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THINKING IN IMAGES

A cursory survey of recent Continental philosophy reveals a theoretical landscape replete with images of violence, some of which are veiled and others more overt.¹ One might think of Levinas' critique of Heidegger, which indicts ontology as a kind of "imperialism" or tyranny when it is conceived as first philosophy (Levinas 1969, 44). Deleuzian descriptions of thought frequently invoke scenes of violence. Indeed, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze claims that thought is "primarily trespass and violence"; his critique of the traditional image of thought is accomplished with a certain rhetorical violence and is rife with its own images of cruelty and torture (Deleuze 1994, 139). The early Foucault also warns that the very operation of thought can "liberate and enslave"; in this sense, he cautions, thought is always already perilous, more or less permanently menaced by violence (Foucault 1994, 328). And Jacques Derrida has suggested that there is a violence embedded in phenomenality itself, such that the very appearance of a world entails a requisite exercise of force (Derrida 1978, 125). These invocations of violence are similarly manifest in Continental feminist writings. Luce Irigaray's psychoanalytic critiques of various figures in the tradition frequently invoke the charge of matricide, and Julia Kristeva has also claimed that "matricide is our vital necessity" (Kristeva 1989, 27–28).²

Of course, the violence to which these thinkers refer is not the same in kind. Rather, what is relevant here is the ubiquity of the icon of violence and its emergence in an expanding number of scenes in contemporary theory. The multitude of these scenes of violence can be dizzying. Whether the violence one refers to is material, revolutionary, sexual, transcendental, symbolic, divine, linguistic, or immanent to the formation of the subject, the ubiquity of this motif is provocative. The iconography of violence informs philosophical reflection across a multiplicity of domains: ontology, ethics, politics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Its expansiveness in this regard is

significant. Indeed, phenomenology, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and the social contract tradition have together circumscribed a theoretical terrain wherein it is all but impossible to think identity or the social bond in the absence of some mechanism of abjection, subjection, possession, or sacrifice, all of which are said to be characterized by violence. While it is true, for instance, that Foucault's account of *assujettissement* gestures toward the productive and creative dimensions of subject formation as much as its more negative and subordinating moments, it remains the case that violence provides, for him, the lens through which the subject comes into view. Despite Foucault's noted aversion to psychoanalysis, a similar dynamic is *formally* at play in a psychoanalytic account that allows for connectivity with others, but only after a movement through primary aggressivity. Hence even in theoretical accounts of connectedness, collectivity, and community, images of violence play a formative role. Given feminist philosophers' long-standing interest in these figures, the prominence of images of violence in these discussions is noteworthy.

VIOLENCE AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGINARY

Among the more formative feminist reflections on the power of the imaginary is Moira Gatens' *Imaginary Bodies* (1996), a text where she argues that sexed subjectivity must be thought with regard to the various images, symbols and metaphors that help to construct and represent sexual difference. In her work on imaginary bodies, Gatens stresses the manner in which the imaginary informs and constrains the production of various forms of subjectivity. Images in thought are central to the deployment and success of cultural norms as they circumscribe certain domains of intelligibility and ethical entitlement. The point for Gatens is not to argue over which philosopher advanced the most valid account of the imaginary or the imagination. It is rather to think through what is at stake epistemologically, ethically, and politically in the vocabulary of images that is deployed in a certain theoretical sphere. In line with Gatens, this work refuses to subscribe to any one articulation of the imaginary. Indeed, the imaginary is not one, but multiple, and this work attempts to honor myriad imaginaries, many of which are irreducible to each other; consequently, one must resist the temptation to conflate them. This resistance is crucial. In her own work, Gatens elaborates this resistance in terms of the difference between an imaginary and an ideology, where an ideology connotes a more univocal and universal matrix through which social meanings emerge. In contrast, an imaginary may be local, singular, and amenable to change (Gatens 1996, x). Moreover, while it is obviously the case that imaginaries may be related—and in many instances

are bound in complicity—it is surely not the case that this interrelatedness is one that is capable of capture in any univocal logic or narrative. Whether the violence one refers to is pre-ethical, normative, linguistic, material, or revolutionary, what emerges is a double imperative: one must think the interrelation of these images of violence but also honor the ways in which they are discrete from each other and cannot be mapped onto each other without remainder. Hence the challenge is to think violence in a way that honors the multiplicity of images and metaphors that are meant to capture it, while resisting the tendency to think of every instance of violence as a manifestation of one underlying ideology.

