



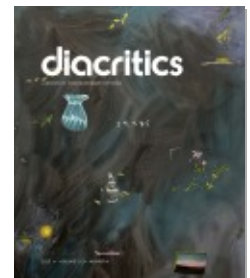
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FUNGORUM MORE: THE CONCEPT OF INTERDEPENDENCE FROM HOBBS TO BUTLER

FEDERICO ZAPPINO AND BRUNELLA CASALINI

Abstract: The Hobbesian state of nature revolves around the metaphor of men having grown mushroom-like, *fungorum more*. This metaphor obscures the generative power of the mother and thus the human condition of dependence. Confronting this phantasmatic imaginary and identifying an alternative to it is one central goal in contemporary feminist thought, as exemplified in particular by Judith Butler's political philosophy. Contemporary mycological studies of the real life of fungi and their ability to construct a true "wood-wide web" help facilitate a different imaginary, one which is centered on the question of interdependency among humans, and between humans and non-humans. This essay further questions the possibilities and limits of a political thought that turns the biological fact of interdependency into a value.

>> MUSHROOM-LIKE: THOMAS HOBBS'S METAPHOR OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

There is one metaphor that has notably flourished in modern political philosophy: Thomas Hobbes's argument in *De Cive* (1642) which sees "men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other" (*homines tanquam si essent iamiam subito e terra fungorum more exorti et adulti, sine omni unius ad alterum obligatione*).¹ The meaning of this metaphor, if not its precise political purpose, is to stand in sharp contrast to premodern political thought. It serves to establish, by means of a figure of speech, that all men are equal by nature and that, in a civil state, no other pre-political forms of relationship or membership, or those relating to the state of nature, can ground or justify obligations or social hierarchies other than those in which the individual himself consciously and voluntarily commits himself through the social contract. It is even less possible to justify the domination of one individual over another.

Indeed, the chapter of *De Cive* in which Hobbes resorts to the mushroom metaphor is devoted to specifying the only "three ways . . . whereby one can have a dominion over the person of another"² (voluntary servitude, defeat in war, and authority over children), and none of these, according to Hobbes, can be grounded or justified in pre-political relations or constraints. In his discussion, Hobbes even goes so far as to denounce what might on the surface appear to be the most natural right of the father over the children as arbitrary, simply because he has created it through a pre-political (or, in Hobbes's words, "natural") relationship: as such, the sexual relationship that brings forth paternity would, for Hobbes, imply no power, no rights, and no duties. Instead, Hobbes writes,

those that have hitherto endeavoured to prove the dominion of a parent over his children, have brought no other argument than that of generation, as if it were of itself evident, that what is begotten by me is mine; just as if a man should think, that because there is a triangle, it appears presently without any further discourse, that its angles are equal to two rights.³

Hobbes's argument for the non-existence of natural paternal dominion, and therefore the arbitrariness of any authority based on it, must have seemed decidedly subversive to the seventeenth century, when Robert Filmer, the author of *Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings* (published posthumously in 1680), accused Hobbes of heresy and blasphemy.

As is well known, Filmer establishes and defends the continuity between the natural right of the father over his children and the possession of sovereign power in order to assert that the power of kings is natural, and that it is legitimate precisely because it is natural. In fact, according to Filmer, it derives from nothing less than the divine creation of Adam. All of humanity, according to Filmer, comes from the creation of a God who first created Adam and only later, from one of Adam's ribs, created the woman who would be assigned the burden of giving birth to future generations. Consequently, it is to Adam that God confers the ownership and legitimacy of dominion over the woman and the offspring, as well as over every other living and non-living creature: over animals and plants, over water, stones, and Earth as a whole. Adam's authority, legitimated by

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divine creation, constitutes absolute power, that is, the power of life and death over his own descendants and over every other creature—and it is from this absolute power that the authority of all kings derives. Filmer turns the Bible's creation story into the source which establishes absolute monarchy as natural⁴ and democracy as unnatural.⁵

Filmer's critique of Hobbes is a conservative critique,⁶ a fragment of premodern thought destined to fall out of favor, but not disappear altogether in a modern age characterized, at least in Europe, by the progressive collapse of absolute monarchies and, where they did survive, their gradual transformation into constitutional monarchies, if not outright republics. It is worth noting, however, that Filmer's critique of Hobbes is not limited to challenging Hobbes's claim of the illegitimacy of the paternal natural law that emerges from the pages of *De Cive* and, a few years later, from his even more influential work on modern political thought, *Leviathan* (1651). Curiously, Filmer's critique challenges the very Hobbesian metaphor of individuals sprouting autonomously from the earth, *fungorum more*.

In a 1652 text, *Observations Concerning the Originall of Government Upon Mr. Hobbs Leviathan*,⁷ Filmer fails to understand how one can even remotely think that human beings live “without any dependancy one of another, or as mushrooms (*fungorum more*).”⁸ According to Filmer, the fact of dependence—or, more precisely, interdependence—is the natural human condition. The problem, however, is that, in light of the biblical scene described above, Filmer interprets this fact as the natural basis for the absolute power firstly of the father over the family, and of kings over their subjects. According to Filmer, man owes his existence to divine creation; thus, far from being a free and autonomous individual, he is entirely dependent on the will of God, to whom he is originally subject. Secondly, since God has given man absolute dominion over woman, and since woman is by nature destined to give birth and produce children, the former is dependent on the latter in order to have children, over whom he can exercise legitimate authority and then pass it on to them, and the latter is dependent on the former because she is by nature inferior and therefore incapable of providing for her own survival. Thirdly, man is dependent on nature for his own material survival, which is why he can exercise his unchallenged dominion over animals, plants, and the Earth as such, in all its living and non-living dimensions. Thus, while Filmer describes the human condition in a way that emphasizes the fact of interdependence, this fact is at the same time interpreted in light of a value system that underlies a dense web of relations of inequality, subordination, inferiority, and naturalized forms of domination.

Hobbes erases the human condition of dependence in order to present the individual as autonomous, *fungorum more*, free from any form of domination other than the power to which he voluntarily subjects himself through the social contract, on equal footing with everyone else. Filmer, on the other hand, uses precisely the argument of the interdependence of the human condition to justify as natural the inequality and domination of man over woman, of father over children, of absolute rulers over subjects; in retrospect, he thus joins the group of authors whom, at the time Hobbes elaborated his reflections, he criticizes for not being able to find any other justification for paternal dominion over children other than the supposed proof “that what is begotten by me is mine.”⁹ But this

is not to say that Hobbes does not argue for the necessity of paternal authority, or that he does not—as Filmer does—establish a close connection between paternal and sovereign power. Rather, he seeks to give this argument a more modern guise than the one Filmer holds. In his own words, Hobbes does indeed want to find “another justification,” but for the same problem: the fact that the father has no natural right over his children does not mean that it is not necessary to “inquire into the original of paternal government.”¹⁰ And the argument by which the philosopher arrives at the political grounding of paternal government certainly deserves attention.

