

Risk

Marc Botha

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Uncertain futures: The problem of defining risk

Defined at its simplest, risk describes our uncertain relation to the future. That this relation is 'complex and ambivalent',¹ manifesting in multiple and varied permutations, follows logically from the fact that at different times and in different places, precisely what constitutes a risk – that which, in other words, makes our relation to the future *perceptibly* uncertain – assumes different forms. Risk crosses borders and boundaries, cultures and histories, and as it migrates it takes on new forms, new uncertainties. How we interpret and respond to these uncertainties – for instance, whether they are seen as holding promise or threat, whether they are embraced or avoided – conditions how we approach risk across its numerous and diverse contexts. Indeed, as Ulrich Beck, arguably the preeminent theorist of risk, notes, '[I]t is cultural perception and definition that constitute risk.'² In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that risk proves constitutively resistant to precise definition:³ 'risks have something *unreal* about them' suggests Ulrich Beck. 'In a fundamental sense they are both *real* and *unreal*.'⁴

Yet despite its elusiveness, there can be little doubt that a continued investigation of risk remains a pressing task in the contemporary world. Indeed, writing from the midst of the coronavirus pandemic – as individuals, communities, societies and governments all struggle to weigh the existential risk posed by the virus itself against the socio-economic risk it has apparently occasioned⁵ – it becomes apparent not only that risk lies at the heart of our political discourse, but that it also constitutes an ideological battlefield where the value of human life (that is of visceral, embodied beings, each with a life) is pitted against the value of the market (an abstract and a self-organizing system, habitually treated as an organic lifeform if not a governing deity).⁶ That these risks and the scale of their impact are asymmetrically distributed both within and between societies and nations has become increasingly clear. The risks posed by the coronavirus not only fluctuate from place to place depending in large part on financial resources and government policies regarding its containment, but also seem unambiguously tied to a range of variables including age, gender, race, socio-economic precarity, body type and pre-existing medical conditions, many of which intersect with one another in the context of the individual to constitute what we might call a vulnerable subject or a subject at risk.⁷ The capacity or incapacity of a state to respond adequately to the challenges posed to its structures and processes by the vulnerable subject – its capacity for accommodating and defending, rather than simply excluding or isolating the vulnerable subject – offers a compelling proxy measure of the politics of risk.

Although it is tempting to say that the coronavirus pandemic and the profoundly unequal politics of risk it exposes are singular to our contemporary reality, most significant crises of the twenty-first century exhibit a similar tendency towards the abstraction of risk: the legacy of the 9/11 attacks in the 'War on Terror' where ongoing risk has been used as the pretext for waging unjust wars; the 2008 economic crash and the ascendancy of austerity economics which place an abstraction of economic recovery ahead of the social systems that protect the vulnerable; and the rapid approach of ecological catastrophe, and the displacement of accountability from the so-called centre to the periphery in the form of what Nixon has called

the 'outsourcing of environmental crises'.⁸ This politics of risk thus proves to be both prevalent and persistent, and has been the subject of numerous studies in the recent past.⁹ Despite the considerable variation in their precise commitments and aims, what emerges almost universally is a sustained concern with inequalities of wealth and the ways in which these inequalities manifest on a global scale.

While the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens remains paradigmatic in this regard, there has also been an increasing recognition that it is impossible to grasp inequalities of wealth without simultaneously addressing asymmetries of power. The contemporary understanding of the latter rests principally on the critical revision of the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's conception of sovereignty and an elaboration of Michel Foucault's understanding of biopower, culminating in a series of significant works of political philosophy at the turn of the millennium, most notably by Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler. The conception of the vulnerable subject that emerges from Agamben's and Butler's work differs starkly from the global subject that underwrites earlier studies of risk. For Agamben, this subject is made manifest in the figure of *homo sacer* who is excluded from the ordinary application of law and thus reduced to bare life;¹⁰ for Butler, it is the precarious subject, who possesses a 'primary vulnerability' that emerges from the tension between the visceral character of all human life and the fact that the subject is always also socially constituted.¹¹ In both cases, the subject at risk clarifies what it means to live in the contemporary world, a world suspended between two competing yet inextricable paradigms of global (dis)order: a global world of interconnectedness and incorporation on the one hand, and the reassertion of the sovereign state and its capacity for separation and exclusion on the other. It is in this light that the subject at risk – the vulnerable subject – becomes not only the exemplum for rethinking the horizons of the political body, but also, in broader terms, the body politic itself.

Reclaiming value: The body at risk and the radicality of value

Opposing the dominant trend towards abstraction in the contemporary governance of risk (i.e. in its identification, calculation and distribution), and countering the ways in which this abstraction is increasingly employed to determine and govern the lives of everyday people, it is necessary not only to pay closer attention to the singularity of the vulnerable body, or the body *at risk*, but to attempt to effect a shift in the understanding of what it might mean to *take risks*. While as a concept risk is unavoidably imbricated with questions of loss and gain, the wholesale assumption that such losses or gains should be principally economic is finally a question of ideology rather than necessity. In this light, the question becomes: how might we begin to recover the vulnerable lives that are exploited by abstract models of risk? How, in short, do we reclaim a notion of gain which amounts to more than the accrual of wealth by a capitalist elite, but a gain which transforms the everyday lives of vulnerable subjects? How might risk be redistributed so that the bodies and lives of those most at risk are not the very ones constantly placed at risk for the sake of financial gain?

It is only in responding to such questions that it becomes possible to begin to reconceptualize risk as distinct from the processes of abstraction that inform the logic of neoliberal capitalism as it seeks to exploit uncertainty regarding the future for the purpose of gain.¹² This reconceptualization must of necessity begin by challenging the question of agency, and what it means or might mean to actively take a risk. In the context of the ascendancy of global capitalism the taking of risk has principally been used to refer to economic loss or gain – a context which habitually involves the displacement of risk from the centre to the periphery, from the wealthy to the poor or from the powerful to the vulnerable.¹³ In this light, identifying a possible route to risktaking as a generative or recuperative act must start by challenging the assumption that risk can ever be adequately conceptualized in terms of abstraction, and rather insisting on the materiality of the world to which the logic of risk is applied, and in particular emphasizing the irremissibility of the embodied experiences of the vulnerable subjects at its centre. By drawing the viscosity of the subject at risk into focus, it becomes clearer precisely what is at stake in the abstraction of risk for economic gain: an

implicit decision regarding which lives are worth saving and which can be sacrificed for the sake of economic growth. The process of recovering risk must, therefore, begin by refusing the disposability of any human life and affirming that the radical vulnerability of all life, and fragility of the systems that produce and sustain it, is the source of incalculable value.¹⁴

Beyond representation: The return of the sublime and the aesthetics of risk

Since risk may be regarded as inherent to existence by the sheer fact of the uncertainty of the future, it follows that it is only by challenging the ways in which risk and value are tied together in the *present* that it becomes possible to reconceptualize risk within the political sphere as a source of potential rather than hazard. In this process it is vital to keep in mind the rift that emerges between the dominant regimes of contemporary risk, the visceral and the abstract: between, on the one hand, vulnerable bodies, fragile ecosystems, precarious labour or those things *at risk*; and, on the other, risk as something to be actively produced and harnessed by various methods of calculation and redistribution. That the first remains in large part subjugated to the second should also be a major source for concern. This subjugation reflects the ongoing acceleration of late capitalism and its manifestation as neoliberal society where the illusion of freedom is fostered to produce docile subjects who, accepting the truth that risk is pervasive, have lost the capacity to distinguish different regimes of risk from one another. What might it mean in this context to take the right risks?