In this sense, Gatens' insight into the necessity of thinking multiple imaginaries echoes Le Dœuff's own insistence that "there is not one reason, or one imaginary" (Le Dœuff 1989, 5). As the title of this book suggests, it draws much inspiration from Le Dœuff's work *The Philosophical Imaginary* (1989). In this text, Le Dœuff was interested in the ways in which a clandestine traffic in imagery has informed much of the theoretical enterprise, and the way in which images are frequently denigrated as anecdotal to the philosophy in question, in spite of the fact that the theory itself relies upon those very images for its coherence and intelligibility. With Le Dœuff, this work refuses the suggestion that the images at play in philosophy are merely anecdotal. To hold such a view would be to contend that Levinas's descriptions of the ethical relation would have the philosophical pull that they do in the absence of his rendering of human sensibility as a scene of "persecution" (Levinas 1981, 114); or it would be to insist that one can approach Foucault's descriptions of subjection and discipline in a manner devoid of any consideration of the rhetoric of violence that tends to dominate those scenes for him (Foucault 1977). Such claims are untenable. This work is committed to the claim that—far from anecdotal—images of violence are responsible for animating many of the theories of identity and knowledge that are in circulation these days. It would not be enough to say that violence is an important motif in contemporary theory. The image of violence is altogether requisite for the coherence of the theories in question here. Moreover, the rhetorical and imaginary dimensions of these texts are essential to their philosophical character. Richard Kearney has noted the bivalent nature of the image insofar as it both represents and creates (Kearney 1988, 15). This dual function of the image is particularly vital to examine in regards to images of violence. Images of violence have both representational and creative faculties, they do not simply nominate or designate, but also *generate* a certain reality.

With this in mind, one of the most provocative things about the images of violence in contemporary philosophy is their ubiquity. If this ubiquity renders them quotidian in some sense, I argue here that this is

precisely the ordinary status of these images that is provocative in terms of thinking through the relationship between philosophy and its imaginary. For it is not simply the case that violence is one image among others in the philosophical lexicon; it is a particularly favored and prolific image, one for which recent Continental philosophy has a demonstrated affection. In contemporary Continental philosophy, violence has ascended as a favorite trope, a preferred image, and a particularly privileged motif. Indeed, for those who work in recent Continental thought, violence is frequently understood to be the mechanism by which there come to be other images, representations, and identities at all. If there is an understood violence at play in the operation of both concepts and norms—which is the case in Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Butler, Levinas, Irigaray, Spivak, and others—then there is no model of identity or recognition that can claim absolute immunity to violence. For this reason, what Le Dœuff calls an “iconographic investigation” of violence and the philosophical imaginary is methodologically complicated insofar as it involves a doubling back, a reflexivity. To interrogate the icon of violence is to interrogate the icon that serves as the condition for the possibility of images at all. One of the fundamental claims of *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary* is that violence is not only that which we see, but it is that which we now *see through*. Images of violence pervade and structure scenes of recognition and intelligibility. Like all images, those of violence are themselves circumscribed through the exercise of violence, in a way that significantly curtails any critique of violence itself, since the critique is destined to redeploy a normative, conceptual, or representative violence in which it finds its genesis. Indeed, there is a violence implicit in the most renowned methods in contemporary Continental thought, deconstruction and genealogy. Foucault does not hesitate to describe genealogy as a method that is concerned with “the dissociation of the body,” “history’s destruction of the body,” and the “hazardous play of dominations” at work in the formation of the subject (Foucault 1984, 81–83).

Hence the investment that recent Continental thought claims in the image of violence is no ordinary investment. A critique of images of violence is not only an exploration of the mechanics of representation and allegory; violence is not one image among others because it is coextensive with the mechanism of representation and phenomenality itself. There is a circuitry at work here that makes an iconographic investigation of violence at once more pressing and more complicated.

