but also all of the compulsive, numbing, addictive activities that render working life under neoliberalism more tolerable.[5] In this light, she suggests, we need a better way of talking about ordinary life and its reproduction—the management of households; preparing and eating food; daily routines of traveling, working, caring for children, and so on (echoes of Foucault's *Care of the Self*). Ordinary life in the context of the pressures of postdisciplinary neoliberalism often feels compressed, demanding, teetering on the edge of possibility, utterly draining, yet also out-of-control, micromanaged by distant institutions and individuals. The response from even the most privileged individuals cannot always be to sit up, pay attention, work harder, work to change ourselves—indeed, this is a mode of subjectivation that neoliberalism itself generates and exploits (Tokumitsu 2018). Sometimes, as Berlant also points out, the only possibility of resistance (or even the only viable response) might be to detach from experience, to evade pain and fatigue, to slow down, and (although she doesn't say this) to alter or even to lose consciousness.

ON EXPERIENCE

A recent issue of a popular men's magazine includes a tongue-in-cheek feature called "The New Status Symbols: How to Be Better Than Everyone Else in 2018." Next to a cartoon of a bearded white man with a bun doing a pretzel yoga pose on a tropical beach drinking a veggie juice while taking a selfie is a text box that reads,

> We're not exactly sure when it happened, but sometime in the past few years, all the old signifiers of wealth and prosperity got flipped on their head. Uber replaced the sports car, and running a bootstrapped start-up is cooler than heading a Fortune 500 company. Now status is all about experiences, man. And getting lots of sleep. To help you make sense of the newfangled yet hyper-competitive world of being better than other people, we drew up a field guide. Just remember: it doesn't count if you don't post about it on social media. (Schube and Hansen-Bundy 2018, 34)

On a street corner near my urban home, a young woman hands me a small folded card. "EXPERIENCE NOTHING," it declares on its face, over a simple graphic of a supine human body against a blue field. The card is advertising a "float tank"—the sensory deprivation experience that is all the rage—and it touts the many benefits of floating, which fall under the headings of relaxation and meditation, broadly construed. Some people, we learn, have "drafted whole portions of books while floating." This obviously piques my interest, but it seems contradictory with the claim that I could "experience nothing." What is this "nothing" I'll be "experiencing," and if I'm experiencing it, isn't it *something*?

These two moments from popular culture capture two key ambiguities in the concept of "experience." On the one hand, not everything that happens to us counts as experience. We build ourselves as special and distinctive subjects by doing special and distinctive things—only these count as "experiences." We also know, however, that the "hypercompetitive world" in which individuals vie for status and compare their formative experiences on Instagram is exhausting and a bit depressing. On the other hand, then, we can withdraw from experience altogether and give ourselves respite for an hour by lying in magnesium-saturated water, having no experience at all. Almost as if the float tank purveyors are hedging their bets against our reluctance to "experience nothing" (which could, after all, also be achieved by having a nap for free), they stress that this is a special kind of nothing—ironically,

an experience of nothing that will help me finish my book or visualize my next artwork, thereby contributing to my personal cachet in a more roundabout and restful way. These examples show that we all tacitly recognize that "experience" functions to sediment subjectivity, and that experience has a constitutive outside—things that happen to us that do not quite count *as* experiences (whether because they are not exciting enough, or because they involve forms of consciousness that don't meet the bar for experience). Experience, in other words, is a complex social and political category as well as a complex epistemic concept.

If "(an)aesthetics" is one of the keywords of this book, "experience" is the other. In one version of empiricism, experience is best understood as a stream of sensory inputs entering individual consciousness (see Janack 2012, chs. 1 and 2). I don't think this is all "experience" is, but it is one of its frames of reference, and when we look at Buck-Morss's analysis we can see how our experience itself may be radically different in a postmodern age—not only because of the fact of the internet or the electric car, but structurally, because of the speed, diversity, form of delivery, range, and potential modulation of those sensory inputs. Note that in the formations loosely and tendentiously described as identity politics, and their inheritors, the experience of injustice is central to the claims making of oppressed agents (Heyes [2002] 2016). As I outline in chapter 1, arguments about experience in this context have been largely organized around whose experience gets to count as representative for political purposes; a less well-known literature also focuses on what experience *is*—specifically, whether it is a product of discourse or an origin of subjectivity. Both these debates, in different ways, sidestep another question about how the transformation of conditions of experience also transforms possibilities for subjectivity. We are having a crisis of experience: bombarded with inputs, and undergoing a contraction of the present and a speeded-up world, we cannot so straightforwardly rely on experience anymore as the basis for an enduring subjectivity. Our experience itself is fragmented and continually receding. Thus, if experience motivates political action, the very basis of our common organizing is undercut. We cannot, however, turn to larger historical stories about the forms our subjectivity takes and dismiss experience out of hand as a basis for political knowledge. As Gayatri Spivak provocatively asked, can the subaltern speak? Not if she is merely a discursive product, the answer went. To reject the epistemic value of experience this wholeheartedly is to undermine important arguments in standpoint theory that show how social location matters to understanding political structures.

If the term "identity politics" seems a little passé, the testimonial impulse in the politics of gender and sexuality has not waned.