To take the right risks begins with affirming the subject at risk: recognizing that bodily fragility and vulnerability are indeed singular, and yet that it is precisely this shared viscosity that makes singular lives comparable and hence undermines the elevation of some lives as inherently more valuable than others. Since risk is radical not only to every life, but to every formulation of the future (and hence unavoidable), it is only by beginning again with risk, by radically questioning if not actively undermining its connection to economic value, and critically interrogating its grounding in the more fundamental value of all human life, that it becomes possible to imagine what it might mean to take the right risks. Thus to rethink risk in terms of its post-economic potential requires us to begin with the embodied or visceral subject and to place under significant scrutiny any conception of subjectivity that rests on the abstraction of the subject to a regime of calculation. In other words, to rethink risk we need to rethink the ways in which we *represent* risk, and how these representations are imbricated with embodied subjects.

The problem of representing risk is at the heart of Scott Lash's epochal essay, 'Risk Cultures'. Taking issue with what he views as the two dominant strands of risk thinking – the realist and the constructivist¹⁵ – Lash proposes to shift the terms of discussion from risk *society* to risk *culture*. Following a broadly Kantian schema, he suggests that while the concept of society hinges on an epistemological or cognitive reflexivity, culture, by contrast, depends on *aesthetic* reflexivity.¹⁶ The latter, Lash claims, is more appropriate to understanding the complex set of cultural events and practices that emerge to reflect on contemporary risk.¹⁷ In particular, it is an aesthetic of the sublime that, Lash contends, provides a close cognate for conceptualizing risk. Both, after all, address the figure of an unknowable threat. As Jean-Francois Lyotard recognizes, 'The sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening.'¹⁸ A sense of great risk, then, that provokes a visceral affect which confirms: 'What is sublime is the feeling that something will happen, despite everything within this threatening void, that something will take "place" and will announce that everything is not over.'¹⁹ It is in this sense that the aesthetics inspired by the sublime yearn to recover the future, despite the sublime initially appearing to place it in jeopardy.²⁰ Although the Kantian sublime ultimately elevates our cognitive capacity to subdue a sense of imminent risk, subsequent phenomenologists – Merleau-Ponty perhaps foremost among them – have convincingly demonstrated that cognition, in fact, is always an embodied process. In this light the connection between the sublime and risk emerges not from their shared abstraction, but rather precisely in their viscosity: in aesthetics, the sublime makes

itself known as gut feeling. On this significant point, it is worth quoting Lash at some length:

Aesthetic judgements of the sublime expose bodies with lack, expose open bodies to the ravages of contingency ... Hence we also experience this as confirming our finitude. Risks and threats, thus experienced and subsumed under neither determinate judgement of the understanding nor the judgements and syntheses of the imagination therefore bring us in touch with our finitude. Kant called this the 'terrible sublime' in which dangers were actually physical. This is a very important means by which we ascribe meaning not only to risks but also to the sensibilities of risk culture.²¹

It is on account of this close alliance between the aesthetics of risk and the sublime – the latter which, as Lyotard notes, acts as 'witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy'²² – that we have occasion to shift focus from the demand of finding an adequate means of representing risk as abstraction to exploring the means of witnessing its visceral manifestation in the subject at risk. Much as in the case of the sublime, such exemplary cases must be both conceptual and visceral, navigating rather than subsuming the latter under the former (as might be the Kantian claim).²³

The work of US poet Rob Halpern instantiates this set of tensions in the conception of risk with both clarity and force. Yet to read Halpern's work in such exemplary terms – as a vehicle for the sublime presentation of contemporary risk, and thus, in particular, for the recovery of risk as a visceral rather than an abstract phenomenon – it is necessary first to recall in greater detail what was merely alluded to above: that risk as a concept never emerges in isolation. Of particular significance in this regard is the argument advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?*, which remains almost certainly one of the most incisive accounts of the concept as concept. A concept, they claim, must of necessity be understood as a dynamic process, a multiplicity characterized by its capacity for both generating and maintaining a complex set of relations that are at once internal and external to the concept itself: internal, since the concept gathers together heterogeneous elements (or components) that persist in a dynamic relation to one another;²⁴ external, since no concept is defined in isolation, but always emerges in relation to other concepts.²⁵ Concepts resonate – 'each in itself and every one in relation to all others'²⁶ – and in resonating constitute an intervention: an event²⁷ that inaugurates a novel way of addressing a problem which has been intuited yet which in isolation remains frustratingly inarticulate and vague.²⁸ It is in this dynamic conceptual sense, in this system of resonances, that Halpern's poetry – ranging across pressing themes such as vulnerability, crisis, disaster and threat – situates itself against an horizon of risk.²⁹ It is thus difficult to pinpoint the precise subject of Halpern's work. Addressed as a whole, his poetry might be described as a sustained aesthetic interrogation of the politics of vulnerability: an exposition of the multiple asymmetries that scar the lives of those most at risk. The everyday existence of vulnerable subjects remains in significant ways illegible within the 'normal' operation of society, predicated as it is on the capacity of a hegemon to effect various protocols of inclusion or exclusion,³⁰ perpetuating the conditions which allow the structural and often direct violence that makes a politics of exclusion and exception the normal condition of existence for vulnerable individuals and groups. The impossible challenge taken up by Halpern's poetry, then, is to discover a means of restoring legibility and presence to those who have been erased or rendered illegible.

By lyricizing abjection and eroticizing loss, this poetic work constitutes an ethically charged *corpus* that not only reflects on risk, but itself also takes risks. Incorporating the insights of psychoanalysis, queer studies, political theory, the critique of neoliberal economics and avant-garde poetics, Halpern addresses a constellation of risks that emerge in the aftermath of the 9/11 events of 2001 in two interconnected volumes of poetry (the final instalments of a tetralogy): *Music for Porn*, which addresses the often fetishized figure of the injured, maimed or dead soldier; and *Common Place*, which interrogates the complex imbrication of, and occluded access to, mourning and desire which become problematically abstracted through the autopsy report of a deceased Guantanamo Bay detainee. Despite obvious differences, the soldier and the detainee become exemplary figures in the poet's attempt to reclaim a degree of legibility for the

vulnerable subject.