>> REPLACING DEPENDENCE DOMINION WITH INDEPENDENCE LAW

According to Hobbes, the state of nature is based on a principle of maximum arbitrariness. “There,” writes Hobbes, “the conqueror is lord of the conquered. By the right therefore the nature, the dominion over the infant first belongs to him who first hath him in his powers. But it is manifest that he who is newly born, is in the mother’s power before any others.”¹¹

Coming into the world in a relationship of dependence on other bodies is interpreted by Hobbes as a situation of violence, for which he resorts to metaphors of war. Moreover, in the pages that Hobbes, surprisingly, devotes to the power of the mother over her children, it becomes clear that for him this is nothing but a tyrannical power. In the state of nature, Hobbes declares, the mother can even choose “rightly,” “at her own will,” whether to “either breed him up, or adventure him to fortune.”¹² And if she chooses “to breed him,” “she is supposed to bring him up to this condition, that being grown to full age he become not her enemy; which is that he obey her,” on a par with a slave, “because the state of nature is the state of war.”¹³

For since by natural necessity we all desire that which appears good unto us, it cannot be understood that any man hath on such terms afforded life to another, that he might both get strength by his years, and at once become an enemy. But each man is an enemy to that other whom he neither obeys nor commands. And thus, in the state of nature, every woman that bears children, becomes both a mother and a lord.¹⁴

The strength of the dominion of the mother-lord, who chooses at her own will, without any constraint or coercion, to abandon or to keep her children, and who, if she keeps them, educates them to be her slaves, would be such as to overthrow even the most common notions of the supposed physical superiority that man derives “by reason of the pre-eminence of sex.”¹⁵ And this, according to Hobbes, is for two reasons: one rational, the other historical. From a rational point of view, it is already obvious that the difference in physical strength between men and women “is not so great that the man could get the dominion over the woman without war.”¹⁶ From a historical point of view, however, Hobbes observes that “women, namely Amazons, have in former times waged war against their adversaries, and disposed of their children at their own wills.”¹⁷ “And at this day,” the philosopher warns,

in divers places, women are invested with the principal authority. Neither do their husbands dispose of their children, but themselves; which in truth they do by the right of nature; forasmuch as they who have the supreme power, are not tied at all (as hath been shewed) to the civil laws.¹⁸

And he goes on to illustrate the worst of the catastrophes:

In the state of nature it cannot be known who is the father, but by testimony of the mother; the child therefore is his whose the mother will have it, and therefore hers. Wherefore original dominion over children belongs to the mother: and among men no less than other creatures, the birth follows the belly.¹⁹

The idea that human beings were never created in the image and likeness of a supernatural deity, as Filmer would go on to argue, but came from a maternal belly, “no less than other creatures,” represents a major paradigm shift in seventeenth-century thought. Hobbes is also often accused of atheism and publicly defends Galileo Galilei in *De motu, loco et tempore* (1642–43) and *De corpore* (1655). However, the theme of maternal dominion in Hobbes remains to be studied in more detail elsewhere: not only has it been seriously underestimated in the field of philosophical-political studies, but where it has been explored, it seems to be subject to contradictory interpretations. There are those who find it progressive and radical for a seventeenth-century philosopher to assert that parental power is primarily maternal.²⁰ There are also those who confuse this power with political authority.²¹ But the power of the mother in the Hobbesian state of nature is not a power understood as authority, and therefore legal or legitimate, but rather a form of *de facto* power, a power understood as “dominion,” arbitrary insofar as it is natural and therefore must be contained, controlled and, above all, subverted.

At the same time, it is important to point out that the critique of maternal dominion does not lead Hobbes to elaborate a critique of the family as a source of illegitimate authority, as Friedrich Engels will do much later in a profoundly altered European social and political landscape. Nor does the metaphor of the individual *fungorum more* support Hobbes’s explanation of the illegitimate nature of any obligation to the mother by a child who could not consent to be born in the first place. Moreover, despite the importance that Hobbes attaches to the various forms of social consent and agreement—in his view, the only thing capable of creating obligations—he never even mentions the hypothesis that the mother’s decision to raise or abandon her children may well depend on the presence or absence of consent at the time of intercourse.²²

By contrast, the portrayal of the mother’s dominance over her children in the natural state as an abusive relationship serves to ground the civil state by negating the fact of dependence, which must be erased in order to construct what Martha A. Fineman eloquently calls the “myth of autonomy.”²³ In this way, Hobbes transforms a sexual difference into a disproportionate, anti-historical inequality of power between the sexes to the detriment of men, constructing the idea of a natural, arbitrary, and absolute power of the mother that must first be limited by the terms of the marriage contract, through which

the father acquires ownership of the child, and then be subdued by the social contract, which aims to establish a state organized around the principle of male authority—and thus, not unlike for Filmer, precisely around patriarchy, that is, the “paternal government.” In fact, it can be deduced from the Hobbesian dictate that, just as “matrimony”²⁴ (the social contract between man and woman) is the way to subjugate the mother, to limit and control her unrestrained domination stemming from the natural generative force, the social contract is the only way to put an end to the state of nature and to inaugurate a state organized around the principle of civil power, based on “civil liberty”²⁵ rather than on natural and, as such, arbitrary dominion.²⁶

In the footnotes to the 1948 Italian edition of *De Cive*, even the philosopher Norberto Bobbio comments on these passages, observing that Hobbes seems to be “led and almost overwhelmed by the force of reason, rather than guided by historical observation.”²⁷ According to Bobbio, the hypothesis of the preexistence of a matriarchal, as opposed to a patriarchal, order, which Hobbes apparently supports, was already controversial in the seventeenth century. However, it is possible that Hobbes was not interested in demonstrating the historical existence of matriarchy; far more important here seems to be the argumentative strategy of making matriarchy and the state of nature, and thus “woman” or “the feminine,” closely align with “nature” itself. The *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the perpetual war of all against all that characterizes the pessimistic Hobbesian conception of the state of nature, is thus identified precisely with the arbitrary exercise of maternal power, which stems from gestating and birthing children and the unrestrained freedom to keep or abandon them, the fact that the mother’s education only serves to enslave the child, or the struggle between men to establish paternity of their children and thus succession. In Hobbes’s rhetorical construction, all of this seems to justify why each man desires what the other has and tries to appropriate it, to the point where escape from the state of nature and escape from maternal dominion become curiously one and the same.²⁸

In some passages of *De Cive*, Hobbes refers to this state of nature, dominated by maternal rule, as “anarchy,”²⁹ thus inaugurating the great modern misunderstanding according to which anarchy does not already mean “absence of government” (as in the Greek *anarchos*, “ungoverned,” “not subdued or subjected”), but “chaos,” “disorder,” and “violence” (the effects of this misunderstanding persist to this day).³⁰ Moreover, Hobbes contrasts *bellum omnium contra omnes* precisely with government, more specifically a government of the father, as a necessary condition for social peace. In this way, his metaphor of “men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other” becomes understandable and, at this point, necessary.³¹

>> TRANSGURING DEPENDENCY INTO INEQUALITY

In *De Cive*, the modern social order is made up of individuals who bind themselves to one another in a social contract, forgetting that they have come into the world through a period of gestation in another body and emerged into a network of relationships, in a

state of vulnerability, exposed to the touch and gaze of others who are already adults; in other words, they are in a situation of dependence that remains unconceivable in modern thought, outside of the inequality, subordination, and domination that Filmer justifies and naturalizes, and Hobbes has to eliminate from his theoretical elaboration of the modern state and the modern individual.