Indeed, having experience has become a task, or project—a demand of post-liberal postmodernity (and also of feminism) that we make ourselves through trial and challenge, that we accumulate exciting events, that we engage in the lifelong fashioning to which Berlant refers. On vacation in Mexico I see a shuttle bus covered with an image of beautiful thatched cabanas standing in tranquil cerulean water, with a stenciled message: "This is not a resort. This is an experience." In this vernacular, as in my first example, "experience" harks back to an archaic English usage as an experiment or test, one that will (presumably) enrich your personal archive and make you a more complex and worthier human than tourists who go to cheaper all-inclusives and spend the week lying on a crowded beach drinking anemic margaritas. Here, experience is yoked to agency. Experience is not just something I have but something I curate. I return to this theme in chapters 3 and 4 to show how normative temporality supports productive action and marginalizes inaction, including passive resistance. Here I'll preview one case analysis that brings together experience, agency, and (an)aesthetics, and to which I'll return.

In her book *Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery*, Meredith Jones describes how cosmetic surgery devotee Lolo Ferrari loved the oblivion of general anaesthesia and its capacity to suspend her life during a fairy-tale "enchanted sleep," allowing her to wake up transformed without any further exercise of agency (Jones 2008, 129–49). Ferrari was an ordinary middle-class French girl turned porn star and minor celebrity who died in 2000 at the age of thirty-seven of a (possibly suicidal) overdose of prescription drugs, including painkillers. She was best known for having the largest breast implants in the world, and at her death her chest was said to measure seventy-one inches. In her challenging analysis, Jones comments on Ferrari's avowed love of general anaesthesia: "Like the stereotypical promiscuous woman who seeks out sex and enjoys it too much Ferrari is too vocal about her taste for unconsciousness. In a culture where self-control is paramount and there is a growing cult of self-determination and self-awareness, the notion of willingly surrendering to an anaesthetic is something abhorrent, something definitely not meant to be pleasurable, but perhaps something very seductive as well."[6]

Jones contrasts Ferrari with ORLAN, the performance artist who once made having cosmetic surgeries into her art form: "Orlan and Ferrari, two extreme practitioners of cosmetic surgery, are opposites in relation to agency. Orlan remains determinedly conscious during her operations, directing the

proceedings, talking to the audience. In stark contrast Ferrari completely gives herself over the surgeon, describing the loss of power via general anaesthetic as a joy that she 'adores'" (Jones 2008, 132).[7] ORLAN certainly considers herself transgressive and has been hailed as undermining the conformity of cosmetic surgery. As Jones implies, however, she is the more conventional feminist. Taking control over the surgical scene, insisting on consciousness (a necessary condition of agency, we assume), and confronting the nonnormative changes to her body as they occur, she is very much a practitioner of the aesthetic rather than the anaesthetic. Ferrari, by contrast, fails one feminist test: she is passive, surrendering to her (male) doctors' ministrations, embracing and enjoying the "black hole" of general anaesthesia. Yet Ferrari could also be seen as someone who took extreme risks with her life and body, engaging in the limit-experiences of general anaesthesia and powerful narcotics, practicing self-transformation of the most dramatic kind, and making herself into a transgressive work of art.

This example, I've discovered, upsets a lot of feminists. Some think ORLAN is a groundbreaking critic, while others think she's a mediocre sensationalist, but everyone agrees she's a go-getter, a game changer, a challenging person.[8] Ferrari's altered body, though, is typically treated—by feminists and nonfeminists alike—as an object of ridicule, disgust, or pity. No one really thinks she had anything to say, and the kindest interpretations of her life read her as a pathetic victim (of abuse, patriarchy, or celebrity culture). While she may be an object lesson for feminism, she is not a feminist subject. Nonetheless, Ferrari embodies, Jones suggests, a paradoxical relation to aesthetic existence. Transforming herself by surrendering her agency, she is both a victim of an utterly normative femininity, and a self-made woman. What could we learn from her? Specifically: we are all faced with demands that we prove our personhood by demonstrating certain capacities associated with agency. What are the genealogies of these demands? From what political contexts do they emerge?

I learned this from Marx and Foucault, although many other radical thinkers make the same point: historically, the emergence of the modern liberal self as an intellectual ideal comes hand in hand with the emergence of forms of power that diminish and manipulate human beings in new ways. The capacities with which this self is endowed—such as autonomy, reason, and critique—are not transcendental, nor are they universal gifts of progress. Instead they are historically and culturally situated capacities that are differentially available within contexts of serious (and in some cases growing)

inequality and exploitation. This doesn't mean feminists should reject any of them. We have excellent grounds to cultivate greater autonomy for women, to defend our capacity to reason, or our ability to offer critique. It does mean, though, that we should ask about how the philosophical quest to cultivate a self is caught up with structures of power that also constrain and manage us.

ON METHOD

This quest—to cultivate an aesthetics of existence in the context of understanding our own histories—is intellectually perplexing and paradoxical, but most of all (I find) it is methodologically challenging. What kind of *science humaine* do we need to free us from dogmas of necessity while not fetishizing autonomy? I have long been interested, too, in related paradoxes of freedom: Could freedom live in accepting what is as well as in the exercise of the will? Could freedom be found in an as-yet-unknown (and in-principle-unknowable) future as well as in programmatic recommendations? Is freedom a quality of subjects, or a worldly practice (Heyes 2018)? I started thinking about these paradoxes because so many of the technologies of the gendered self institutionalized in Western culture offer themselves to us as liberatory yet ultimately rely on a painful and futile voluntarist individualism that eschews real political change. Drawing on Foucault's method, my last book detailed the genealogy (including the contradictions) of a certain understanding of the self—as an authentic inner substance that must be realized on the surface of the flesh (Heyes 2007). I was interested in that understanding as it manifested in several different technologies (changing sex, losing weight, and having cosmetic surgery) that clearly had historically and culturally specific meaning but that were often construed (both in a cultural imaginary *and* in the self-conception of individuals) as essential personal truths. I wrestled with the interaction of the structural and the individual: having done a genealogy of trans identities, for example, what follows for how any one of us—including but not only those who want to "change sex"—can and should relate to our own gendered subjectivity (Heyes 2003; Heyes 2007, ch. 2; Heyes 2009)? I construed such questions as ethical, and they are; they are, however, also questions within ethical frameworks that are (contra how ethics is often practiced in philosophy) historically minded, sensitive to relations of power, and that place ethical demands on individuals with full recognition of the conditions of possibility for those subjects to act—or even to exist (Butler 2004, 2006).