In spite of this, the proliferation of scenes of violence in contemporary philosophy has very rarely been the object of philosophical critique in and of its own right, in spite of the fact that violence itself is one of the more commonplace topics across contemporary feminist, queer, postcolonial, literary,

and political theory. Occasionally, one hears the criticism that the reigning rhetoric and imaginary in recent Continental philosophy has indulged the motif of violence to the point of irresponsibility. The intimation is that contemporary theory has employed this motif in excess, and in a way that is ethically worrisome. Justifiable worries persist about the naturalization of violence, its emergence in a broadening number of domains, and the fear that violence as a philosophical motif is not handled with the care that it warrants. The work that follows finds some provocation in this criticism, but not for the reasons one might expect. Equally provocative is the defensive posture that is typically assumed in response to this critique. Should one worry aloud that the expansion of the motif of violence has had the consequence of detracting from the address of more “concrete” instances of violence, one is accused of not reading carefully, of misunderstanding the philosophy in question, or of failing to grasp the nuances of the relationship between the symbolic and the concrete. This defensiveness is inadequate if not dangerous. Epistemic competence is played against ethical sensibility in a manner that is untenable. A critical space must be carved such that one can query the stakes of the imaginary that one inhabits without being accused of naively disengaging the imaginary itself or of lacking philosophical rigor. In this sense, the provocations of this book are two: the occasional critique of Continental thought for its indulgent engagement with violence, no less the defensive posture that is assumed in response to this criticism. Both the critique and the defensiveness signal something that is deserving of attention. Le Dœuff cautioned that the prominence of a particular image in philosophy could indicate that “something important and troubling is seeking utterance—something which cannot be acknowledged, but is keenly cherished” (Le Dœuff 1989, 9). I argue that images of violence mark just such a troubled investment.

To investigate what is at stake in the proliferation of scenes of violence in philosophical writing is neither to delegitimize these images nor to pronounce them indulgent; it is simply to query the work they have been put to, and the effect they have had in parsing the disciplinary borders of philosophy. Any critique of images of violence in contemporary theory must thus contend with what is, on the one hand, an entirely legitimate investment in thinking through the myriad forms that violence can assume, particularly those instances of violence that are rendered invisible within certain economies of representation. Indeed, this attentiveness to the multiple valences of violence is one of the more powerful hallmarks of Continental feminism in particular. There is doubtless something redemptive in this investment, insofar as Continental philosophy provides one with resources for thinking through mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination that may be veiled. Concrete violence is informed by symbolic or normative

violence, so an analysis that fails to acknowledge the manifold of forms that violence can assume would be superficial. As myriad feminist thinkers have noted, protecting certain groups from violence is not simply a matter of rendering them visible and deserving of protection; it is also a matter of exposing the paradigms of recognition, intelligibility, and visibility that render them abject, or disproportionately available to violence, in the first place. From this perspective, an investment in the critical examination of scenes of violence is requisite for the elaboration of more just ways of life. But there is nothing in this that should foreclose the responsibilities that philosophers may assume for the rhetorical and representational schemas that permeate their work. The idea that there is something redemptive in violence being thought in different domains does not at all exclude the possibility that there are some venues in which scenes of violence may have run amok to such a degree that violence becomes naturalized—a requisite moment in any thinking of the corporeal—in ways that justifiably provoke worry. The language we use to deal with bodily violence, for instance, may unintentionally naturalize the relationship between violence and the body and hence perpetuate the belief that as embodied beings, violence is our unavoidable destiny rather than a historically contingent one.

Significantly, to embark on an exploration of violence and the philosophical imaginary now is to commence this project in the wake of what has been a significant expansion of what is thought under the rubric of “violence.” Of interest here is not political, divine, material, or sexual violence in isolation, so much as the elasticity of the motif of violence, and particularly its expansion to those domains that lie outside of ethics. Here there is less concern with accounts that situate the origin of material violence in scarcity (Sartre) or excess (Bataille) or that concern themselves primarily with questions of context and justification (Fanon). These considerations of violence are of course vital, but the focus here is the expansion and contraction of the motif of violence, and the sheer breadth of phenomena that are currently thought under that moniker. For instance, it is commonplace now to speak of ontological or metaphysical violence, though these kinds of violence lack an easily discernable ethical valence. One aim of this book is to think seriously about the effects of images of violence that proliferate in domains other than ethics. Hence, it is not a discrete mechanism of violence that is the issue here, so much as the proliferation of the rhetorical moods and imaginaries of violence and the way in which these figures simultaneously symptomatize and attempt to mask philosophy’s problematic relationship to the body, and, crucially, to its own body proper. The problematic that grounds this book is thus metaphilosophical in a certain sense, insofar as it is concerned with the way in which images of violence betray something about philosophy’s own self-understanding. This work suggests

that it is via an imaginary that privileges images of violence that “philosophy proper” is circumscribed and that the nature of this circumscription betrays a fundamental and constitutive impropriety in the delineation of the philosophical domain.