Hobbes knows that man does not come into the world like a mushroom, but from the “birth that follows the belly.”³² The force of this statement is such that he is accused of atheism and blasphemy by Archbishop John Bramhall,³³ for it denies the idea of divine creation and asserts that superstition cannot constitute the foundational narrative of any modernity. At the same time, Hobbes cannot conceive of the natural equality of all individuals and the freedom of the modern individual, except by denying the fact of their constitutive dependence. Due to his inability to give dependence a value that is com-

patible with equality and freedom, Hobbes does away with the condition of dependence as an aberrant dimension of man, an arbitrary domain to be relegated to the state of nature, or one of which the state of nature itself is but an aberrant metaphor.

It is important to point out that in modernity, the fact of dependence is increasingly erased, much more generally, as a precondition for the affirmation of individual equality and freedom. And, in fact, this erasure establishes, through negation, the concept of “nature,” which becomes the constitutive outside to “society.” In part, this is done by transforming the relational concept of interdependence into the unidirectional concept of depen-

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dence, which is then externalized and projected onto certain social groups or populations to establish them as abject, inferior, and needy. This is precisely the result of the supposedly exclusive and above all insurmountable condition of dependence, to the point that the social contract of modernity is underpinned not only by a “sexual contract,” as Carole Pateman famously noted in 1988³⁴ (or a “heterosexual contract,” as Monique Wittig pointed out³⁵), but also by a “racial”³⁶ and an “ableist contract.”³⁷ Consider, as evidence, the long history of the construction of colonized peoples as dependent on the colonizers,³⁸ as well as the exclusion of disabled people from the public sphere as dependent on the more or less constant care of people who themselves belong to excluded social groups, primarily women and racialized people. They are connoted by forms of “derivative” or “secondary” dependence³⁹ and thus doubly excluded.⁴⁰

In addition, the genealogical analysis proposed by Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon suggests that one of the first icons of dependency in the modern period is the figure

of the “pauper,” the person who “lives not on a wage, but on poor relief.”⁴¹ In the pre-modern and feudal period, dependence was considered the norm, and independence was, in contrast, understood as a source of social disorder, insofar as it was associated with uprootedness and vagrancy. In the modern period, the concern for maintaining social and political order changed to dependence through a real shift of the “semantic geography.”⁴² The common interpretation of the fact of dependency in the light of a new moral and psychological value system thus creates the “stigma of dependency,” which is connoted in negative, moral, and above all pathological terms:

In the strenuous new culture of emergent capitalism, the figure of the pauper was like a bad double of the upstanding workingman, threatening the latter should he lag. The image of the pauper was elaborated largely in an emerging new register of dependency discourse: the moral/psychological register. Paupers were not only simply poor but rather degraded, their character corrupted and their will sapped through reliance on charity. . . . The pauper’s dependency was figured as unlike the serf’s in that it was unilateral, not reciprocal. To be a pauper was not to be subordinate within a system of productive labor; it was to be outside such a system altogether.⁴³

Externalizing the fact of dependence to a few feminized and racialized social groups, and constructing it as a reference to an inferior, even pathological and stigmatized condition, allows modernity to be constituted around a hierarchical rationality in which “human” and “rational” (limited to the male, white, European version of humanity) coincide, and are ontologically and axiologically separated from both nature and dependency. The social order envisioned by Hobbes, and more broadly by modern political thought, must therefore be predicated on the existence of an other (colonized peoples, the disabled, the poor, children, women) and an elsewhere (the peripheries of the empire, private space, the home) of dependency. What is more, in the words of Val Plumwood, Western modernity produces relations of dependence that it itself denies through the mechanisms of classical logic centered on negation. In fact, dualism (p/non-p) establishes not only a difference or a dichotomy, but a real hierarchy of values: “p” determines the existence of everything that goes beyond it and is called “non-p.”⁴⁴

One of the dualisms that, even in the modern age, constitutes the human as rational and independent, freeing him from the burden of the so-called “3D jobs” (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning labor)⁴⁵ and externalizing it onto women and colonized peoples, is undoubtedly the hierarchical distinction between the public and the private.⁴⁶ Exempting white men from the full range of tedious and monotonous daily activities associated with the care for children, the elderly, and the disabled, as well as the reproduction of life itself and its needs, frees up their time and energy for other activities and, at the same time, encourages their misrecognition of the work on which their daily existence depends. In other words, the tradition of separate spheres allows white men to feel no responsibility for the burden of work needed to care for and value social reproduction itself.⁴⁷ It is this “irresponsibility of the privileged”⁴⁸ that allows them to continue to imagine themselves as independent and self-sufficient individuals, thus feeding the “myth of autonomy.”⁴⁹

But the public/private dualism is not the only one that erases dependence on the human and externalizes it only onto the other. The modern division between nature and society turns these two spaces into “real abstractions.”⁵⁰ Far from *describing* the world, the hierarchical distinction between nature and society *creates* it. “Nature,” write Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, “is not a thing but a way of organising—and cheapening—life,” in order to insert it “into processes of exchange and profit.”⁵¹ And it is this operation that produces the capitalist mode of production. In turn, the nature/society binary operates in concert with the hierarchical distinction between center and periphery. The center coincides with the space of society. The periphery, on the other hand, coincides with nature, which is to be subdued, domesticated, and made “scalable,”⁵² that is, infinitely reproducible.⁵³

Just as Hobbes had to remove the maternal dominion from the state of nature in order to construct a political theory based on the fiction of individuals *fungorum more* and to root, paradoxically, their equality and independence in this fiction, so modern instrumental reason approaches nature by making a *tabula rasa* of interdependence in order to better dominate it, removing as much unpredictability and contingency as possible. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing explains, the colonial cultivation of sugar cane, for example, was made possible not only by the subjugation of precolonial civilizations and thus slave labor, or by the introduction of a division of labor that made the plantation “the original factory,”⁵⁴ as Patel and Moore write. It was made possible, above all, by the eradication of the local flora to make way for the cultivation of a plant with “few interspecies relations.”⁵⁵ This erasure served to avert and eliminate what Lowenhaupt Tsing calls the “indeterminacy of encounter”⁵⁶ with other species, and made the sugar cane plantation an example for the application of a scalar logic in production. At the same time, the marketing and consumption of sugar by the center of the empire presupposed an additional, no less important element: distance from what was happening on the periphery. As Kate Crawford writes, “ignoring the supply chain is baked into capitalism”—“the left hand cannot know what the right hand is doing, which requires increasingly lavish, baroque, and complex forms of distancing.”⁵⁷

>> JUDITH BUTLER’S THEORY OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Five centuries after the Hobbesian theorization of the state of nature, Judith Butler returns to that very point in order to develop a theory of interdependence that addresses the perverse effects unleashed by modern political thought.⁵⁸