Representing risk: Militarized capital and the nation at risk

Within the prevailing conditions of post-9/11 risk – a situation where the state cooption of the existential threat posed by global terrorism is used as a pretext for waging illegal wars that consistently place economic interests above human lives – what unites vulnerable subjects is the shared danger of their abstraction to a mere statistic. Under such conditions, bodies, identities, histories and possibilities are transformed by the techniques and technologies of contemporary biopolitics and its alliance with neoliberal capitalism, as the deep complexities of human society and its shifting patterns of conflict and risk are flattened into biopolitical data and human algorithms³¹ to constitute the new basis of informational capital. Reduced to such terms, oblique and unpredictable kinships between even the most unlikely subjects become increasingly probable on account of their shared vulnerability, offering a faint outline for a politics of possibility recovered from its reduction to probability.

Yet if their common ground is found in their shared biopolitical abstraction, it should also be recalled that it is the raw fact of embodiment that underwrites even the possibility of such biopolitical abstraction to begin with. What happens, then, if abstraction is elevated and the body ignored or – as in the case of the soldier and detainee – actively destroyed so that only the abstraction remains? Can there be a body politic (which is to say a political aggregation we might otherwise term society) if the most overtly political bodies can be reduced to an idea, arbitrarily memorialized or redacted from history at will, or, more terrifying still, destroyed or consumed by a collective appetite for catharsis or revenge?

Similar questions animate Sianne Ngai's perceptive analysis of *Music for Porn*, which she identifies as an allegorical vehicle for coming to terms with the unresolved contradictions in the Marxist conception of abstract labour. In a contemporary world so thoroughly desensitized by hyper-commodification and an over-exposure to spectacular violence, Halpern's radical poetic labour struggles to reanimate the abstracted soldier through the poetic encoding of a visceral and habitually culturally disavowed desire:

Halpern, the body of The Soldier is one abstracted at multiple levels: as a national representation ... as a corpse removed from public view; as a homosexual icon ... and as an allegory of value. At the very same time, this abstract-allegorical body is incongruously presented as the visceral object of the poet's lust, sexual fantasy, and a range of conflicting emotions: love, hate, disgust, shame.³²

Tying together Halpern's diverse and difficult meditation on the erotics of wartime capital is the figure of a soldier: a *soldier*, importantly, not a marine; a figure remarkable, then, precisely because he is the embodiment of a transfigured ordinariness. The soldier, generically, is the good son of the working-class family: a figure notable at once for his heroic resilience, yet equally heroic, as national abstraction, for his expendability. Indeed, the soldier embodies all the impossibilities of liberal democracy-become empire: a national fetish that the poet believes must become the object of what he terms a 'devotional kink'³³ in order for us to confront the depth of the imperial violence that moves through our world, placing us all so deeply at risk.

Sometimes wounded, sometimes maimed, but at others the sacralized corpse of the sacrificed hero, this soldier ties together the diverse range of forms Halpern investigates in the volume. He animates longer essayistic reflections that draw together an incisive post-Marxist critique of neoliberalism. He provides a common point of access to fragmentary and often disarmingly delicate prose poems that map the crossing of erotic and martial affect. He grounds the complexity of the 'patterned objectivist lyrics',³⁴ both drawing on and participating in a long tradition of experimentation with the line in American poetry – sometimes in its discreteness; sometimes multiple enjambed – that runs from Whitman, through Stein, to Olson and his successors.

Exemplary in this regard is the 'MY OPERATIVES' sequence in *Music for Porn*,

which reflects, at the level of form, a more profound and traumatic incongruity which the poet must risk in struggling to find an adequate means for representing or making sense of the senseless: the aforementioned entanglement of the martial and the erotic within the neoliberal abstraction of the human subject; the exemplary figure of the soldier reduced thus by the abstracting force of capital to mere 'waste'³⁵ or 'meat'.³⁶

Consider the following:

Now that we've seduced the soldier my own thought
Thins to a fevered nought there never having been before
The war things were identical whereas now difference
Reigns in names for annihilation being mine own peace
And stability industry ricochets and ducks the largest
Private army a one man truth squad alone dodging total
Intelligence solutions chop off surveillance [...];³⁷
or the more explicit passage from the same sequence:
Lick yr wounds it said as if the words would make
Me one with the current traumatic neuroses of peace
That's how we live on waste he said crawling out
Under the dead weight a carcass had come rising
When he saw me on my knees his dick in my mouth
Creaming him crushed beneath the weight of nations.³⁸

That the poetic line simultaneously connects and separates, makes concrete and abstracts, is of considerable significance here. The line becomes itself a model of relation, exposing the vertiginous tensions between, on the one hand, the inextricability of war and capital which become abstractions of risk and, on the other, the poetic sublimation of proscribed sex and desire as visceral figurations of this abstraction.

One might say that by tracing through this figure of the soldier the ways in which the poetical line both facilitates and interrupts relation, Halpern gives expression to an urgent political vision in *Music for Porn*. In short, what the poetic line risks in formal terms – in its restructuring of our collective access to the disavowed connections between explicit violence and explicit sex together subsumed under the sign of capital – is mirrored in Halpern's reflection on the inextricability of borderlines, battle lines, lines of production and, perhaps most saliently, lines of credit – that is to say, the risky apertures of speculation that emerge when we confront the inextricability of the nation-state, the military-industrial complex and the transnational flows of capital that drive and sustain these two.

Indeed, Halpern's soldier is able to exemplify the interdependency of state, war and capital so forcefully precisely because he allows for what the poet terms an 'affective tuning' – a realignment of the private and public, the intimate and social – to constitute a distinctive and disturbing expression of political emotion. On the one hand, the soldier's vulnerability evokes pathos because it invokes relation at the scale of the individual and, particularly, the individual within the context of the family: the soldier is a son, a husband, a father, a brother. On the other hand, the soldier is understood as the embodiment of a transhistorical trajectory of heroic political subjectivity, the everyday hero of an American poetic mythography. For this reason a further line – a genealogical line that binds nationhood to war in the American literary imagination – assumes preeminence. Tracing this line from Virgil, through Whitman, to the present, Halpern identifies an

affective tuning of a military figure ... only fully realized in our own present ... To organize prosodically an experience of war, Whitman links uncoded affects, say a certain unsingable tenderness for a dead soldier's body ... to over-coded attachment *love of nation, fervor for democracy* ... To be that sacrificial body, a soldier's corpse is drained of its historicity *bare life, dead meat, taboo* just as the nation's mourning is hygienically cleaned of partisan *militant* subjectivity.³⁹

Recognized as the subject of a long genealogy that links eros and political violence, the principal question at the heart of *Music for Porn* is incisively phrased by the poet himself:

'How to unbind this eros from martial interests, wrest an openness to penetration away from sovereign ends? How to disentangle my desire from a long genealogy of homoerotic camaraderie embedded in histories of empire and nation, but without denying these entanglements?'⁴⁰ Halpern's fragmented response to this impossible demand emerges through a sustained poetic reimagining of a queer affection that risks transgressing the increasingly militarized line of abstraction. Realigning queer affect from within explicit fragments, exploring the significance of inappropriate cathexis, this is a poetry that takes the right risks: the risk of insisting that it may yet be possible to retrieve a trace of pure value from an economy of pure waste. Another name for this trace is the future.