Because I took this approach, quite a lot of my work for that book and for subsequent projects has involved reading qualitative, ethnographic research on how and why people seek to change their bodies to accommodate various kinds of social demand, to achieve intersubjective validation or "recognition" (e.g., Latham et al. 2019). Sometimes I think I am an anthropologist manqué, a scholar whose love of personal stories and the contexts in which they gain meaning has been vicariously satisfied only through philosophical reflection one step removed from those stories. As my intellectual career has moved on, I have tacitly tried harder and harder to narrow that gap between philosophy and everyday life, to bring the kinds of structural analysis I learned how to do as a political thinker together with personal stories without doing violence to either. Working through this ethical endeavor, I realized that I needed a more robust philosophical method for describing embodied lived experience "from the inside." This need stemmed in large part from my feminist commitments: the articulations of experience provided by oppressed people are an important window onto the epistemic elisions of frameworks of understanding that pass as universal. If Foucault's genealogical method aimed to expose the posturing of histories with a priori commitments to an essential subject, the feminist emphasis on experience aimed to expose the partiality of masculinist history by showing that women's perspectives pointed toward alternate interpretive realities that are often marginalized or entirely overlooked.

At the same time, I found that feminist theory lacked what we might call a *method* for describing experience, and perhaps especially embodied experience. There are of course better and worse writers—philosophers with varying capacities for "thick description" of things that happen to us. When we think about such key feminist topics as childbirth, pregnancy, rape, objectification, or racist violence, they all have an embodied component that is a necessary part of fully understanding them as sites of injustice. Historical or structural analyses of such injustices are certainly key to making sense of the relations of power that undergird them, but to keep analysis only at that level is to ignore the texture of individual undergoing that conveys the wrongs done and respects the subjects of that experience. Neither level of analysis can be reduced to the other, but neither are they (in my view) incommensurable or necessarily contradictory. I certainly wanted to have effective descriptive skills and to be able to cite and create narratives that would capture the personal. More than that, however, I wanted a model for making sense of lived experience that included philosophical principles, a helpful vocabulary, an established set of insights, an intellectual tradition and literature, and arguments with forms

I could appropriate. I turned to phenomenology as the most obvious example of such a method. Phenomenology was not only a challenge to learn for an analytically trained philosopher with no background in the tradition but also a tricky balancing act for a scholar with a commitment to Foucauldian genealogical investigation (Stoller 2009).

Genealogy, recall, is Foucault's Nietzschean method as he implements it in particular in *Discipline and Punish* and in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, and as he describes it in a number of essays and interviews. Genealogy offers a "history of the present" (Foucault [1976] 1978, 31) that, he argues in his key essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," renounces any claim to "suprahistorical perspective." The "historian's history," Foucault says, "finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself" (Foucault 1977, 152). In other words, "history in the traditional sense" assumes a transcendental subject who is the author of progressivist narratives that organize the events of the past into a developmental story. This way of doing history likes to take a great distance on its object, articulating the origins and achievement of, for example, liberty. The "effective" history of genealogy, Foucault argues, is, by contrast, "without constants": "nothing in man [*sic*]—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (153). Genealogy as a method opposes the idea of any single unity progressing through history—such as the free individual, who acts intentionally and systematically to increase his liberation—and instead focuses on accumulating accounts of those historical threads that, taken together, create the conditions of possibility for certain kinds of subjects to exist. For Foucault, as I'll describe in chapter 3, the very concept of evolutive time, for example, and the individual who lives in it, are produced by discipline rather than preceding it (160–61). What Foucault seeks to articulate via genealogy is typically the emergence of a discourse—a set of beliefs and practices that come together to structure the conditions of possibility for a particular subject position.

There is a large literature interpreting Foucault's genealogical approach (e.g., Gutting 2005, ch. 5; Sluga 2006), but in the context of the tension with phenomenology I need only ask, What does genealogy do for us? It shows us our contingency by demonstrating how subjects emerge historically, rather than existing prior to history and participating in it. Foucault's much more specific and local approach (compared with the grandiosity of Nietzsche's

genealogy) is a way of disturbing our illusions of unity, and depriving "the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature" (Sluga 2006, 228). For example, *Discipline and Punish* shows how "the disciplines"—practices in disparate areas of life (education, the military, hospitals, prisons) that share common features—converge to create "docile bodies." Docile subjects did not emerge as a result of a single organized strategy, nor are they a political phenomenon that can be understood as only regressive (or progressive); rather, the painstaking archival work Foucault undertakes reveals how a particular politics of truth functions to organize and limit the self-understandings available. It thus gives us, as contemporary inheritors of disciplined bodies, a perspective on our own conditions of possibility. For Foucault, then, genealogy is one part of a larger commitment to *critique*, understood as a radical challenge to our certainties about ourselves, and to our ways of knowing those certainties (Foucault [1978] 1997f). As I and others have argued elsewhere, critique can be understood in this context as an ethical practice explicitly in contrast to judgment, which undergirds a distinctive understanding of freedom (Butler 2002; Heyes 2007, ch. 5; Heyes 2018). Genealogy is deeply relevant to the subject's understanding of itself, but that relevance comes from pulling the epistemic rug from under our feet, rather than relying on any certainty about descriptions of who we are.