What is interesting about Butler’s proposal is, first of all, that it does not simply contrast Hobbes’s pessimistic view of the human condition of dependence with an optimistic or even irenic one. Quite the contrary, Butler agrees with Hobbes in his conception of primary relationships as “conflictual” and finds no reason to deny “that enmity and hostility are more fundamental than love,”⁵⁹ nor does Butler see reason to rehabilitate the mother as a necessarily loving figure, or one animated only by self-sacrifice. “Even the infant Oedipus,” writes Butler,

was handed over to that shepherd who was supposed to let him die of exposure on the side of the hill. That was a nearly fatal act, since his mother handed him to someone tasked with arranging to let him die. Being handed over against one's will is not always a beautiful scene. The infant is given over by someone to someone else, and the caregiver is conventionally understood as given over to the task of care—given over in a way that may not be experienced as an act of deliberate will or choice. Care is not always consensual, and it does not always take the form of a contract: it can be a way of getting wrecked, time and again, by the demands of a wailing and hungry creature.⁶⁰

However, even assuming that the condition of dependency can certainly give rise to conflictual relations, to forms of “getting wrecked,” or to relations of care that are not always consensual, it is hard to see how this justifies the erasure of dependency itself—and, by extension, interdependency—from the theorization of the modern individual and state. In Butler's analysis, the foundation of the civil state on the “phantasy”⁶¹ of the individual *fungorum more* rather than on dependence led five centuries later to the promulgation of all that Hobbes sought to contain, namely the “war waged by one sovereign individual against another—a war, we might add, of individuals who regarded themselves as sovereign.”⁶²

In *De Cive*, Hobbes claimed that outside the civil state, there would be destruction and anarchy, and that only the state could achieve a world of “reason, peace, security, riches, decency, society, elegance, sciences, and benevolence.”⁶³ Yet, in Butler's reflections, the contemporary world that supposedly represents the full realization of these ideals seems more akin to Hobbes's own description of the state of nature, namely the realm of “war, fear, poverty, slovenliness, solitude, barbarism, ignorance, cruelty.”⁶⁴ How is it possible that a world of sovereign individuals organized into sovereign states, as Hobbes hoped, seems today to be “immersed in sorrow”⁶⁵ and has become the scene of “environmental destruction,”⁶⁶ “collapse,”⁶⁷ “necropolitical violence,”⁶⁸ and “atrocities and senseless death”?⁶⁹ In the face of such egregious failures, is it possible to speculate that the founding assumption of modernity was dangerously misguided?

As noted above, Hobbes erases the fact of dependency in his inability to reconcile it with modern values of equality and individual freedom, and establishes that the only legitimate forms of obligation between individuals are those that arise from the various forms of a social contract. Butler, on the other hand, takes on a far more arduous task than Hobbes. For the feminist philosopher, the values of liberty and equality should be rethought and pursued by deconstructing and demolishing the very individualism that animates them. The individualist paradigm should give way to the recognition, enhancement, and codification of interdependence through globally binding obligations, the nature of which would, moreover, be extra-contractual.⁷⁰ The obligation stemming from interdependence, according to Butler, is indeed global in that it transcends and exceeds the individual and situated forms of the social contract to which individuals consciously commit themselves.

In order to analyze this normative proposition, it is important to recall that for Butler, the representation of the state of nature that emerges from *De Cive* is not merely a

fiction or fantasy, but rather “a phantasmatic scene structured by multiple and occult determinants.”⁷¹ By the adjective “phantasmatic,” Butler means a socially shared fantasy that is not fully conscious, but also does not presuppose a “collective unconscious.”⁷² On the other hand, what the narrative of the state of nature presents as an original state or initial scene is in fact imagined retrospectively by those who have told this narrative over time, and thus constitutes “the result of a sequence that begins in an already-constituted social world.”⁷³ It is precisely for this reason that Butler considers phantasmal formulations of the state of nature to be of primary importance for understanding the structures and dynamics of life, as well as power and violence, in the modern and contemporary age.

What unites the various phantasies of the state of nature, not only in Hobbes’s *De Cive*, but also in later theorizations, such as those of John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is that “in the beginning” there is always a *man*, who is already adult and standing on his own two feet in a state of radical self-sufficiency. In other words, in modern elaborations of the state of nature, “the primary and founding figure of the human is masculine.”⁷⁴ This means that man has always been an individual, and the individual has always been a man. “That,” writes Butler, “comes as no surprise; masculinity is defined by its lack of dependency,”⁷⁵ that is, as fully autonomous or sovereign, while the determination of the feminine occurs in relation to a precise distribution of dependence.⁷⁶ Consequently, the human condition presented as original by the various contractualist philosophies is part of a story that “begins not at the origin, but in the middle of a history that is *not* about to be told.”⁷⁷ If the original, fully autonomous individual is already a man, this means that the narratives of the state of nature do not mention the set of social relations that constituted him as such; first of all, the relations that were designed to socially assign a gender to him in the first place. In the first moment of the story, Butler notes, “that individual has already been cast as a gender, but not by a social assignment; rather, it is because he is an *individual*—and the social form of the individual is masculine in this scene—that he is a man.”⁷⁸ And again: “He is assumed to desire women in the course of things, but even this postulated heterosexuality is free of dependency and rests on a cultivated amnesia regarding its formation. He is understood to encounter others first in a conflictual way.”⁷⁹ Moreover, the state of nature narratives fail to account for the set of nurturing and caring relationships that were necessary for the material constitution of this individual, who is instead presented as having been an adult all along. In a passage that seems to echo the specific Hobbesian conception of the state of nature, Butler writes that “dependency is, as it were, written out of the picture of the original man”:

He is somehow, and from the start, always and already upright, capable, without ever having been supported by others, without having held onto another’s body in order to steady himself, without ever having been fed when he could not feed himself, without ever having been wrapped in a blanket for warmth by someone else. *He sprang, lucky guy, from the imaginations of liberal theorists as a full adult, without relations*, but equipped with anger and desire, sometimes capable of a happiness or self-sufficiency that depended on a natural world pre-emptively void of other people.⁸⁰

In an attempt to understand what version of human and social relations this phantasmagorical scene aims to represent, as well as the forms of concealment necessary for its operation, Butler evokes the possibility that the independence of this already adult man can only come from a previous *repulisti* (erasure), or even from a murder, thus constituting “the prehistory of the so-called state of nature”:

Since the state of nature is supposed to be, in one of its most influential variants, a prehistory of social and economic life, the annihilation of alterity constitutes the prehistory of this prehistory, suggesting that we are not only elaborating a fantasy, but giving a history of that very fantasy—arguably, a murder that leaves no trace.⁸¹