Against risk's abstractions: The poetics of viscosity and the insistence on life

That the concept of risk has shifted, expanded, intensified and accelerated in the present digital age is clear from the increasing abstraction of everyday life. The embodied subject becomes a digital subject; society itself – which historically has been materially located, with concrete infrastructures connecting these locations – becomes an increasingly virtual concept, transposed into informational networks, both professional and social. Recalling that for Beck, risk is in the first instance a predicate of perception,⁴¹ what is perceived as risk under such conditions is significantly reshaped by its technological abstraction, which makes it increasingly invisible and inaccessible not only to the public to which it applies, but also to public scrutiny. Under such conditions, the visceral particularity of the embodied subject at risk is all too easily lost to a generalized abstraction, and the overwhelming sense of *always* being at risk. It is in recovering not only the particularity but also the localizability and viscosity of risk, that Halpern's poetry has significant implications for contemporary risk thinking. He examines arguably the most extreme figures through which the abstraction of risk is manifested: the US soldier, as both hero and victim, whose body is declared disposable and whose future is made expendable for the sake of an imperialist concept of nation that has been co-opted by war; and the Guantanamo Bay detainee, an anonymized and redacted terror suspect, onto whose body – physically relocated to an extra-judicial territory, with or without supporting evidence – the abstracted form of national mourning, rage and desire for vengeance are projected. Halpern's strategy for reclaiming these spectral yet persistent figures is radical, and within the normative structures of conventional aesthetics, almost unthinkable. The eviscerated subject, the subject become object, is reinvigorated and reformed through the libidinal force of desire – a defiant queer affect, the taboo of a 'devotional kink', to recall Halpern's terms.

Probing the relationship between viscosity and abstraction in Halpern's *oeuvre* proves fertile ground for the political discourse on risk. His work makes explicit the link between our 'new age of risk' and the ways in which the politics of viscosity and abstraction are locked into a symmetrical relationship. A turn to the viscosity of the subject seems imperative in this light, interrogating the conceptual imbrication of risk, vulnerability, precariousness and fragility by bringing these into a sustained dialogue with not only the material aspects of viscosity – that is, the immanence of the body – but also its symbolic manifestations in terms of an embodied internality, concealed functions, enclosed hierarchies and occluded processes.

The significance of viscosity and the viscera to human culture is considerable; their material and metaphysical import manifest across a range of cultures and histories. Mythology and religion are replete with visceral practices, from divine punishments to visceral offerings, the divination practices of auguries, to the quasi-scientific medical theory of the humours. We might say that our systems of knowledge flow through our insides, but equally that our insides provide an important model for functionality, from medicine to political theory, where, among many other examples, we discover its metaphorical centrality to concepts such as the *body politic* in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and its material centrality to contemporary biopolitics as envisioned by Foucault (who famously draws on the account of the public evisceration and execution of an attempted regicide at the start of *Discipline and Punish*).⁴² What is worth noting, however, has less to do with the historical minutiae of this or similar accounts, than with the fact

that the internal functioning of the body and the internal functioning of political systems are bound together through a particular representational model. Because it is the generality of this representational model that makes it translatable, and also that accounts for the reciprocal significance of systems of aesthetic representation to the ways in which we understand viscosity, along with related bodily categories of flesh and incarnation, blood and circulation.

An interesting and relevant modulation of viscosity – one that relates closely to questions of political and aesthetic representation – emerges in the recent work of Achille Mbembe. Drawing attention to the pending eclipse of the modern political subject by the advent and rise of new data-driven technologies, Mbembe outlines a dystopian future where data has ‘overcode[d] the subject’, the culmination of ‘multiple wave fronts of calculation [that] expand throughout the planet, incorporating more and more life and matter into systems of abstraction and “machine reasoning”’.⁴³ Under such conditions, which are in many respects simply the culmination of the neoliberal logic of the intensified abstraction of capital that characterizes the contemporary understanding of risk, the reassertion of the viscosity of the subject becomes eminently political. Indeed, as Mbembe notes in a different context, the upsurge of affect above reason as the governing principle of much contemporary political activism is significant.⁴⁴ If the danger of abstraction resides in an unmediated knowledge, a knowledge, in other words, that is able to bypass reason, the politics of viscosity constitutes a new political medium through which the political subject may be expressed.

In this light, the vulnerable political subject as interpellated in terms of its viscosity might be defined as

one who is so disabled by all kinds of power structures, that he or she is rendered physically ill with rage, grief and fear, none of which seem[s] to have an outlet ... [T]his visceral subject, inhabits a frustrated body he cannot call homea body that is unable to shout in the face of the apparent impunity and mercilessness of the violence and horror inflicted on it by various structures of power.⁴⁵

While in one sense the recovery of the political body of the vulnerable subject promises a means of countering its exponential abstraction by these structures of power, it remains unclear to Mbembe that this viscosity, occupying a space shaped by violence, is able to distinguish clearly between its constructive and destructive potential. One possible reason for this ambiguity relates to the fact that the politics of viscosity, in an ironically similar manner to the politics of abstraction, has in his view largely abandoned reason or the capacity to ‘properly identify the threshold that distinguishes between the calculable and the incalculable, the quantifiable and the unquantifiable, the computable and the incomputable’.⁴⁶ The challenge in this light becomes how to imagine and then represent the visceral subject as a ‘reasonable’ threshold figure, engaged in both the macrological struggle to lay claim to rights and protections for all those who are most vulnerable or at risk and the micrological struggle of the right of the particular individual to persist in a state of vulnerability, recognizing in vulnerability itself a source of shared existential modality regarding the human condition.⁴⁷ In this light, the visceral subject, understood as an exemplar of the vulnerable subject, is one whose bodily being has been so abstracted by structures of power that it is necessary to find new means of presenting and representing the embodied condition in order to reclaim the right to a material political resistance. The shift that is required to accomplish this is then precisely from a reactionary *politics* of viscosity to a generative *poetics* of viscosity.