The metaphilosophical nature of this project has required that there are certain questions about which this work remains agnostic. As an exploration of the various means by which philosophy as a discipline accomplishes its own frustrated circumscription via images of violence, there are two critical questions that this work does not attempt to answer. The first is the question of *why* it is that violence has ascended as one of philosophy’s favorite images and why it is that philosophy has come to favor images of violence to the degree that it has; the second is the question of whether or not the ubiquity of these images of violence is necessarily a good or bad thing. This latter question, regarding the normative force of the imaginary, will be held in abeyance until chapter 2. For now, it suffices to note that while the imaginary is not without its normative moorings, to decry the proliferation of violent images as categorically indulgent or dangerous—or conversely to uncritically herald images of violence without regard for the consequences—is to respond to the ethical questions posed by violence and the philosophical imaginary with insufficient care. The second chapter argues that any narrative that attempted to categorically laud or denounce philosophy’s relationship to violence would have the effect of masking more meaningful questions regarding what is ethically at stake in the traffic of images of violence in philosophical writing. The question to ask is not: Is this good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy? The more meaningful questions relate to the effect that a discourse that is so saturated with images of violence has on how we imagine ethics, responsibility, and identity.

The question of *why* is held in abeyance for different reasons. A plethora of reasonable and perfectly valid hypotheses might be advanced regarding the affection for images of violence evinced in contemporary theory, the sheer volume of which is sufficient to complicate any easy speculation that would answer this question once and for all. Certainly there are a multitude of historical theses that might explain the proliferation of images of violence in contemporary thought. One of the more salient is the idea that this is symptomatic of a Nietzschean inheritance and testament to the significant influence that Nietzsche exerts over the French thinkers of the twentieth century (see Schrift 1995). It is Nietzsche from whom we inherit the idea that ethics, metaphysics, and knowledge are all discourses of power. They are born of vested interests capable of domination and cruelty. As most of the thinkers engaged here claim a Nietzschean inheritance, it would be legitimate to claim that one of the symptoms of this Nietzschean legacy is a commitment to the idea that reason, virtue, and morality bear their

own kinds of violence. An equally influential legacy belongs to Heidegger, particularly regarding his own taking up of this Nietzschean motif in his various invocations of the violence of language and technological thinking (Heidegger 1977). Even more broadly, the ascendance of images of violence might even be read as symptomatic of the ambivalence that recent French philosophers have evinced in regards to phenomenology itself. Given that some postphenomenological thinkers have decried this tradition as subjectivist, appropriative, and violent, the theoretical terrain that remains is one in which it is hard to conceive of knowledge or intention in a way that is not violent, a fact that is of some consequence. This is especially the case since poststructuralist and postphenomenological thinkers rarely if ever claim a complete break with phenomenology and consequently assume a degree of complicity with its alleged violence.

Also important is Jacques Derrida's engagement with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas in the essay "Violence and Metaphysics," an essay whose influence on contemporary discussions of violence is hard to overstate. In this essay, Derrida casts a critical eye toward Levinas's engagement with an "ontological or transcendental oppression" that is enacted by a transcendental or phenomenological subject to the degree that this subject knows the world through an act of cognition that is akin to possession and illumination (Derrida 1978, 83).

This illumination of the world, and the other, is a violent one to the degree that it utilizes concepts that come from the self, so, on a Levinasian account, it is demonstrative of a pernicious egoism. Derrida renders the Levinasian account of alterity this way: "Incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other, phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence. Through them, the entire philosophical tradition . . . would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same" (Derrida 1978, 91). While Derrida differs from Levinas substantially when it comes to their respective accounts of alterity as well as their understanding of what can ethically be mined from a philosophical figuring of alterity, he does not in principle object to the attribution of violence to ontology and phenomenology. He rather insists upon its necessity. In one of the more renowned passages from this essay, Derrida speaks of "[a]n original transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice, even supposed by ethical nonviolence. Is it meaningful to speak of a pre-ethical violence? If the transcendental "violence" to which we allude is tied to phenomenality itself, and to the possibility of language, it then would be embedded in the root of meaning and logos, before the latter had to be determined as rhetoric, psychagogy, demagoguery, etc." (ibid., 125). The attribution of violence to light, to illumination, and to appearing has had enormous consequence for subsequent attempts to theorize the social bond and the appearance of self and other in the world.