Such a murder seems to concern first and foremost the mother,⁸² just as in Hobbes’s *De Cive*, where the description of maternal power as an arbitrary dominion to be curbed and subverted gives way to the establishment of the civil state based on the law of the father. Butler interprets the various narratives of the state of nature as the Lacanian mirror stage of modern, liberal thought: “The jubilant boy who thinks he stands on his own as he looks in the mirror, and yet, watching him, we know that the mother, or some obscured object-support (*trotte-bébé*), holds him in front of the mirror as he rejoices in his radical self-sufficiency.”⁸³ But “what support,” asks Butler, “what dependency has to be disavowed for the fantasy of self-sufficiency to take hold, for the story to start with a timeless adult masculinity?”⁸⁴ The imaginary of the *fungorum more* individual is fueled by the fantasy that individual lives and bodies can stand on their own feet, ignoring the role of both the supporting infrastructure (including, first of all, that which comes from the natural environment) and other lives and bodies. And it is precisely this fantasy (or this *phantasy*) that produces forms of exclusion, erasure, and hierarchy between worlds and lives; especially, one might add, if the mirror stage never reaches its third stage, in which the child, after confusing its own image with that of a stranger and believing its own reflection to be a distorted image, finally recognizes itself in the mirror.⁸⁵

It should be emphasized, however, that Butler’s challenge to the phantasmatic imaginary of the state of nature does not simply denounce modern political thought’s neglect of caring relationships or the infrastructure of life support and life itself. Rather, such erasure is interpreted as the symptom of a problem that goes much further than merely the devaluation of care. Indeed, the erasure of dependence from the foundational narratives of modernity serves to lay the groundwork for the most unbridled individualism—and it is precisely against the individualist paradigm that Butler hurls a theory of interdependence. It is not a matter of simply adding a little more care, attention, or responsibility to an individualistic system of values

Indeed, the erasure of dependence from the foundational narratives of modernity serves to lay the groundwork for the most unbridled individualism—and it is precisely against the individualist paradigm that Butler hurls a theory of interdependence.

that is designed to remain as it is. On the contrary, the very fact of interdependence should undermine individualistic values, because these values have produced not only neglect, carelessness, and irresponsibility, but more generally the hierarchical distinction between “indispensable lives” and “disposable lives,” between “grievable lives” and “ungrievable lives.”⁸⁶ The further one moves away from the parameters of conformity toward individualism and its values, the more disposable one’s life becomes. It is far from indispensable. “We rarely see,” observes Butler, “public obituaries extolling the person who lost their job or was unable for various reasons to do much of anything at all that could be assessed by neoliberal metrics.”⁸⁷ And when it is a woman who dies, “she is quickly framed by the domestic sphere where her value consists in raising children or looking out for neighbors.”⁸⁸ This is why Butler contrasts the phantasmagoric narrative of male individuals *fungorum more*, already adult and self-sufficient, with “a different story” that begins like this: “No one is born an individual; if someone becomes an individual over time, he or she does not escape the fundamental conditions of dependency in the course of that process.”⁸⁹

That condition cannot be escaped by way of time. We were all, regardless of our political viewpoints in the present, born into a condition of radical dependency. As we reflect back on that condition as adults, perhaps we are slightly insulted or alarmed, or perhaps we dismiss the thought. Perhaps someone with a strong sense of individual self-sufficiency will indeed be offended by the fact that there was a time when one could not feed oneself or could not stand on one’s own. I want to suggest, however, that no one actually stands on one’s own; strictly speaking, no one feeds oneself. . . . All of these basic human capacities are supported in one way or another. No one moves or breathes or finds food who is not supported by a world that provides an environment built for passage, that prepares and distributes food so that it makes its way to our mouths, a world that sustains the environment that makes possible air of a quality that we can breathe.⁹⁰

Far from falling into an essentialist or heteronormative reductionism, Butler defines dependence in terms of an ontology.⁹¹ This means that what essentially characterizes life (not just human life) is precisely dependence, which, in Butler’s proposal, is not reduced to dependence on caring relationships, but is defined in a decidedly broader sense: dependence is a relationship with other bodies, with social infrastructures and with the environment, and if this relationship is ontological, it is because without it, there would be no possibility of life.⁹² As such, the ontological relation of dependence is characterized by insuperability: that is, it does not turn into independence over time. Indeed, in Butlerian ontology, the idea of a life that is not dependent on other bodies, structures, institutions, or forms of social organization is a life that cannot really exist. The ontological condition of dependence may be extreme (for example, in the case of childhood, illness, disability, or old age) or it may fade away,⁹³ but in any case it remains a “pandemic” fact,⁹⁴ that is, it tends to characterize everyone’s life, and life as such, wherever it is found. By neglecting the fact of interdependence, governments “know that they are in the midst of a globally destructive activity, and that too seems to them like a right, a power, a prerogative that should be compromised by nothing and no one.”⁹⁵

Understood as a pandemic fact, interdependence leads Butler to elaborate a theory with a universalist drive aimed at transforming ontology into politics. While implying differentials of independence and dependence—as well as a differential distribution of dependence itself—interdependence constitutes a common condition and thus presupposes “global obligations that serve all inhabitants of the world, human and animal.”⁹⁶ The idea of global obligations, Butler explains, “is about as far from the neo-liberal consecration of individualism as it could be, and yet it is regularly dismissed as naive.”⁹⁷ But

only by avowing this interdependency does it become possible to formulate global obligations, including obligations toward migrants; toward the Roma; those who live in precarious situations, or indeed, those who are subject to occupation and war; those who are subject to institutional and systemic racism; the indigenous whose murder and disappearance never surface fully in the public record; women who are subject to domestic and public violence, and harassment in the workplace; and gender nonconforming people who are exposed to bodily harm, including incarceration and death.⁹⁸

Global obligations, which are shared and binding throughout the world, would have to go beyond the obligations that nation states already have to each other. Such obligations would have to be post-national in character, i.e., transcend all borders or frontiers. They would lay the foundation for “post-sovereign understandings of cohabitation.”⁹⁹

For Butler, the possibility of thinking about—long before implementing—obligations of a global nature, one which is aimed at accepting the fact of interdependence, presupposes a rethinking of the value of equality for reasons opposite to those assumed by Hobbes. Hobbes holds that all individuals are equal by nature; such a conception of equality, however, obliterates the set of relations through which equality itself becomes conceivable, since it merely takes the individual as the unit of analysis from which to establish a universalization. And, paradoxically, if natural equality is understood narrowly as a right in the head of an individual, albeit artificially constructed, it is divorced from the fact of interdependence. On the contrary, reformulating equality from interdependence means that it can only emerge in the relations between lives (human and non-human), in the name of these relations and bonds, and not already as a peculiarity of an individual subject. Equality, on the other hand, is by its very nature a relational value: this means that it must first of all inform relations, because these are the only situations in which it makes sense to speak of equality, and the only ones capable of guaranteeing it and making it cogent.