Recalling the connections exposed above between viscosity and the sublime, it is perhaps no surprise that there is no conventional mode of representation that proves entirely adequate to this task. A similar problem haunts Halpern’s poetry and nowhere more intensely than in *Common Place*. The collection draws its content from public records which provide an oblique and incomplete view of the statesanctioned activities at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Centre (often simply called GITMO), which is perhaps the most ominous manifestation of the exceptional logic of the so-called ‘War on Terror’. In *Common Place*, Halpern directly addresses the effects of a radically asymmetrical exercise of power on the incarcerated body. The

autopsy report of a detainee who appears to be a composite figure, the ‘everyman’ of illegal detention under a global state of exception, serves as the basis for Halpern’s risky poetic reflection. His name is redacted, given to the reader initially in the form of a placeholder (_____); yet, his story closely resembles so many reported experiences at Guantanamo Bay, including the notorious first suicide (an account of whose death has been disputed) of a Yemeni detainee. This confusion and profusion of names and identities are the first of many markers of the destructive power of biopolitical abstraction which moves through Halpern’s visceral poetics – the ‘my solider’ of *Music for Porn* elided into ‘my detainee’ in *Common Place*.

Halpern’s poetry is itself situated in the space of suspended legality, of suspended norms or exceptional new norms, which Agamben recognizes in what he terms the *nomos of the camp*⁴⁸ – ‘the camp [regarded] not as a historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past (even if still verifiable) but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living’.⁴⁹ In this extra-legal location – a space of suspended legality enforced under the pretext of guaranteeing a securitized political freedom, but in reality simply subtracted from material structures and processes of accountability – the body of the detainee, reduced to bare life, extinguished and then abstracted to a report, becomes the focus of a radical poetic project. Halpern sets about translating this autopsy report, the very paradigm of abstract biopolitical discourse, into elaborate variations and alternations of lyrical verse and evocative prose, manifesting in powerful philosophical reflection, intimate love poetry, dark reveries and erotic dreamscapes.

Whether or not this writing is able to rescue something of the loss of human life it sets about retracing, or whether it merely manifests another sort of violence, a charge which has been brought to Halpern’s work,⁵⁰ must of necessity occupy an undecidable threshold. It is precisely by occupying this threshold – on one side of which is a quasipornographic fantasy, and on the other a devastatingly forensic political critique – that *Common Place* is able to offer a profound and far-reaching reflection on the viscosity of contemporary risk. This is a remarkably complex work, punctuated by opaque intensities, patterned by erratic repetitions and recurrences, evasive on account of gaps and recurrences that require a great deal of time to unfold and decipher. The body of the detainee, abstracted through the anonymous and unremitting forensic gaze that produces this autopsy report, a gaze which the poet must reproduce time and again, poses disturbing questions around the problem of witnessing and complicity. As Bellamy notes, ‘The autopsy report feels like vengeance; the detainee may be dead, but the state keeps observing him, stripping him of humanity until nothing remains but tissue pulp.’⁵¹

Halpern’s work brings into focus the hidden, raw wounds of a cultural complicity – of our witnessing and inaction in the face of ‘state-sponsored brutality’, recognizing that the sublime task of poetry lies in its capacity to transfigure this violence ‘into something akin to love’.⁵² To accomplish this, however, the poet must take immense risks, situating himself at the very periphery of what is poetically sayable: excepted, degraded and abjected for the sake of this love, his words must ‘turn [...] the impenetrability of an autopsy report toward intelligible joy, its violence, a conjugal bower’.⁵³ In short, then, the poet must risk a radical queer desire for the detainee, who, like the solider, must be rescued from his abstraction to waste:

This is how the body of a soldier harbors my love for a detainee. The same river pours over the one without a drop of that love being subtracted from the other. You can see I’m aiming to preserve and nourish both young men under the double ray of tenderness and compassion, but these figures are one and the same while my yearning drowns his withdrawn form, my need to feel him close overwhelms the body’s inaccessibility, giving way to an equal but opposite excess.⁵⁴

Under the state of exception, the figure of the detainee is divested of all rights, deprived of all value and reduced to pure waste. By mobilizing a desire that occupies a threshold – between life and death, eros and thanatos, creation and destruction – the poet is able to occupy an extreme space in which reality and fantasy both consume and produce one another in an attempt to revive and restore the human-made-waste.

Such spaces of risk often seem to translate into the experience of reading and thinking through, or alongside, Halpern’s work. These poems aim to unsettle both

psychologically and viscerally, testing tolerances and relentlessly interrogating the terrifyingly mutual implicitness of the most radical apparent contradictories: self-annihilating abjection and world-making desire. Displacing any easy sense of coherence and disrupting the reader's comfortable sense of self-relation, the potential of this visceral risk lies in its capacity to generate a radical rift within the abstraction of the present. To resist abstraction, to insist on the visceral, however awkward, shameful or impossible such visceral affects may be, is also to insist on the political. It is precisely because 'the absent detainee destabilizes all he comes in contact with'⁵⁵ that Halpern's *Common Place* is able to constitute an agonistic ground on which the two poles of contemporary risk – risk as abstraction and risk as it emerges in the vulnerable subject – can be effectively disputed.

The peripheries of risk: The vulnerable body and the state of exception

In considering these visceral risks, the precise connection between vulnerability and risk, anticipated earlier but not fully explored, becomes a central concern. As suggested above, visceral risk is a localization at the level of the body of the vulnerable state of being *at risk* – of being subject to risk or the recipient of risk. In the context of the ascendancy of risk as abstraction, visceral risks often remain unarticulated or ignored. It is taken for granted that we live in precarious times, but the sheer ubiquity of risk has the disturbing capacity to make itself into something unexceptional; the anticipated horizon of the everyday.

In this context the contemporary manifestation of risk is comparable to what critics of neoliberalism have noted as the normalization of crisis.⁵⁶ If we exist in a state of continual crisis, then crisis loses its capacity to mobilize us one way or another. We become increasingly passive, and this passivity has the effect of amplifying existing structures of power, providing these with the pretext for exercising their power in increasingly unaccountable ways in the name of this crisis – in the name of protecting a particular systemic state in a time of crisis. Yet in reality, against this horizon of crisis, risk takes on a very specific role or function. It becomes a means of locating crisis – of intensifying the situation in which a crisis is registered. In other words, in locating a particular risk, there is a move from a situation of general crisis to a situation of specific crisis that seems to call for or justify a particular action.

Yet the location of risk often involves dislocation, the most notable example of which the Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, theorizes as the *state of exception*, establishing a legal framework through which a state could legally, and often indefinitely, suspend the ordinary application of law in response to the identification of a particular perceived threat or emergency.⁵⁷ From this position, exceptional acts are habitually taken in the name of security to eliminate risks. Historically, this process has invariably involved the displacement and relocation of human beings identified as the source of risk: most infamously in the ghettos and extermination camps of Nazi Germany. Yet it is precisely the same logic at play in detention centres such as Abu Grahb or Guantanamo Bay, which operate legally under the exceptional measures of the so-called 'War on Terror', but extra-legally from the perspective of international law. These detention centres or camps are habitually located in peripheral spaces, outside of legitimate claims to sovereign territory, in order to circumvent, among other things, human rights legislation. Here, then, is the paradox on which the current argument pivots: the displacement of human beings to the periphery makes it possible for those wielding extra-legal power to treat these human beings as dehumanized bodies.