If this is genealogy, phenomenology is something quite different. The term "phenomenology" and its cognates are used very loosely across a wide range of disciplines to imply any method that focuses on first-personal perspectives on experience; in its most capacious uses, some researchers call their work "phenomenological," meaning only that they value personal narrative, or quote the anecdotes of their research participants at greater length. Of course, phenomenology is a much more robust philosophical tradition than this, with a long reach, but which for my purposes has proved most useful in its post–Merleau-Pontian feminist articulations. Introductions to phenomenology typically characterize it as a philosophical method that attempts to identify the essential structures of consciousness, starting from a first-personal perspective—it is the undertaking of the conscious subject to find necessary truths about the meaning of things in our experience. This project famously requires a bracketing, or *epochē*, of our own unreflective immersion in our own lived experience, to shift our attention from what is experienced to how it is experienced, and what makes this experience possible.[9]

Foucault himself had a troubled relation to phenomenology—one of the schools of philosophy he was trained in, and was expected to embrace as part

of his philosophical education and milieu. His early work on psychology evinces that training. In 1954 he wrote an extended introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's essay "Dream and Existence," the same year in which he published his own short book *Maladie mentale et personnalité* (Binswanger with Foucault [1930] 1993; Foucault 1954). The first part of that book argues that the claims of the natural sciences, and of physical medicine, cannot be mirrored in (or incorporated by) the human sciences, of which psychology is a part (Foucault [1962] 1987, xii), and disavows any continuity between "organic" and "mental" pathology (10, 13). Foucault repudiates the reductive explanatory techniques that natural scientific models imply (and especially the pseudoscientific account of mental illness offered by psychoanalysis), in favor of descriptive (i.e., phenomenological) language. This language recognizes the symptoms of "mental illness" as part of a mind-world context, in which a form or style of relating to certain difficult situations comes to pervade the whole of a person's Being-in-the-world. The second part, at least in the original edition, attempts to bridge the gap between phenomenology and Marxism—a project that, as Todd May (2006) points out, was in keeping with the intellectual environment (dominated by Sartre) in which Foucault found himself in postwar France. During Foucault's *Wanderjahren* between 1955 and 1959 he spent time in Sweden, Poland, and Germany working on his history of madness, first published as *Folie et déraison* in 1961. During this time, he came to repudiate his early work and dissociated himself from phenomenology as a method and a politics. As he said in 1966, "If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness" (Foucault [1966] 1970, xiv).

Foucault's first book was reissued in 1962 as *Maladie mentale et psychologie*, with an entirely different second part that is more a précis of the central arguments about the history of madness appearing in his other work than a logical extension of the project of phenomenological psychology (Foucault [1962] 1976). Foucault no longer takes mental illness for granted and attempts to politicize it but instead makes a more radical move: he questions the historical constitution of the very category "mental illness," in much the same manner as *Madness and Civilization* had the year before. As May describes, this period between 1954 and 1962 is marked by Foucault's turn to the work of Georges Canguilhem and Nietzsche and his development of his own genealogical

method. The subject becomes "more constituted than constituting. It is not subjective experience, but rather the formative history of that experience, that now becomes the relevant subject matter" (May 2006, 302):

> It is no longer the experience of the subject that is to be interrogated, but the categories within which that experience is articulated. If, methodologically, archaeology and genealogy step back from the immersion in experience that characterizes phenomenology, by the same gesture they step back from the content of that experience in order to take as their own content the categories and structure of thought that phenomenology takes for granted. If phenomenology takes subjective experience as its object and description as its method, the later Foucault takes phenomenology (and other human sciences) as his object and history as his method. In this sense, the rejection of phenomenology could not be more complete. (306)

If Foucault's driving political belief was that there were no universal necessities about the human or about human existence, then the forms of phenomenology available to him were especially antithetical to his mature philosophical methods. Although he never returned to phenomenology, he did return to more explicit consideration of experience and the role of marginal individuals and their subjugated knowledges in politicizing human contingency. Foucault might have turned to his contemporaries for exemplars of existential-phenomenological thinkers putting their work to more radical uses: although he had a mostly antagonistic intellectual relationship with Sartre that ended with a rapprochement of sorts, he could have been reading and engaging Fanon (of whom he seems to have known nothing); Beauvoir (whom he allegedly treated with chilly politeness, even though they moved in the same political and intellectual circles in Paris); or even returning to Merleau-Ponty (who taught him as an undergraduate).[10] Instead, his early rejection of existentialism and phenomenology seems to have directed him away from the figures of his own day who were using these intellectual traditions in more political and self-reflexive ways.