Thus reformulated, equality becomes the value on the basis of which a distinction is made between the different forms the ontological fact of dependence can take, even before interdependence. Interdependence, moreover, is not in itself a value, nor necessarily a positive value, “a good thing, a sign of connectedness, an ethical norm to be posited over and against destruction.”¹⁰⁰ This is, first of all, because dependence itself is a “vexed and ambivalent” fact,¹⁰¹ and it “can be miserable; it can take form as exploitation, imprisonment, and legal dispossession; it can be the scene of domination or unwanted

self-loss.”¹⁰² For example, when one’s survival depends on a humiliating job; when the air on which one’s life depends is polluted by the emissions of an industrial plant on which the economic survival of a large number of other people depends; when sentimental dependence on a particular person can become a threat to one’s life;¹⁰³ or when dependence on a particular drug is exploited or induced by the pharma industry.¹⁰⁴ In all these forms, it is precisely equality that is lost. That is why the goal cannot be exhausted in the mere affirmation of the fact of interdependence, but must turn to the edification of the best form of interdependence, the one capable of embodying the value of radical equality.¹⁰⁵ Precisely because everyone is equally dependent on someone or something else, and clearly *vice versa*, the interpretation of this fact must be guided by the value of equality, and this value in turn must inspire global commitments aimed at achieving an egalitarian approach to the value of life.

To do this, writes Butler,

we hardly need a new formulation of the state of nature, but we *do* need an altered state of perception, another imaginary, that would disorient us from the givens of the political present: . . . We do not have to love one another to be obligated to build a world in which all lives are sustainable. The right to persist can only be understood as a social right, as the subjective instance of a social and global obligation we bear toward one another.¹⁰⁶

The point is that the totality of commitments that make up a value and, more importantly, a normative system, the fact of interdependence, cannot be delimited by consensus: “The obligations of cohabitation are not always born from love or even choice; the relations between us, this sociality goes beyond kinship, community, nation, and territory. It takes us, rather, in the direction of the world.”¹⁰⁷

>> FROM THE FACT TO THE (PROBLEM OF THE) VALUE OF INTERDEPENDENCE

For Butler, interdependence implies the deposition of the sovereign subject from the throne of the anthropocentric (and androcentric) project of modernity. Interdependence, in all its ambiguity, necessity, and contingency, this *de facto* power that imposes extra-contractual constraints, is but the maternal dominion metaphorically represented in *De Cive* and then removed to make way for the construction of the individual *fungorum more*. At the same time, such a purpose would be incomplete without a reconceptualization of the self and the body, that is, of what actually constitutes or delimits the individual. And it is clear at this point that such a reconceptualization undermines the idea of a selfhood “as a fraught field of social relationality”¹⁰⁸—a relationality defined not only by love but also by suffering and conflict—and of a body that is not, and never has been, a self-sufficient entity, but is ontologically relational.

In a passage from *The Force of Nonviolence*, in which Butler describes their peculiar theory of equality, the philosopher takes as their point of departure a conception of the body understood as a threshold:

to refer to equality in such a context is not to speak of an equality among all persons, if by “person” we mean a singular and distinct individual, gaining its definition by its boundary. Singularity and distinctness exist, as do boundaries, but they constitute differentiating characteristics of beings who are defined and sustained by virtue of their interrelationality. Without that overarching sense of the interrelational, we take the bodily boundary to be the end rather than the threshold of the person, the site of passage and porosity, the evidence of an openness to alterity that is definitional of the body itself. The threshold of the body, the body as threshold, undermines the idea of the body as a unit.¹⁰⁹

Strikingly, the ontology of the body understood as a threshold defines an interdependence or interrelatedness that is not limited to human or social relations alone, but pushes toward a relationship of true symbiosis between the body and the world.

The spatial limits of the perceived body belie its proper reach, for it is always both here and there, rooted and transported. The world that is usually assumed to be over there, or around me, is in fact already in and on me, and there is no easy way around that form of adherence, the way the world sticks to me and saturates me.¹¹⁰

Understood in this way, the body challenges the idea of an individual organism defined by certain boundaries.¹¹¹

In this regard, it is important to note that in a 2012 study, “A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals,” Scott Gilbert, Jan Sapp, and Alfred Tauber demolished the idea of the individual from a biological perspective. Even in the natural sciences, the hegemony of the term “individual” as referring to individual living organisms derives precisely from that of the individual *fungorum more* of modern political thought, the subject-citizen, holder of individual rights and duties.¹¹² Today, however, we can say that from the point of view of genetics, evolution, anatomy, physiology, and, above all, immunology,¹¹³ the human being, like any other living organism, is not and has never been an individual. In the light of the studies carried out by Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, the human being would be more like a lichen, literally a fungus, living in symbiosis with algae. Humans, like the lichen, are organisms whose lives depend directly on their environment and on other bodies, especially those living in them or with whom they are in symbiosis.¹¹⁴ As Thomas Pradeu shows, from an immunological point of view, exogeneity is an integral part of every organism: the lives of animals, including humans, depend on the intake, absorption, and respiration of elements from the environment.¹¹⁵ “The aim of a co-constructionist theory,” explains Butler, “is less to distinguish what belongs to the self and what does not than to understand how the external world is part of the body—and has to be.”¹¹⁶ The world “is not just out there as the backdrop for human action or the field for human intervention; on a daily basis, bits of the world are incorporated into the body itself, suggesting a vital connection between body and world.”¹¹⁷ A connection that can, of course, have devastating effects when what the body incorporates into itself (as contemporary exposomics shows) is pollution or toxicity,¹¹⁸ but the solution is not to deny the body’s constitutive interdependence with the world, but to make that very interdependence livable—and equally so.

Five centuries after the publication of *De Cive*, biological, immunological, and mycological studies establish interdependence as a fact in a very narrow sense, and thus allow us to reflect in new and unforeseen ways on the very metaphor that the progenitor of modern political thought developed for a very different purpose.¹¹⁹ The human and the fungal conditions turned out, in fact, to be much closer to each other than critiques of Hobbes's metaphor have so far tried to reveal. And this does not only apply to conservative critics à la Filmer: in 1987, for example, Seyla Benhabib reinforced Carol Gilligan's well-known arguments against Hobbes's metaphor, and accused it of fueling the most unbridled atomistic individualism.¹²⁰ In a 2005 essay, Eva Feder Kittay, Bruce Jennings, and Angela Wasunna took it as the starting point for a reflection aimed at establishing an irreducible distance between the mushroom state of independence and the state of interdependence pertaining to the human condition.¹²¹

The point, however, is that the motif of proximity between the human and the fungal condition is radically at odds with what Hobbes had in mind. Whereas the philosopher thought he was using the fact of fungal independence as a metaphor aimed at obliterating the fact of human interdependence, the fungal world provides one of the most incredible confirmations of not only intraspecies, but also interspecies interdependence. What is commonly called a "fungus" is in fact only the most visible part (also called the carpophores or sporophores) of an organism whose vegetative apparatus consists of the mycelium, which is itself formed by a network of filaments called the hyphae. This creates a veritable symbiotic network in the undergrowth which Merlin Sheldrake eloquently calls the "wood-wide web";¹²² a network of the undergrowth that is formed by the interdependence of fungi, plants, and other living organisms. Similarly, what Hobbes calls the "individual" is only the most visible part of a web of interdependence with other human and non-human bodies and groups, and with the living and non-living dimensions of the Earth.