As Agamben carefully traces, the location of the state of exception in the expression of sovereign power is very precisely tied to a biopolitics which exhibits itself most clearly in the capacity to reduce a human being to a bare life.⁵⁸ Stated more directly, we encounter a brutal structural paradox: at the periphery, on the outside, it becomes infinitely possible to access the inside, the viscosity, of the human being. In what is undoubtedly one of the most extreme forms of risk management imaginable, the state of exception, the extra-legal periphery allows power to probe the recesses of being human, to exploit its weaknesses, its vulnerabilities – the soft spots of the body. Being

outside is what provides access to the inside. In summation then, a visceral risk is a risk dislocated to the periphery, and by virtue of the state of exception⁵⁹ relocated to particular bodies.

In targeting the militant technocracies of the present, Beck has himself noted the similarities between risk and the exception in their shared capacity to suspend the prevailing rule of law: '[T]he expectation of catastrophe sets the political landscape in motion, opening up a power-play. New options appear on the table; risks can be exploited in order to gain power. This is the meeting point of the theory of risk society and Carl Schmitt's reflections on state of emergency.'⁶⁰ For, if it is true that in the contemporary world risk 'is welcomed for its ability to suspend rules',⁶¹ the consequences of this suspension invariably prove profoundly disturbing. Since risk is always asymmetrically distributed, and eminently redistributable, transposing the dubious financial logic of risk governance to the biopolitical sphere, it becomes all too easy to treat people and populations as mere abstractions. In such situations, the logic of risk is invariably used to justify the normalization of crisis and with it the exception: those who within the prevailing calculation of risk pose the greatest threat are themselves abstracted, excepted and physically displaced to the periphery. At the periphery the human is grasped in terms of its viscosity – almost coincidental to this risk calculation.

Unremarkable: Radical risk at the apex of abstraction

At the periphery, excluded from the protections afforded by law, it becomes clear precisely how the abstraction and displacement of risk become a source of great violence. Isolated, tortured and eventually driven to suicide, the body of Halpern's detainee becomes a paradoxically visceral testament to the evisceration of our future under the totalizing regime of a calculus of risk. Deprived of rights and excepted from the application of law irrespective of guilt, the detainee becomes a carceral object, existentially impoverished. This point is clear, even from very start of the collection: *A Square, A Cell, A Sentence*:

this blank resource whose waste excels, a darker place where bodies bend, ribs break in vaster banks, by blunting force, just say whose organ, say whose bone, drafting futures, time negated & not perceived as use, being raw, the stone, the teeth, what strange glamour, hangs like the sun, this deciduous mulch, his skin, the sky, the latch, the bone.⁶²

What darker space are we occupying here? Is it the cell or the grave, or perhaps the recesses of the unconscious? Is there a difference? What we do discover is a place of torture and dismemberment where the 'body bends' and 'ribs break'. Thus we gain access to the eviscerated world of the autopsy report – an abstracted account of state-sanctioned violence; the forensic documentation of 'times negated & not perceived as use'; a life reduced to 'waste', a 'deciduous mulch', a compost used to feed national fantasies of a militarized present and to justify the exceptional jurisdiction of a securitized state. What becomes apparent is the evisceration of the human subject alongside the abstraction of the human form: person made body, body made waste, waste made discourse, discourse put to ideological use.

In countering the strategic use of this forensic discourse to gloss over this immeasurable violence – pushed to invisibility at the periphery, but unambiguous underpinning the state of exception – the poem takes on the burden of *unwriting* the abstract. *Common Place* takes shape as a transfigurative love poem: distorted, impossible, but opening a space where desire and shame, sexual pleasure and abjection, and, finally, life and death prove generatively interchangeable. Indeed, the question of interchangeability is central to the collection: generic, interchangeable, fungible, transferable or eminently substitutable are terms that Halpern uses repeatedly through *Common Place* to describe a mode of human being that has been utterly dismantled, turned inside-out, transformed into a broken network of viscera. This process of substitution and interchangeability is first registered in the redaction of the detainee's name, marked in the text by a horizontal line between square brackets, [_____].

Here then we find the apex of abstraction: a mere placeholder that is embedded in the text in multiple ways, but always allied to a diminishment of the visceral subject and an incapacity to signify. Reduced to a blank, the detainee is declared unremarkable, targeted, then erased by the calculus of risk: 'The forehead reveals dark small raised lesions; see "Evidence of Injuries." The eyes are unremarkable. The irises are brown. The cornea are slightly cloudy.' A few lines later we find that '[t]he tongue is unremarkable. The lips are without evidence of injury. What would it be like to kiss them? Transcription of the autopsy report gives way to these fantasies of contact ... The chest is unremarkable. But how can the chest be unremarkable? His chest can only be remarkable, inconceivable referent to which my love fails to cling;' and finally, '[t]he external genitalia are those of a normal adult circumcised male, and unremarkable. I just lost my place in the document. I don't want to continue doing this tonight, but I'll keep it up, as if under duress'.⁶³

That this declared unremarkableness must be made remarkable requires it to become the object of near-religious devotion for the poet, the object of his 'devotional kink', as we have seen, for '[e]ach of these [abstracted characteristics declared unremarkable] deserves elaboration, friction, love'.⁶⁴ The insistence on the torturous labour of tracing the 'unremarkable' is of particular significance, for what we encounter in this autopsy report, as already intimated, is, finally, the singularity of a subject made absolutely generic, absolutely interchangeable. The unremarkable is then what is unworthy of further commentary, unworthy of a second look. And it is precisely because this body is declared unremarkable, that it demands remark, demands our attention – an attention that through the incisive forensics of Halpern's voice becomes scrutiny, giving a spectral form to the detainee's lost viscosity. The more difficult feat of reanimating this loss, of accomplishing a task of public mourning, leads the poet to an impossible desire – indeed a desire for the impossible – which is precisely the inalienable desirability of every human life.