More or less since Foucault's death, phenomenology in the English-speaking world has divided. If you attend the annual meetings of the US Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, for example, you can still find plenty of panels devoted to the minutiae of Heidegger's *Nachlaß* or the role of the transcendental ego in Husserl. In a strangely through-the-looking-glass way, however, you can also find a parallel conference of presentations focusing on feminist and queer phenomenology, phenomenology

of sexuality or disability, Black or Latinx phenomenology, and so on. These latter established and emergent modes of thinking all start from the claim—explicit or implicit—that the phenomenological reduction is incomplete. Far from bracketing everything except the pure transcendental ego, the phenomenological tradition has allowed vestiges of privileged experience to remain attached to it, masquerading as human universals. Rejecting the idea that there is any form of subjectivity that could fully exclude the "empirical ego," "posttranscendental" phenomenology thus aims "not to try to find an ego unmarked by naturalizing and historicizing processes, but to use the reduction to critically reveal the naturalization and contingency of subjectivity—the way in which structures, meanings and norms of being are socially and historically sedimented so as to make our experience what it is" (Al-Saji 2010b, 16n9).

This was what I needed. I wanted to learn to describe lived experience in ways that perhaps rested in moments on the essentials of embodied cognition, but that was consistently alive to the diverse realities of culture and history—and in particular the cultures and histories of gender, race, disability, and sexuality—as they are felt in our bodies. I wanted to describe lived experience in a thoroughly political vein. I was uninterested in a transcendental phenomenology, in other words, but urgently needed an existential one. My models for this kind of phenomenology have thus been twentieth-century thinkers who deploy first-personal philosophy to understand sexual difference and colonial racism—most notably Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon—as well as *their* inheritors—the late twentieth-century scholars and my peers who, really only since the 1990s, have taken phenomenological work further afield to integrate its insights with political theory. Sandra Bartky's *Femininity and Domination* (1990), together with Iris Marion Young's early essays, especially her germinal "Throwing Like a Girl" ([1980] 2005) (as well as the responses this work came to generate [e.g., Bartky 2009; Chisholm 2008; Ferguson 2009; Mann 2009]), were my first connection to feminist philosophy that took the specifics of female embodiment as lived (rather than as represented) seriously. As this project evolved, I was especially influenced by Gayle Salamon's work on transgender, racism, and disability (2006, 2010, 2012, 2018); Lisa Guenther's (2013) book on solitary confinement; Alia Al-Saji's essays on veiling, touch, and the visual in racism (2010a, 2010b, 2014); Linda Martín Alcoff's work in critical race philosophy and on experience in the context of sexual violation (1996, 2000, 2006, 2014); and Sara Ahmed's (2006) "queer phenomenology"—a corpus that models how to understand "lived

experience" using the rich methods of phenomenology without treating the political context of that experience as detachable.[11] I also read contemporary essays in phenomenological psychology, phenomenologically inflected work on the lived experience of time, and Drew Leder's (1990) Merleau-Pontian analysis of health and illness, all of which appear at various moments in the essays in this book. Their methodological unity, despite their varied themes, comes from their attempt to interweave analyses of the emergence of particular subject positions with close description of the lived experience of those subjectivities. That is, they approach *assujettissement*—the process of becoming a subject and being subjugated—from two directions, the genealogical and the first-personal, with the aim of showing how these levels of analysis inflect each other and are indispensable to political projects.

Within most social science research, such a dual approach might not be considered especially controversial: there are structures, and there are agents who act within them. Even here, however, the question of how much the structure dictates the agent (or vice versa) has a long intellectual half-life that motivates methodological controversies in social theory. Within continental philosophy, with its greater degree of abstraction, the methodological challenges tend to be approached as theoretical knots rather than as practical problems of how to account for experience. As I show in chapter 1, genealogy repudiates the transcendental subject by showing how the very idea of such a subject has its own history; phenomenology follows the intentional threads of lived experience back to their condition of possibility—a transcendental ego that makes such experience possible.[12] In this sense, phenomenology is starkly opposed to genealogy: genealogy is intended to show how certain kinds of person come into existence, and it is (in theory) irrelevant to its method how those persons experience their world, while phenomenology takes lived experience as an epistemic foundation. My goal in the first chapter is thus to set out these theoretical tensions and outline in principle how my method resolves them; the work of the subsequent chapters is to show how particular phenomena of time, space, and embodiment can be approached from simultaneously genealogical and phenomenological perspectives. This book, then, is an attempt to model a philosophical method that moves back and forth between registers—between the lived experience of an individual and her conditions of possibility; the constraints on what we can be and do, and how we engage and exceed those constraints. Genealogy models a constant interrogation of our conditions of possibility as the kind of subjects we find ourselves to be. Phenomenology, however, has a related critical depth,

what Johanna Oksala calls "the phenomenological imperative of ultimate self-responsibility": "phenomenology must," she says, "be a self-critical and self-responsible practice, a movement of thought that turns back, again and again, to investigate its own conditions and origins" (2016, 71).

APPLYING THE METHOD

The examples in this book are worked through using this method, identifying what it can show us about particular embodied experiences that invite "the crosslighting of two irreducible perspectives," the subjective and the historical (Oksala 2010, 14). They are chosen with an eye to the way the term "experience" functions in contemporary political life. My cases are also about "experience at the edge"—a phrase I coined to capture those parts of our lives that resist inclusion within the frame of undergoings readily available for social and political interpretation. As I've flagged, some things happen to us but don't seem to count as our experience, exactly, whether in our own minds or in the opinions of others. In this light, chapter 2 examines popular focus on sexual assault cases involving targets who are unconscious—whether because drunk, drugged, anaesthetized, in a coma, or asleep—which has drawn attention to the role of social media in both exacerbating and gaining redress for the harms of sexual violence perpetrated against unconscious or semiconscious victims. To be violated while "dead to the world" is a complex wrong: it scarcely seems to count as a "lived experience" at all, yet it often shatters the victim's body schema and world. I situate political anxiety about women's unconsciousness and sexual assault while offering a phenomenological analysis of its harms: it exploits and reinforces any victim's absence from intersubjective life, and exposes her body in ways that make it especially difficult for her to return to the shared world as a subject.[13] It undercuts her capacity to sustain a body schema that persists across time, as well as her capacity to retreat from that body schema into what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called "anonymity." While this analysis is generalizable, the harm caused by exposure of the body's surface and the two-dimensional visibility it generates occurs within the contexts of the racialization and sexualization of bodies. Drawing on Fanon's account of the racial-epidermal schema in the context of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of "night," the chapter argues that sexual violation of one's body while unconscious can make the restful anonymity of sleep impossible, leaving only the violent exposure of a two-dimensional life. This consequence is doubled and redoubled for women in visibly racialized and