Echoing Donna J. Haraway's well-known phrase, Lowenhaupt Tsing explains that "fungi are our companion species":

the concept of "symbiosis"—mutually beneficial interspecies living—was invented for the lichen, an association of a fungus and an alga or cyanobacteria. The non-fungal partner fuels lichen metabolism through photosynthesis; the fungus makes it possible for the lichen to live in extreme conditions. Repeated cycles of wetting and drying do not faze the lichen, because the fungal partner can re-organize its membranes as soon as water appears, allowing photosynthesis to resume. Lichen may be found in frozen tundra and on parched desert rocks. For mushroom lovers, the most intriguing interspecies companionship is that between fungi and plant roots. In mycorrhiza, the threads of the fungal body sheathe or enter the roots of plants. Indian pipes and other plants without chlorophyll are supported entirely from the nutrients they gain from fungi in their roots; many orchids cannot even germinate without fungal assistance. Here plants gain sustenance from fungi; in more cases, however, the fungus obtains sustenance from the plant. But a mycorrhizal fungus is not just selfish in its eating. It brings the plant water and makes minerals from the surrounding soil available for its host. Fungi can

even bore into rocks, making their mineral elements available for plant growth. In the long history of the earth, fungi are responsible for enriching soil thus allowing plants to evolve; fungi channel minerals from rocks to plants.¹²³

Paradoxically, we can confirm Hobbes's intuition about coming to the world *fungorum more*. This is only possible, however, because individual human existence, just like that of the carpophore, depends on the intra- and interspecies infrastructure that supports it, destabilizing or even unraveling the hierarchies between nature and society, and subsequently between public and private, center and periphery, but also between human and non-human and between living and non-living. The lessons we learn from the life of fungi, their multi-species relationships, and their prominent role in the evolution of life on Earth should be enough to put an end to the idea of human exceptionalism over nature and other species. And in this sense, the contributions of biology, mycology, or immunology can certainly help us change our view of the world and transform shared narratives and representations, thus weakening the limits of the world constructed by modern political thought.

At the same time, such an undertaking cannot do without the contribution of political philosophy and social theory, which are capable of holding onto the specificity of political and economic interdependence, and thus of calling into question human responsibility, power relations, and the production of social inequalities. Interdependence is already a fact of the global political and economic organization of life. This is the case in its most damaging form. And not in spite of Hobbes's conception of interdependence, but precisely because of it. The erasure of the fact of interdependence for five centuries has promoted an organization of social and economic relations based on dense, as well as covert, plots of interdependence between genders, between races, between classes, between species, between North and South, between worlds: plots of interdependence marked by the most brutal, naturalized, and unacknowledged inequalities, which in turn have produced material infrastructures based on exploitation, dispossession, and violence within and between species. The Capitalocene is exactly that—but with one fundamental difference to biological interdependence (and even the parasitic relationships that can emerge in the fungal world), which is that the reasons for its emergence are anything but biological. Understanding this is necessary to avoid the illusion that interdependence is a fact from which a value, and in this case a positive value, automatically emerges. As we have seen, this assumption is unfounded even from a strictly biological and co-constructionist point of view, for the simple reason that a fact in itself is not a value.

The lessons we learn from the life of fungi, their multi-species relationships, and their prominent role in the evolution of life on Earth should be enough to put an end to the idea of human exceptionalism over nature and other species.

As mentioned above, the fact of interdependence could become the basis of a normative vision if it were to inform the life-supporting infrastructure and, more importantly, if it were to do so in a globally cogent way. The inescapable obligation that would flow from interdependence would find its foundation in itself, first by countering the modern misunderstanding of what interdependence means, by repairing the social and ecological damage that this misunderstanding has caused, and by affirming the value of radical equality of life: radical equality in dependence and thus interdependence.

Without a clear understanding of how interdependence has been concealed and subjugated to the logic of profit operated by capitalist modernity, it would be impossible today to conceive of the value that interdependence might open up for reshaping the world on a more egalitarian basis—outside of the conditioning that in modernity has created infrastructures of inequality, and that seems simply to be failing in the task of supporting life as such.

Notes

This essay is the result of a joint reflection. Sections 1, 2, and 4 are attributed to Federico Zappino; sections 3 and 5 to Brunella Casalini. The essay has previously been published in Italian in *Pandemos: Rivista di scienze umane, politiche e sociali* 1 (2023). The authors hold the copyright. The authors would like to thank Elena Loizidou for her careful reading of and comments on the English translation, and Anna Montebugnoli and Lorenzo Coccoli for reading and commenting on the original version of the text.

1 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 100.

2 Hobbes, 100.

3 Hobbes, 105.

4 Filmer, *Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings*, Chapter 1.

5 Filmer, Chapter 2.

6 Laslett, "Sir Robert Filmer."

7 Filmer, *Observations Concerning the Originall of Government Upon Mr. Hobs Leviathan*.

8 Filmer, 2.

9 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 105.

10 Hobbes, 105.

11 Hobbes, 106.

12 Hobbes, 106.

13 Hobbes, 106.

14 Hobbes, 106.

15 Hobbes, 106.

16 Hobbes, 106.

17 Hobbes, 106.

18 Hobbes, 106. One of the "places" Hobbes may be referring to is Ndongo and Matamba in present-day Angola, which was governed by female rulers throughout the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth. Among them was Nzinga Mbande, who had no husband and resisted Portuguese rule for a long time. In this respect, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí's groundbreaking work shows how the gender and sexual hierarchies that prevailed in Europe did not unequivocally apply in Africa before the era of colonial rule (see Oyěwùmí, *The Invention Of Women*).

19 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 106–07.

20 Paganini, "How Far Can a 'Radical' Philosopher Go?"

21 Pateman, "God Hath Ordained to Man a Helper."

22 On this point, see Sreedhar, "Hobbes on Sexual Morality."

23 Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth*.

24 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 108.

25 Hobbes, 110. Hobbes defines civil liberty as a framework where "no man, whether subject, son, or servant, is so hindered by punishments appointed by the city, the father, or the lord, how cruel soever, but that he may do all things, and make use of all means necessary to the preservation of his life and health."

26 Considering that the "best state of government" for Hobbes is notoriously "monarchy" (126), which, insofar as it is hereditary, must be able to rely on a certain criterion of succession, it seems clear why it is so important for Hobbes to artificially construct the idea of a matriarchal state of nature as a contrast to the constitution of the state based on the principle of paternal authority, which (contrary to Filmer's claim) does not need to derive from the force of generation in order to claim legitimacy.

- 27 Bobbio, footnote 1, in *De Cive* by Thomas Hobbes, 214.
- 28 The hypothesis that the state of nature in Hobbes is nothing more than matriarchy also seems to be shared by Wu, "Parents and Nature."
- 29 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 112.
- 30 The ambiguities of the concept of "anarchy" favored by modern political thought are discussed in detail by Bottici, *Anarchafeminism*, especially Chapter 2. On this point, see also Loizidou, *Anarchism*.
- 31 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 100.
- 32 Hobbes, 107.
- 33 See Chappell, *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*.
- 34 Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.
- 35 Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, especially Chapter 4. It is interesting to note that, while from a philosophical-political point of view, Wittig rescues the modern political theorization of the social contract (especially in the version proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau), from a literary point of view she centers women's liberation around the figure of the Amazon, who for Hobbes, as we have seen, is a frightening example of female strength (Hobbes, *De Cive*, 106; on this point, see Wittig, *Les guérillères*). However, this is not to say that Wittig endorses matriarchy: "Matriarchy," she writes, "is no less heterosexual than patriarchy: it is only the sex of the oppressor that changes" (*The Straight Mind*, 10).
- 36 Mills, *The Racial Contract*.
- 37 Simpican, *The Capacity Contract*; Pinheiro, "The Ableist Contract."
- 38 On this point, see at least Memmi, *La Dépendance*.
- 39 On this point, see Fineman, *The Neutered Mother*; Kittay, *Love's Labor*. The literature on "care" is now extensive and diverse: see, at least, Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*; Tronto, *Caring Democracy*; The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto*; Bernardini et al., *Vulnerabilità*; Nedelsky and Malleson, *Part-Time For All*.
- 40 Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency."
- 41 Fraser and Gordon, 91. On this point, see also Coccoli, "Defining Poverty."
- 42 Fraser and Gordon, "Genealogy of Dependency," 89.
- 43 Fraser and Gordon, 91–2.
- 44 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, especially Chapter 3. Plumwood traces the characteristics of this procedure in the negation or marginalization of the other, on whom the self is also constitutively dependent; in the hyper-separation between the self and the other, or in the construction of apparently unbridgeable differences; in the relational incorporation or definition, whereby the other is always seen as lacking and deficient in relation to the self; in the instrumentalization and objectification of the other; and finally in its homogenization and stereotyping.
- 45 Duffy, "Doing the Dirty Work."
- 46 Even in the Athenian democracy of the fifth century BC, this distinction between the public and private spheres clearly existed. The difference to modernity, however, is that the former was not based on the idea of the natural equality of all individuals.
- 47 For a queer-materialist critique of the concept of "social reproduction," see Zappino, *Un materialismo queer è possibile*, especially Chapter 8.
- 48 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*.

- 49 Fineman, *Autonomy Myth*.
- 50 Patel and Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, 47.
- 51 Patel and Moore, 47–8.
- 52 Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Chapter 3.
- 53 Tsing.
- 54 Patel and Moore, *History of the World*.
- 55 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 39.
- 56 Tsing, 38.
- 57 Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 35.
- 58 Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*.
- 59 Butler, 39. And Butler goes on: “I will insist that conflict is a potential part of every social bond, and that Hobbes is not altogether wrong.”
- 60 Butler, 49–50.
- 61 Butler’s use of the term “phantasy” is derived from the theories of Susan Isaacs, Melanie Klein, and Jean Laplanche: “In the course of this text,” Butler writes, “we will distinguish between fantasy, understood as a conscious wish that can be individual or shared, and phantasy, which has an unconscious dimension and often operates according to a syntax that require interpretation. The daydream can hover on the border between the conscious and unconscious, but Phantasy . . . tends to include a complex unconscious set of relations to objects” (Butler, 34).
- 62 Butler, 32.
- 63 Hobbes, *De Cive*, 114.
- 64 Hobbes, 114.
- 65 Butler, *What World is This?*, 30.
- 66 Butler, 101.
- 67 Butler, 101.
- 68 Butler, 86. On this point, see also Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.
- 69 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 185.
- 70 Butler, 44 ff.
- 71 Butler, 35. A few pages earlier (33), Butler mentions Gregory Sadler’s essay, “The States of Nature in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,” according to which there is “a rhetorical construct ‘state of nature’ as war of all against all, lacking any institutions of civilization and civil society; Historically existent ‘state(s) of nature’ in pre-political societies, where family, patron-client, clan, or tribal structures are in conflict with each other; Historically existent ‘state(s) of nature’ within established civil societies where, despite establishment and enforcement of laws, citizens remain in a mistrustful condition vis-à-vis each other, i.e. concerned about criminality; The historically existent ‘state of nature’ governing foreign relations, i.e. the condition of states in relation to each other; Historically existent and possible ‘state(s)’ of nature that culminate in civil war with the breakdown of civil society through factionalization.”
- 72 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 35.
- 73 Butler, 36.
- 74 Butler, 37.
- 75 Butler, 37.
- 76 Butler, 37.
- 77 Butler, 36.
- 78 Butler, 37.
- 79 Butler, 38.
- 80 Butler, 37–8 (emphasis is mine).
- 81 Butler, 38.

- 82 Wearing, "Ontology as a Guide to Politics." In this essay, Wearing points out that for feminist theorist Adrienne Rich, the misogyny of patriarchal society can be traced precisely to the male revulsion for dependence (see Rich, *Of Woman Born*).
- 83 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 42.
- 84 Butler, 42.
- 85 Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the 'I' Function."
- 86 On this point, see Butler, *Precarious Life*.
- 87 Butler, *What World is This?*, 84.
- 88 Butler, 85.
- 89 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 40.
- 90 Butler, 41.
- 91 Zappino, *Comunismo queer*, 120.
- 92 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 41–2.
- 93 Butler, 42.
- 94 In *What World Is This?*, Butler explains that "pandemic" derives from the Greek word *pan-demos*, which means "all the people, or perhaps more precisely, the people everywhere, or something that crosses over or spreads over and through the people. . . . The *demos* is thus not the citizens of a given state but all the people despite the legal barriers that seek to separate them or their documented status" (5).
- 95 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 44.
- 96 Butler, 44.
- 97 Butler, 44.
- 98 Butler, 44.
- 99 Butler, 48.
- 100 Butler, 10.
- 101 Butler, 10.
- 102 Butler, *What World is This?*, 83.
- 103 Nan Goldin offers an incisive visual account of this in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.
- 104 On this point, see the nonviolent protests in major museums around the world by P.A.I.N. (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now), an art and political organization founded by Nan Goldin to counter the high rates of opioid addiction and its effects in the United States, which are exploited by the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma and Mundipharma (see the documentary *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*).
- 105 Butler, *What World is This?*, 83.
- 106 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 64.
- 107 Butler, *What World is This?*, 98.
- 108 Butler, *Force of Nonviolence*, 10.
- 109 Butler, 16.
- 110 Butler, *What World is This?*, 35.
- 111 Chiara Bottici also discusses this question at length from the perspective of transindividual philosophy in *Anarchafeminism*, especially Part II.
- 112 Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, "A Symbiotic View of Life."
- 113 Pradeu, *The Limits of the Self*.
- 114 Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, *A Symbiotic View of Life*, 326.
- 115 Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunology*.
- 116 Butler, *What World is This?*, 10.
- 117 Butler, 11.

118 On this point, see Cielemecka and Åsberg, “Toxic Embodiment and Feminist Environmental Humanities.” This point is also addressed by Murphy, “Against Population, Towards Afterlife.”

119 DeFalco, *Curious Kin in Fiction of Posthuman Care*; Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*; Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*; Stamets, *Fantastic Fungi*.

120 Benhabib, “The Generalized and the Concrete Other.”

121 Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care.”

122 Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*.

123 Tsing, “Unruly Edges,” 142–43. On this point, see also the work of Zuniga, *Drawing Out Fungal Care*. See also the international art collective Bruxas, “Get Bodied.”

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