Most recently, James Dodd has argued for a deep kinship between philosophy and war, to the degree that radical reflection on the problem of violence in war leads one to further reflect on the possibility of philosophy itself (Dodd, 2009). Dodd's claim is that many of the most significant movements in the history of Western philosophy have been circumscribed to some degree by war, or somehow motivated by those issues that the phenomenon of war tends to foreground. This is not to say that philosophy can be reduced to a response to war, but that both war and philosophy prompt the most radical questions as to who we are.

Finally, the images of violence in recent Continental thought are no doubt bound to the humanitarian atrocities of the Second World War to the movements of colonialism and decolonization that provided the historical backdrop against which much of this theory appeared. Many of the thinkers engaged here were struggling with the ethical questions posed by the horrors of the Holocaust, and similarly with systems of thought that more or less implicitly endorsed or condemned colonial violence. That violence continues to figure with such prominence in recent Continental thought is testament to the legacy of colonialism and to the deep complicity that is shared between philosophy as a discipline—particularly in those moments when it demonstrates its affection for Enlightenment ideology—and the various movements of colonization. Homi Bhabha (1994), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), Le Dœuff, and Genevieve Lloyd (2000), among others, have documented the ways in which the philosophical imaginary traffics in the movement of colonization. Philosophy's affection, even fetish, for figures of light and darkness, homelands, islands, and wilderness betrays its disciplinary investment in limits and boundaries. While I refuse to endorse any single hypothesis regarding why it is that philosophy has such a penchant for images of violence, it is doubtless the case that philosophy's own self-understanding in part motivates this investment. Philosophy arrogates to itself the highest and most abstract forms of critique, and critique, at least in the Kantian sense, is not so much an indictment as it is an exploration of limits and of boundaries. This disciplinary self-understanding reverberates in tropes, allegories, and images of violence that announce philosophy's lack of ease with its own disciplinary borders. As to the final question of *why* this is, this work remains agnostic, not for lack of viable hypotheses, but for their ubiquity.

FEMINISM AND THE MOTIF OF VIOLENCE

The expansion and contraction of the motif of violence are particularly charged when viewed from a feminist perspective. Certainly to think through the relationships among violence, representation, and identity in light of

the provocation of Irigaray's work is to acknowledge the manner in which scenes of violence are frequently sexed, and to further acknowledge that the philosophical tradition bears its own constitutive and founding scenes of violence, scenes that Irigaray has insisted involve the radical erasure and denigration of the feminine. Indeed, feminist philosophy for the last several decades has been marked by the idea that identity itself entails a kind of constitutive violence. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued this in reference to the idea that the universality of the male was contingent upon the othering of the female. Luce Irigaray (1985) insisted in response to this position that given that "man" has assumed the status of a universal referent, there have never truly been two sexes represented, only one, the feminine on Irigaray's account consigned to invisibility, a sexed identity that has heretofore been denied representation and recognition. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has interrogated the abjection of homosexuality and the way in which this abjection is requisite for the emergence of intelligible gendered identity. bell hooks (1992) has examined the "commodification of Otherness" in which racial difference is reduced to an exotic commodity by mainstream white culture; the result is that whites mistakenly conceive of the desire for the other as a genuine affirmation of cultural pluralism, when in reality it is a violent gesture of cultural appropriation. Gayatri Spivak (1988) has interrogated the possibilities for subaltern speech and agency within dominant postcolonial narratives that cannot recognize these narratives as authentic. In so doing, she illumines not only the racialized violence of colonialism but also the unwitting violence of the very discourses that seek to redress that denigration. Tina Chanter (2008) has furthered the analysis of abjection through an exploration of the ways in which different valances of identity—gender, sex, class, race, nation—rely for their intelligibility on the suppression and abjection of others. And Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) has recently argued for the renaissance of identity politics in response to what she calls the "critique of identity" that was the implicit legacy of much of the feminist theory of the 1990s, a critique that was largely justified with reference to the idea that the recognition of a gendered or raced identity itself constituted a violence insofar as it involved concepts, norms, and stereotypes. While these philosophers hold significantly different investments in thinking through the mechanism of exclusion that is at play in the emergence of identity—indeed some of them are indicted in no uncertain terms by each other—the omnipresence of the concern with violence is nonetheless significant.