sexually stereotyped groups—who are, contra media fixation on the tragic cases of middle-class white high schoolers, more likely to be sexually assaulted. Finally, the way the assault is sometimes played back to the victim after the fact through the digital circulation of photos, video, or commentary can draw out the experience in a way that forecloses her future.

Philosophy of time perhaps especially clearly invites a dual genealogical and phenomenological approach: there is objective time as it evolves historically, and there is *temporality*—or time as it is lived. In chapters 3 and 4 I show how these two registers for philosophizing about time come together in the attempt to manage a postdisciplinary, neoliberal experience of social acceleration and temporal fragmentation. Chapter 3 shows a commonality between E. P. Thompson's and Foucault's historical accounts of time discipline—a way of representing, organizing, and experiencing time. Writing in the waning days of Keynesianism, they both describe related historical processes (industrialization and the emergence of the disciplines) that generate a distinctive temporality in which the clock becomes sovereign and time becomes a currency to be invested, spent, wasted, or profitably used. This transition enables not wasting time to become an individual virtue, and leisure to be brought within the purview of time-discipline.

Both Thompson and Foucault wrote just before neoliberalism came into view. I therefore go on to articulate an account of *postdisciplinary time*, which, I argue, has developed along three additional axes. First, it reconflates work and life by introducing the potential for work into every moment—including (but not only) through new communications technologies. Rather than approaching demanding and complex projects sequentially and incrementally—as Foucault describes the process of disciplinary time—postdisciplinary time requires both that the lessons of disciplinary time be learned and that they be fractured and reapplied to the challenge of simultaneously managing multiple complex tasks. "Multitasking" presents well-known challenges of attention, which in turn feed into a temporal experience both ruthlessly linear and circling or repetitious. The conflation of work and life has a particular gendered tenor, and I review some examples from the literature on the "second shift" to show how public/private distinctions are reconfigured for women who do the most housework and childcare. Finally, I suggest that postdisciplinary time generates its own affects: most importantly, it remains radically future-oriented, but in the absence of the step-wise linearity of disciplinary time it generates a generalized anxiety (that form of uncertain worrying about what happens next that can float relatively free of any particular object).

I conclude by suggesting that postdisciplinary time should reconfigure how we think about agency, even further away from an individual account that is premised on a temporally extended self, and toward a much more skeptical analysis that recognizes the value of not-doing.

The phenomenological tradition has typically understood temporality as a central organizing axis of lived experience, and experience itself as always temporal. We construct experience around what has happened, is happening now, and will happen. Our past is known and organized and to some extent interpreted, while the future is unknown and open and full of possibilities. As embodied subjects we always exist spatially and temporally, with an interesting bent toward the future: our eyes look ahead, and we most commonly and easily move forward rather than back. More subtly, some phenomenological thinkers understand the typical lived experience of temporality to require activity—the self-conscious completion of various doings that fill in and provide a framework for grasping the passing of time. Indeed, this bare assumption appears in marked and often unquestioned form in the way postdisciplinary time is articulated. Chapter 4 picks up my account of postdisciplinary time to suggest that it requires an antidote, an inverse, a time out of time rather than an "experience." I call this nonexperience *anaesthetic time*, and I provide an account of it that parallels and complements my account of postdisciplinary time.

Anaesthetic temporality, I argue, is a sensical response to postdisciplinary time, as a way of surviving in an economy of temporality that is relentlessly depleting. Not exactly the same as boredom or daydreaming (both moods that have attracted phenomenological attention [e.g., Svendsen 2005; Geniusas 2015]), anaesthetic time is "addiction lite" (as I show through comparing and contrasting research in phenomenological psychology on serious opiate addictions). It is a diffuse, drifting, unpunctuated, unproductive, and unsynchronized temporality facilitated by everyday drugs such as alcohol, cannabis, or "benzos"—those common sedative prescription drugs that mitigate daily anxiety. Anaesthetic time loves the night and doesn't care about the future. It cannot contain experience that is temporally organized—maybe what happens during anaesthetic time doesn't even count as experience because it is not taken up with anything we might call activity. I show how anaesthetic time is gendered, and how it is sold to white, middle-class women, especially mothers, through cheap mommy wine represented as safely bourgeois. White femininity, on the one hand, is stereotypically read as docile or submissive, while on the other hand educated white women have been (and have been

represented as) upwardly mobile within traditionally male-dominated labor markets. This political tension maps neatly to a drug that paradoxically lets you check out at the end of a hard day. In reality, anaesthetic time may be more imperative for women who are under financial stress, while drug use is disproportionately stigmatized and punished for racialized women. Extending this analysis, I point out that within a biopolitics of life and death, rather than using drugs to speed up or slow down in temporary ways aimed at maximizing productivity, some populations have been deemed postdisciplinary *postsubjects*—not worthy of managed life at all, so much as a drugging-toward-death. Finally, I argue that sleep is the limit case for anaesthetic time. We must sleep to live, but it's hard to grasp whether (or how) sleep is part of "lived experience." It represents an immediate and involuntary suspension of existence and a total respite from postdisciplinary time. This sensory void represents a limit, an encounter (for better or worse) with complete withdrawal from temporal experience, including from the exhaustion of contemporary fantasies of autonomy.