In this process of poetic generativity, the text of the report in which 'the detainee wavers between a vaguely whole figure of fantasy and a nightmare of fragments'⁶⁵ itself acquires substantial agency. As the report is revisited, subjected to explicit readings, the object of so many quasi-pornographic revivifications through scrutiny, the report and its detainee themselves become, in a sense, capable of looking back – that is, of scrutinizing the poet and the reader – and thus of a species of agency that produces effects in the world. 'The romance of *Common Place* is not a simple relationship of Halpern using a pornographic gaze to dominate and use this other, but the other's refusal to be a compliant subject.'⁶⁶

Thus we should read this field of risk as a field of ambiguous exchange, where the body at risk and the risk of the poet are seen as confluent. Acutely aware of the impossibility of meaningfully equating the abstraction of language and the viscosity of the body, Halpern is driven to explore an affective zone where the two are reciprocal. It is the intensity of desire that seems to promise the means of exceeding this broken economy, reaching towards a visceral desire for the visceral itself as a path to a weak redemption of sorts. In Halpern's own words,

Once his body is admitted and a relation felt, narrative returns like the repressed, which had been there all along, spilling over the structure of my sentence, awaiting its own improper content. Plastic flexi-cuffs around his hands and a ligature said to be identical to the elastic band of his army-issued briefs, neutered on contact with my syntax, turning that part of him that has no name, the part to which my happiness clings, into the most fungible of things, his 'unremarkable genitalia'. Still, I can run my tongue along their edge, forcing arousal while reading this report where the wrongness of my object-choice feels unavoidable ... I submit to what I can't master and spread my legs for his dreamy cock ... There will always be someone who falls outside the general equality, being unimaginable from inside the frame.⁶⁷

Empathy

The records redacted, the concrete incidents to which they refer rendered vague and

fugitive, the work of the poet becomes one of bearing an impossible witness to that which evades the frame. The autopsy report provides only an oblique inventory of the prolonged torture and humiliation that the detainee must have endured – exceptional acts rendered unremarkable under the securitized gaze of the state of exception. The question that haunts Halpern is how it might be possible to retrieve even the trace of value from such encompassing waste, particularly when the detainee has been made to die at least two deaths: the physical death of his alleged suicide and the social death of his solitary confinement. How might it be possible to restore to the detainee some sort of life from the posthumous violence of an autopsy report?⁶⁸

To understand Halpern's response, and the extent of its risk, it is worth recalling a central and compelling point argued by Eleni Stecopoulos in her book *Visceral Poetics*: that language is not only a natural phenomenon, but a visceral phenomenon – of body, breath, voice, cavity: a system of resonances in visceral spaces that are reproduced in our systems of signification. Stecopoulos is particularly interested in the ways in which the body becomes multiply signified by language, at once fragmented and potentially reconstituted. The significance of *poiesis* and poetry in this process is considerable. Indeed, Stecopoulos offers a remarkable series of insights relating to the idea of poetic language as a kind of homeopathic cure. This will not happen at the level of simple cognition though, but rather by recognizing that language is always imbricated in the divisions of our body from itself, linking our idiolect or private language to our idiopathy or private symptom.⁶⁹ In Stecopoulos's estimation, a 'visceral poetics is always a negotiation of wholes and fragments, pressures and voids, that corresponds for me not to triumph over the oppression of signification, but to a macaronic, ethnographic poetics endlessly seeking out language that could embody it as indeed all and nothing at once'.⁷⁰

It is by crossing a private idiolect of desire with the public discourse of the detainee's radical undesirability that the hollowed-out signifiers of the autopsy report are reinjected with vigour. The poetry that emerges expresses what we might call an erotic thanatography – a literary language that is charged with the potential to write death back to life through the sublime transfiguration of absence and waste into a surfeit of value. Life, for Halpern, is both addressee and destination, and in this light both *Music for Porn* and *Common Place* must be read as tracts against death and as rituals of reanimation. The radical risk that Halpern takes lies in his refusal to accept the idea that the detainee has, in fact, been reduced to what Agamben would call a *bare life*, insisting instead on a weak potential for transfiguration glowing even in the most forbidden recesses of the abstracted body. For the parts of the autopsy, like the parts of the life and death narrative for which it is a substitute, never fully add up; and it is the generative power of the poem that promises to overcome the reduction of the body to a mere equation in a larger calculus of risk.

In harnessing sexual desire to drive this erotic thanatography, Halpern seeks to counter the clinical thanatography of the autopsy report – once again to make remarkable what has been rendered unremarkable. What is witnessed here is nothing less than a reclamation of the exception. Where the state of exception constitutes the ground on which the most fundamental rights of the subject are completely usurped, displaced by a calculus of extreme risk management, here the detainee as exceptional figure is reinvested with a problematic, but still notable, agency. In this light, what Halpern risks is something profound. By relentlessly advocating for the right to desirability of even the most undesirable subjects we discover not an abstracted advocacy for universal human rights, but a visceral reassertion of these rights on the ground. This radical desirability discovers a forceful corollary in what Butler recognizes in terms of grievability: 'Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?'⁷¹ Inserting desirability as a third term in this equation is a means of acknowledging the persistence of the body under the contemporary regimes of abstraction, or what we might otherwise call contemporary risk. The right to be grieved and the right to be desired are finally the visceral expression of the right to be loved. So fundamental are these to the human condition that deprived of these rights, the vulnerable subject becomes little more than an abstract idea.

Notes

1 Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 1999), 134.

2 Ibid., 135.

3 Ibid., 135–6. See also, Roy Boyne, *Risk* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), 3–7; Deborah Lupton, *Risk* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 5–8.

4 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 1992), 33.

5 This conception of risk is in the first instance predicated on the identification of exponential growth as the governing logic of capitalism, and in particular of the late capitalism that Beck places at the heart of his conception of the risk society. No longer able to extract sufficient capital from either natural resources or labour to sustain the imperative for high rates of growth, the logic of capitalism seeks a higher and more comprehensive form of abstraction, making risk itself the most prevalent form of capital (ibid., 40). On the historic antecedents of the conception of growth that informs capitalism, see Florian Shui, *Austerity: The Great Failure* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 15, 47–9.

6 On the question of the logic of the market as a neoliberal quasi-religion, see Joshua Ramey, *Politics of Divination: Neoliberal Endgame and the Religion of Contingency* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 1–3, 53–62.

7 Martha Albertson Fineman's account of the complexity of the vulnerable subject, and the demand on state institutions made by the vulnerable subject, is instructive in this regard. See Martha Albertson Fineman, 'The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition', *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, 20.1 (2008): 8–11 (1–24). Equally significant is the connection between vulnerability and the discourse of intersectionality, which aims at exposing and challenging institutionalized vulnerabilities that reflect larger social, political and economic inequalities at a structural level. See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2016), 17–19.

8 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA and London: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22.

9 See, for example, Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 1999); William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security beyond Probability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); and Ramey, *Politics of Divination*.

10 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*; Giorgio Agamben, 8–9; Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 69.

11 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 20. See also Estelle Ferrarese, 'Vulnerability: A Concept with Which to Undo the World As It Is?', *Critical Horizons*, 17.2 (2016): 152–4 (149–59).

12 According to Beck, 'while in classical industrial society the "logic" of wealth production dominates the "logic" of risk production, in the risk society this relationship is reversed' (Beck, *Risk Society*, 12).

13 For an overview on some of the key issues in the politics of the displacement and distribution of risk, see Iain Wilkinson, *Risk, Vulnerability and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 90–6.