In the face of disagreement, there is some consensus that violence is indeed there, in one form or another. Identity itself is a function of some kind of parsing, expurgation, or exclusion, more often than not rendered in terms of violence. Of course, feminist theory's negotiations with this motif are both critical and complicit: critical to the degree that they interrogate

the universal and neutral conceit of a masculine subject that relies for its intelligibility upon the denigration of the feminine; and complicit to the degree that most elaborations of the subject in feminist theory have redeployed their own exclusionary logic. One of the aims of this book is to think seriously about what it means to inhabit a discourse that claims as one of its aims the critique of violence, but a discourse that has itself been indicted in no uncertain terms for its own constitutive exclusions. The next two chapters deal explicitly with these questions. If one works in phenomenology, and bends these analyses in the service of feminist, race, or queer theory, what does it mean to employ in that endeavor a discourse, or a style of thinking, that has been indicted as appropriative and violent? What does it mean to do race theory, when what frequently traffics under the label “theory” is a Eurocentric intellectual tradition that was deeply complicit in movements of colonization to begin with? A kind of ethical ambivalence is introduced as one grapples with the moral or political shortcomings of a discourse that one also takes to be vital to the conjuring of a more just world.

In addition, the exclusionary violence at play in the constitution of identity is thought alongside a different kind of violence, one that is no less commonplace. This is the violence of knowledge and reason, a violence that is announced in gestures of possession and illumination. The concern with this kind of violence marks contemporary Continental thought in particular, especially in its critical engagements with phenomenology and transcendental philosophy. As Levinas notes, historically, “theory” tends to designate a movement of comprehension—a move proper to most theories of knowledge in Western philosophy—wherein the known object is subsumed, claimed, or possessed in a cognitive relation that reinscribes the privilege of the subject (Levinas, 1969). For Levinas, this approach enacts a disrespect or foreclosure of alterity and even more profoundly announces the conceit of a subject that refuses to be limited, called into question, or disarmed by the approach of the Other. To understand knowledge as a possession of the other is commonplace across the Western philosophical tradition. It is obvious on a Platonic account as particulars are illumined through their participation in the Forms, and it is likewise writ large in phenomenology, wherein the other is known only through its appearance within a horizon drawn by the subject and illumined by a constituting consciousness. Given feminist philosophy’s ambivalent embrace of this inheritance, the violence that is said to constitute knowledge, reason, and the very practice of philosophy abides and is reanimated within the purview of recent feminist thought.

Even as poststructuralist thinkers have indicted phenomenology’s violence, postphenomenological elaborations of subjectivity have motivated their own criticisms, grounded in the worry that the ascendance of poststructuralism—and the concomitant expansion of what is thought as

violence—has somehow compromised the focus that should be devoted to remedying more “real” and “concrete” kinds of violence. But this sort of criticism relies on a problematic parsing of different forms of violence. While the segregation of various forms of violence is surely analytically useful, it can distort or oversimplify the relationships among concrete, material, and symbolic violence. For instance, one cannot coherently claim that material violence is more “real,” more “concrete,” than the violence of subjection. To do so would be to presuppose a naïve relation between matter and the symbolic and likewise fail to acknowledge the manner in which cultural matrices of intelligibility delineate in a very real sense the contours of the flesh. In feminist circles, the rhetoric of “reality” circulates in tandem with a discourse on violence that is frequently expressed in the criticism that certain philosophies (and philosophers) fail to take seriously the plight of “real” women, and have become mired in an anemic symbolic politics that is not up to the task of protecting women from physical violence. Claims such as this are worrisome insofar as they remain blind to the ways in which the symbolic circumscription of the category “real woman” bears enormous physical consequence, as myriad feminist thinkers have noted. For these reasons, an easy parsing of symbolic and concrete violence is not only theoretically unjustified; it is a practical impossibility. In this sense, the rhetorical invocation of “reality” in feminist theory is frequently a site of violence in its own right. All of this is to claim that feminist discourse—even when bent in the service of a critique of violence—is saturated with its own metaphors, images, and allegories, no less violent. Some of this is the effect of the appropriation and/or revision of a canon and a tradition wherein images of violence run rampant; but in other ways, feminist theory now assumes, and must bear responsibility for, specific kinds of violence that are implicit in its practice.