Chapter 5, finally, articulates some of the historical reasons that childbirth is so difficult to describe, and why those descriptions have in any case come to be epistemically discounted, while interspersing this genealogy with phenomenal description of my own experience of giving birth. Narrating a positive experience of pain in childbirth, as I (ambivalently) do is politically fraught: it risks being complicit with histories of Eve's punishment or feminine masochism. As Elaine Scarry (1985) argues, it is also constrained by the notorious impossibility of putting pain into language, and the way that intense pain destroys the possibility of linguistic expression and even of subjectivity itself.

It is this observation that reveals that the experience of the *Leiden* (passion/suffering) of childbirth can also be a limit-experience—an undergoing at the edges of the subject's own intelligibility to itself that breaks down the self in a way that permanently changes it. Freedom, for thinkers from Heidegger to Bataille, can be known only by finding the edges of our human subjectivity. A "limit-experience" describes a unique, possibly entirely unexpected event that puts the self's account of itself into radical question, and in doing so redraws the bounds of its self-imagining. Because a limit-experience is embodied and extralinguistic, there is no method for approaching it, nor any after-the-fact description that fully captures it. One can, however, describe the techniques that happen around limit-experiences, or that generate their conditions of possibility. This is what Foucault imagined when he

alluded to S/M or his Death Valley trip, or some spiritual traditions imagine when they foster epiphanic practices. I am reliving birth post hoc by building a story about it that will necessarily reflect my historical and cultural moment, but there was, before, an inexpressible limit-experience in the moment of which there was no self nor speech. This last essay thus reclaims the limit-experience from its embeddedness in existential heroism for the more mundane and everyday in general, and for childbirth in particular. Through its narration of a birth, it shows the edges of intelligibility and how experience itself sometimes is interrupted, only to be taken up again "after the fact" in a reworking of oneself as a new ethical subject. Again, this theoretical intervention also speaks to a larger public debate about "women's voices" in the delivery of health care that often struggle to capture experiences of obstetric violence as well as the existential aspects of childbirth (Shabot 2016, 2017; Shabot and Korem 2018).

Anaesthetics of Existence, then, is a book about refusal, exclusion, and liminality. It has been written with a keen sense of the dangers of assuming the autonomous individual as the basic unit in political ontology, at the same time as it takes seriously our individuality as part of an irreducibly plural humanity, as Hannah Arendt might say. I want to talk about what different people experience, especially when this experience is put under erasure by a political field and denied to us as political subjects, but I am also wary of the impulse (including the feminist impulse) to treat testimony as unimpeachable, as if it did not have (and gain) meaning by appearing on to a particular political stage, always in a long-running drama. If, as these comments indicate, what counts as experience is always disputed, I also hope that this book will provide an analytic frame as well as some content about those undergoings that fall outside experience or happen at its limits. The case studies in this book track the three "edges" of experience I outline at the end of chapter 1: asking how the interruptions of unconsciousness can be thought for a politics of experience; revealing the normative constitution and exclusions of experience as temporal; and asking after the possibilities of experience at the limit of subjectivity. They follow various arcs, moving from a melancholic essay on sexual violence, through a sardonic reading of privileged forms of "checking out" of temporal discipline, to a joyful discussion of birth; or from the most obvious "outside" of experience—unconsciousness—through increasingly subtle erasures. Thinking about experience as a normative category with a constitutive outside in this way enables experience to be resituated in feminist philosophy as a less commonsense political category,

and a more politically useful one. Rather oddly for a philosopher, perhaps, I tend to be better at showing than telling, so there is a lot more to say about the theoretical method I'm developing here than I do say (mostly in chapter 1). That will have to wait for another time. I have tried to keep this book short, pithy, and parsimoniously referenced, in the hope that the situations of depletion it describes might not be exacerbated by reading it.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Thanks to Gayle Salamon for reminding me of Joan Scott's "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity" (2001), the title of which comes from an exam script that tried to render in writing a nonnative English-speaking graduate student's interpretation of an unfamiliar term ("fin de siècle") he had heard in a lecture.

2 Buck-Morss is using the term "shock" in its psychological context, rather than a medical one. That is, she appears to mean by "shock" the hyperstimulation of the sensory world as it overwhelmingly imposes itself on the human organism, rather than an organic condition in which blood flow to crucial organs is dangerously reduced.

3 These and related objections that Foucault recommends a kind of "dandyism" or is capitulating to a narcissistic "Californian cult of the self" have a long history. For Foucault's own comments on this risk in his work, see Foucault (1997a, 271) and Foucault (2005, 12–13). For the criticisms, see, e.g., Hadot 1992; Thacker 1993; Wolin 1994. For more recent sympathetic readings of Foucault against this charge, see Heyes 2007, ch. 5; O'Leary 2002; D. Smith 2015; Vintges 2001.