14 For an incisive account of disposability as a paradigm for understanding the relation between neoliberalism, violence and human life, see the second chapter of Brad Evans and Henry Giroux, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2015).

15 According to Lash, where Beck's and Giddens's *realist* conception of risk society rests too heavily on a broadly liberal conception of risk that manifests primarily

through its increased rationalization and institutionalization (albeit both are critical of this position), the conservative *constructivist* position advanced by Douglas and Wildavsky asserts a sectarian understanding of risk that, far from being a potentially universalizable condition arising from an unavoidable relation to an unknown future, is regarded as a localizable threat posed by particular elements of society that disrupt the prevailing socio-economic order (Scott Lash, 'Risk Culture,' Barbara Adam, Ulrich Beck and Joost van Loon, eds., *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2000), 47–62). It should be noted, however, that Lash's essay was written in the late 1990s, a period during which the prevailing cultural paradigm was broadly postmodern, many of the assumptions of which have been subsequently questioned. Beck, however, disputes this claim, questioning Lash's insistence on a realist-constructivist division in risk thinking, affirming instead a pragmatism that navigates between the two (Beck, *World Risk Society*, 134–6, 139–40).

16 Lash, 'Risk Culture', 49.

17 Ibid., 50–2. In a move that predates and predicts its subsequent paradigmaticity, Lash closely connects the logic that governs the identification and management of risks with neoliberal economic ideology and its figure *par excellence*, the economic subject, or what Foucault theorizes as *homo economicus* (Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchill (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2008), 268–71).

18 Jean- Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachael Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 99.

19 Ibid., 84.

20 In Kant's terms: 'Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls for our strength'. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 121.

21 Lash, 'Risk Culture', 57.

22 Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 101.

23 See *ibid.*, 87–8.

24 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 20.

25 Ibid., 18–19.

26 Ibid., 23.

27 Although there are many competing contemporary definitions of the event, what is common to all of these is a recognition that events are generative (productive of something new) in being disruptive (being a rupture of the status quo, from within or without) and that this disruption realigns the elements (Badiou) or components (Deleuze) of the status quo in order to produce this something new. This general architecture of the event is given a clear articulation in the opening of Žižek's short book, *Event*. See Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through A Concept* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2014).

28 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 28.

29 There might be a considerable number of such conceptual typologies. For the purpose of the present it suffices to focus on three principal expressions of risk as a concept: existential risk, which might otherwise be called fragility; the state of being at risk, which might otherwise be called vulnerability or precariousness; and the more colloquial sense of risk as a response to uncertainty. The case advanced in this chapter is that what appear to be three discrete senses are in practice imbricated at all levels, and hence the terminological slippage, rather than being a sign of conceptual inaccuracy is, in fact, the mark of a conceptual dynamism.

30 For Butler the question of legibility and illegibility is a measure of what does or does not have the status of reality as it is framed by those in power (Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 83). Illegibility in this context therefore indicates those political realities which are, on account of their vulnerability, regarded, in effect, as inferior or *less real*.

31 For differing views on the implications of algorithmic thinking to the contemporary

constitution of the subject, see Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 95–6, 109–10; Louise Amoore, *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 5–8.

32 Sianne Ngai, 'Visceral Abstraction', *GLQ: Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 21.1 (2015): 33 (33–63).

33 Halpern, *Music for Porn*, 11. The term is used repeatedly in both *Music for Porn* and *Common Place*.

34 Ngai, 'Visceral Abstraction', 36.

35 Halpern, *Music for Porn*, 80.

36 Ibid., 83. The sequence in *Music for Porn* progresses from 'addressed the solider,' through 'undressed the solider' and 'caressed the solider,' to 'seduced the solider' and 'embarrassed our meat man' (ibid., 76–83).

37 Halpern, *Music for Porn*, 83.

38 Ibid., 80.

39 Ibid., 48–9.

40 Ibid., 53.

41 Beck, *World Risk Society*, 135.

42 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1977), 3–8.

43 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 113.

44 Achille Mbembe, 'Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Viscerality', Franklin Humanities Center, Duke University, Duke Humanities Centre, 27 April 2016. Lecture.

45 Ibid.

46 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 113.

47 See Marc Botha, 'Precarious Present, Fragile Futures: Literature and Uncertainty in the Early Twenty-First Century', *English Academy Review*, 31.2 (2014): 14–16 (1–19).

48 The paradigmatic instance of the camp, in this sense, is the extermination camp of Nazi Germany, although Agamben traces its origins as well as its subsequent manifestations (*Homo Sacer*, 166–72).

49 Ibid., 166.

50 As Dodie Bellamy notes in a review of *Common Place*, 'Is this text merely another white colonization of the suffering of a subaltern other? ... Could he possibly get away with this? Of course he doesn't get away with it. The project from the beginning is foreclosed. Much of the energy of the text arises from Halpern's feverish grappling with his moral stance – and what ultimately redeems the book are its shifting layers of resistance and failure' (Dodie Bellamy, 'Adjustment Disorder: On Reading Rob Halpern's *Common Place*', *The Fanzine*, 7 September 2015, accessed on 10 July 2020, <http://thefanzine.com/adjustment-disorder-on-reading-rob-halperns-commonplace/>).

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Halpern, *Common Place*, 80.

54 Ibid., 79.

55 Bellamy, 'Adjustment Disorder'.

56 See, most famously, Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London and New York: Penguin, 2008).

57 'The state suspends the law in the exception on the basis of its right of selfpreservation, as one would say'. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985), 12; see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2005), 1–24.

58 'The inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power. *It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*' (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6; author's italics).

Or a similar suspension of the social laws or norms that have as their pretext (if not always their practice) the protection of the vulnerable and the pursuit of equality.

60 Ulrich Beck, *German Europe* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 26.

61 Bruce Robbins, 'The Limits of Cosmopolitanism: Ulrich Beck's "German Europe"'.

Los Angeles Review of Books, 18 July 2013, accessed on 20 July 2020, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-limits-of-cosmopolitanism-ulrich-becks-german-europe/>

62 Halpern, *Common Place*, 11.

63 Ibid., 25–6.

64 Ibid., 27.

65 Bellamy, 'Adjustment Disorder'.

66 Ibid.

67 Halpern, *Common Place*, 69.

68 This is particularly complex question in that the detainee is also the exemplary figure on which the weight of accountability for global terrorism is projected.

69 See Eleni Stecopoulos, *Visceral Poetics* (Berkeley, ON: Contemporary Practice, 2016), v–vii.

70 Ibid., 9.

71 Butler, *Precarious Life*, xiv–xv. Although the connection between desirability and grievability is seldom made explicit in Butler's work (see *Precarious Life*, 20 and *Frames of War*, 183–4 as notable exceptions), they are in fact mutually implicit in her conception of the vulnerable subject which is grounded, if not limited, by the fact of its embodiment (its viscosity).