Within the purview of feminist philosophy, a paradox has been created by virtue of the fact that it is not only the exclusionary violence that comes with the recognition or legibility of identity that is the issue, but it is also the mechanism of empathy or knowledge of another’s circumstance that has come to be indicted as similarly violent. Crucially, this sensibility creates a theoretical terrain wherein both recognition and the lack thereof, visibility and invisibility, are viewed as violent. Indeed, the constitutive violence that marks the birth of the subject—along with the possessive violence of reason that lays claim to the other through knowledge—together constitute a theoretical terrain in which it is all but impossible to conceive of identity and relation *without* violence. It is in this context that contemporary feminist theorists have increasingly been motivated by attempts to think through what a nonappropriative or nonviolent relation with the other might look like. These projects have been accomplished along two different critical

axes: either as attempts to critique violence in its various instantiations, or as more descriptive or phenomenological accounts of passivity and vulnerability that are intended to emphasize a dimension of availability to the other that is not necessarily violent. In this sense, contemporary feminist theory is preoccupied with the spaces that are left for articulating a nonappropriative or nonviolent relation with the other. Such spaces seem to be dwindling, however, given that the kinds of violence at play in subjectivation and recognition are transcendental in a sense, meaning that they serve as the condition for the possibility of the representation and knowledge of identity as such. Reservations have been raised regarding the hegemony of scenes of violence on the contemporary theoretical landscape. Kelly Oliver (2001) has cautioned that one cannot appropriate a model of subjectivity wherein violence appears requisite without dooming oneself to the reanimation of violence without end. Because of the dominance of the paradigm of recognition, discussions of identity have tended to reinscribe what Oliver calls the “pathology of oppression and domination” (2001, 9). Indeed, Oliver reads most demands for recognition as symptoms of this pathology and argues for a break with the neo-Hegelian tradition in this regard. While there is every reason to heed Oliver’s caution regarding the way in which violence and oppression may be naturalized within the reigning discourses on recognition, my own reservations here are somewhat different. I would like to refrain, as much as is possible, from attributing a straightforward ethical charge to the image of violence itself. Indeed, I think this refrain is necessary if one is to respect the singularity of those instances and those domains in which violence takes shape.

GENEALOGY AND VIOLENCE

In its reluctance to assign a causal metanarrative, its attempt to honor the instability at play in any attempt to conceptualize violence, and its attentiveness to the corporeal, this book draws much of its methodological inspiration from Foucauldian genealogy. The strategy adopted here is a genealogy in the sense outlined by Foucault in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1984). An exploration of violence and the philosophical imaginary must resist the thought that there is one privileged motivation for the deployment of violence as a theme, or some ultimate truth that would explain the proliferation of these images. As such, this analysis is not invested in a return to origins, or an attempt to synthesize various figures of violence that should remain dispersed and thought in their singularity. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault writes that genealogy opposes itself to the search for origins (1984, 77). It refuses to be seduced by the formation of

metanarratives that causally explain or justify the proliferation of certain images or statements. Just as the genealogist eyes neat historical narratives with suspicion, he or she also refuses to speculate on the destiny of a certain way of thinking. In this sense, there is suspicion of metanarratives as they pertain to both past and future. Hence the agenda of this text is not to install an unbroken continuity that would characterize the various imaginaries of violence at play in contemporary Continental philosophy, but rather to take seriously the manner in which these imaginaries traffic in what Le Doeuff calls “a repetition in radical difference” (1989, 9)

Importantly, however, the rejection of the search for an origin does not consist in a rejection of history. Indeed, as a method, genealogy insists on taking history seriously, but only insofar as it can be examined with the hope of finding new interpretations, and only with an eye toward honoring all that is contingent and contradictory in the particular story we inherit. On Foucault’s account, historical sense can be bent in the service of genealogy only when it proves willing to surrender the certainty in absolutes, whether that is the unity of the body or soul, the faith in eternal truth, or objective history. Genealogy is methodologically marked by a willingness to hold these absolutes in abeyance, and the gaze of the genealogist is one that is keen to look for the accidents and errors that have been recuperated in a ruse of unity, contiguity, and universality. It is a gaze that acknowledges its own radical contingencies as much as is possible. This way of seeing is alive to the possibility of different interpretations, other histories, different stories; it is resolutely historical, but only in its investment in opening the future. It has a way of bringing to light those moments of divergence and incommensurability that are obscured in the drive for unity and coherence that marks other historical methods. “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity” (Foucault 1984, 79).