4 Foucault himself was ambivalent about the relationship between his own experience and his work: while he said that all his work was inspired by personal experience (Foucault [1978] 2000b, 244), he also evaded discussion of his personal life on the grounds that it would appear prescriptive and reinstall the author-function of which he had been so philosophically and politically critical

(see Foucault [1983] 1997d, 154). This ambivalence has been fueled by a secondary literature of philosophical biography: see especially James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993), which agonizes over the relation between Foucault's sexuality and his philosophy and has in turn provoked charges of sensationalism and homophobia (see, e.g., Halperin 1995, 143–52).

5 "Slow Death," the article from which this quote is taken, has been very controversial (especially among scholars of fatness) for its association of obesity with certain patterns of behavior and in turn with certain political contexts (e.g., Crawford 2017; Kirkland 2011). I concur with much of this critique, and it was palpable when I heard Berlant present an early version of the essay. Nonetheless, the basic argument of the piece, on my reading, concerns how certain kinds of everyday, banal, or ostensibly extrapolitical activities are tacitly used to manage the demands of political life. This important argument should never have been yoked to claims about body size.

6 Quote is from Jones (2005, 198). The same point is paraphrased in *Skintight* (Jones 2008, 132).

7 ORLAN always capitalizes her own name—a practice I follow except when quoting.

8 Rachel Hurst and Luna Dolezal (2018), for example, contrast ORLAN's broadsides against medical orthodoxy and her willingness to live in the space between the "before" and the surgical "after" with the ambivalently conformist moments in performance artist(s) Breyer P-Orridge's *Pandrogyny* project.

9 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for clarification here, and for putting this point in this way.

10 On Foucault's intellectual relationship to Sartre, see Flynn 2004a and Flynn 2000b. In an interview with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Foucault says that while "Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something that is given to us," he nonetheless returns to the "moral notion of authenticity" and "the idea that we have to be ourselves—to be truly our true self." It's a confusing aside that doesn't especially capture Sartre's views, nor does it readily contrast with Foucault's description of his own project as creating ourselves as a work of art (Foucault [1983] 1997a, 262). On Foucault and Fanon, see Taylor 2010; on Foucault and Beauvoir, see Vintges 2001; on Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, see Sabot 2013.

11 These are the authors who most influenced me in writing this book, but the field of phenomenologists writing with a political cast about embodied life is far larger. See also, for example, Fielding and Olkowski 2017; Fisher and Embree 2000; Lee 2014; Neimanis 2017; Ortega 2016; Rodemeyer 2017, 2018; Schües, Olkowski, and Fielding 2011; Shabot and Landry 2018; Käll and Zeiler 2014; Weiss 1999, 2008.

12 Again, I'm grateful to a careful reviewer who helped me clarify this distinction.

13 Here and later in the book I sometimes refer to the victims of sexual violence while unconscious as "women." In researching chapter 2, I reviewed a large corpus of legal cases, news media stories, rape memoir, legal and social history, and psychological literature, and as I presented the work publicly and discussed it with students and colleagues, I was told plenty more personal anecdotes about sexual vio-

lation. Of this body of examples, just one of these latter anecdotes involved a male victim—a student who said that he had once woken during a train journey undertaken as a solo teen to find an older man sitting next to him and attempting to fondle his genitals. All of the other cases involve victims who identify themselves or are identified as girls or women, and in 100 percent of the cases the perpetrator is identified as a man (although as I note in my discussion of the Steubenville case in particular, girls and women are often complicit with sexual violence against unconscious victims, or subsequently participate in covering it up). My analysis addresses discourses of racialized femininity in ways that make some sense of this gendered phenomenon, but it is not my intention to deny the significance of sexual violence against male or genderqueer victims in the contexts I describe.

ONE Foucault's Limits

1 In his lecture course, Foucault footnotes the contemporary case report on which he bases his account as "H. Bonnet et J. Bulard, *Rapport médico-légal sur l'état mental de Charles-Joseph Jouy, inculpé d'attentats aux moeurs*, 4 janvier 1868" [Medical-legal report on the mental state of Charles-Joseph Jouy, accused of offenses against public decency, January 4, 1868] (Foucault [1999] 2003, 319). Bonnet and Bulard were head doctors at the asylum at Maréville where Jouy was detained. This report is reproduced in French with the author's English translation as two appendices in Taylor 2018.

2 Linda Alcoff's essay on this case, discussed in this chapter, is titled "Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia" (1996). Although Alcoff never directly says that Jouy is a (proto)pedophile, this is the implication of her essays on the case from 1996 and 2000. For a critique of the description "pedophile" that is both historical and conceptual, see Tremain 2017, 146–49.

3 A later essay titled "Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience" (Alcoff 2000) includes much of the same material as the paper from 1996, with slightly more elaboration of Alcoff's phenomenological perspective. In what follows, I quote from both essays to represent Alcoff's early position.

4 The feminist critique of the Jouy case that Alcoff mobilizes is part of a larger intellectual context in which Foucault's remarks on sexual freedom, sexual violence, and (to a lesser extent) gender politics have been both taken to task and recuperated. In an article written in 1978, Monique Plaza notoriously challenged his remark in 1977 that rape is only a crime of violence rather than a distinctive sexual harm (Plaza 1978, 97), and Foucault's defense of decriminalizing all consensual sex, including between adults and youth, in a radio interview from 1978 features in feminist charges that he trivializes child sexual abuse (including in Alcoff 1996, 101–6). Foucault was not unsympathetic to feminist and lesbian politics, however, and never said that rape should be unpunished or that sexual violence was politically unimportant, situating his comments instead in the