This project also draws inspiration from Foucauldian genealogy in the sense that it begins and ends with thinking on the body. Le Doeuff suggests that images emerge at moments of theoretical tension and may even signal an attempt at evasion, disavowal, or a theoretical instability. In light of this claim, it is important to consider the possibility that the iconography of violence in contemporary philosophy largely signals a discomfort with the body. This may seem to be a claim that is already overwrought. But even within feminist theory—which has been preoccupied with philosophy’s neglect of the body for decades—there is still a pressing need to think through the ways in which this evasion continues to be accomplished, as well as the continually evolving attempts to mask the evasion itself. I remain committed to the hypothesis that the proliferation of images of violence is linked to Western philosophy’s persistent inability to reckon with the body, and to the ambiguities that the body forces us to recognize. Well over half a century

ago, Beauvoir wrote about the ethical import of assuming this ambiguity, indicting any attempt to transcend or nullify ambiguity as an instance of bad faith. Today there remain important reasons to heed Beauvoir's caution (Beauvoir 1996).

Indeed, it may seem strange to suggest that feminist theory "return" to the body, but only insofar as this agenda seems to presuppose that feminist theory has ever ceased thinking the body in its political and ethical dimensions. In truth, despite myriad attempts to think the body within feminist philosophy, embodiment remains a problem for philosophy and for feminist thinking. I suggest in chapter 5 that the nature/culture dichotomy with which feminist theory has been preoccupied for decades now shares the stage with a different conceptual pairing, namely, vulnerability and aggression. So while the favored theoretical paradigm may have shifted, the focus is still squarely on the ethical paradoxes posed by embodied life.

The task is hence to think through the "hazardous play of dominations" that is at work in the very *emergence* of the body (Foucault 1984, 149). With Foucault, to perceive or think the body is not to imagine a locus of coherence or unity, but rather the site of violence and dissolution. Contra phenomenological accounts of embodiment such as the one offered by Merleau-Ponty—which render the body as a gathering or unity in which sense finds its genesis—the Foucauldian body is a site of dissociation and dissemination, marked by violence. "The body is an inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of the dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (*ibid.*, 83).

With this description of the body in mind, the body that has proven the most perplexing for philosophy is its own. In this sense, the discourse on violence and corporeality has real consequence for the body of philosophy proper and for the thinking of disciplinary borders. Inspirational for the purposes of this book are Gatens' meditations on the way in which the image of the body proper is linked to the image of the body politic and the corporate body (Gatens 1996, 24). I argue here that this kind of analog is particularly useful in thinking through Continental philosophy's theorization of the body and the manner in which these reflections may inform philosophy's own self-understanding. Thinking on corporeality is in this sense reflexive; one cannot think the body *within* theory without thinking the body *of* theory; this is despite the fact that philosophy's meditations on its own limits, its own finitude, tend to be anxious and tentative. The body has always been a problem for philosophy because of its own disciplinary self-understanding, so it comes as no shock that its own body is thought as a scandal.

In this regard, the philosophical imaginary's reliance on images of violence signals discomfort not only with the body *per se*, but also with its own body proper, its own disciplinary borders, and its own circumscription. Like

any discipline, philosophy has its own investment in its canon—though this may be more pronounced in the case of philosophy—and its own anxieties about broadening the understanding of what it is we do when we do philosophy. In this sense, it is instructive to draw a parallel between the body of philosophy proper and the body that Foucault describes in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” The disciplinary borders of philosophy delineate a field that is subject to perpetual disintegration and dissemination, and necessarily so, as theory is taken up in new contexts and as a result reads differently and does different things. It would appear, however, that this disciplinary vulnerability is not something philosophy can readily abide. This book is not an attempt to rehearse the myriad ways in which a hermetic vision of philosophy can motivate paranoid attempts to rid the discipline of impurity and return us to the canon. Many who write on gender, race, sexuality, nationalism, or identity more broadly construed could give a litany of examples. What is of interest here is the way in which the iconography of violence serves as a symptom of this unending anxiety, an anxiety that haunts the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy.