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C O N C L U S I O N

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# Theses on the Intellectual Imagination

Philosophy, which once seemed outmoded, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed.

—Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

A PROPÆDEUTIC TO INTELLECTUAL PRAXIS

In what follows, I attempt to assemble *theses*—a distinctive genre of writing that articulates an intervention in a political, economic, or cultural practice—on the form and animating vision of intellectual practice. For all of its distinguished and formidable pedigree—instantiated, for example, in Martin Luther’s devastating *Ninety-Five Theses*, which arguably serves as a catalyzing exigence of the Protestant Reformation; Karl Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, which inaugurates his mature thought on epistemology and social ontology; and Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which simultaneously rings the death knell for a moribund historicism and unveils a radical cultural criticism—there has been remarkably little sustained deployment of the theses-text in academic writing. It may therefore be helpful to flesh out the contours

of the theses toward the end of illuminating the goals, scope, and limits of what I have set out to accomplish in this book.

The theses-text is, perhaps most of all, an incorrigibly hybrid form as is attested to by its indeterminate quantitative status. On the one hand, it is disseminated as a single text. On the other hand, it consists of multiple theses. Moreover, the theses-text is numbered in such a way as to suggest a self-contained particularity to each thesis. And yet the very concept of number suggests multitude and thus evokes an expectation of additional theses to come. To get around its vexing defiance of singular and plural characteristics, I have coined the term the *thessay* as a provisional name for this most protean of rhetorical forms.

These fraught concerns about its ontology extend to its *telos*. Historically, the *thessay* has often been advanced in a provocative spirit to stake or clarify positions, spark debate, and summon interlocutors. The title of Luther's text, *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, casts his theses as an invitation to the scholastic practice of *disputatio*. Marx's *Theses*, similarly, was initiated as a space-clearing rather than definitive document. Engels characterizes Marx's *Theses* as "notes hurriedly scribbled down for later elaboration, absolutely not intended for publication, but invaluable as the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook."<sup>1</sup> Benjamin's theses also echoes the spirit of its predecessors. In a letter to Gretel Adorno that he enclosed along with the typescript of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin writes: "I am handing them to you more as a bouquet of whispering grasses, gathered on reflective walks, than a collection of theses."<sup>2</sup>

But if the *thessay* advances its arguments as propaedeutic sketches that await more extended exposition, its terse, oracular form evokes an unquestionably summative, synoptic ambition. As an intervention to pitched debates, the *thessay* not only radiates an urgency to clarify the stakes of a historical moment, it is also swept forward by an oppositional momentum against entrenched commonplaces. Hence, Luther not only seeks to disambiguate what he takes to be a fateful conflation of temporal and eternal authority by the church but also pits himself in opposition to its sacerdotal hierarchy. Marx, for his part, not only shows that the insurgent Young Hegelians were still beholden to the ide-

alist assumptions of Hegel but also stakes out a devastating indictment against philosophy as a disciplinary practice. And at time when the Soviet Union's pact with the Nazis had scrambled categories between left and right, Benjamin's *thessay* not only delineates the radical left imaginary but also mobilizes intellectual history against the fascist onslaught.

No wonder, then, that the *thessay* is less properly a "genre" than a meta-genre. It draws on the *essay* form to stage its contingent claims and structure its suggestive insights. It revs up *polemic* to ground-sweeping critiques and articulate expansive judgments. It exercises the *aphoristic* meter to marry the sagacious with the prophetic. It is erudite and therefore *scholarly* in sensibility, and yet it is also conversational and therefore *demotic* in temper.

And yet it is for precisely these reasons that the *thessay* has almost completely been missing from contemporary academic writing. Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter's devastating critique of the professional codes of academic writing offers a succinct explanation as to why this might be the case:

Academic writing . . . is regulated by clear norms, usually among them the demand for a refined, ahistorical, smoothly finished univocality. . . . Our writings suppress our convictions, our enthusiasm, our anger, in the interest of achieving an impersonal, "expert" distance and tone. . . . [We] seek a coherent, authoritative, cleanly argued, singular and defensible position, devoid of "extraneous" or "tangential" details.<sup>3</sup>

The very form of the *thessay* cuts against these hegemonic professional codes of writing. Far from being univocal, it is irrepressibly polyphonous. Against an affectless tone, it vibrates with intensity. Moreover, in contrast to the conventional academic article that sets out a narrow thesis that it is then expected to defend—"a coherent, authoritative, cleanly argued, singular and defensible position"—the *thessay*, by definition, is fecund with ideas. It is not coincidental, then, that it is the preferred form for insurgent knowledges. This is the case not only because it is attuned to plurality, affect, and fugitivity, but because of the writerly economy that it affords. In this vein, Audre Lorde's comments

on the material conditions from which writing is emergent can prove particularly instructive. Lorde was protesting a decision by a prominent women's magazine to publish only prose ostensibly because poetry was held to be a less "rigorous" and "serious" art form. Against this, Lorde writes:

Yet even the form our creativity takes is often a class issue. Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose. In this day of inflated prices for material, who are our sculptors, our painters, our photographers? When we speak of a broadly based women's culture, we need to be aware of the effect of class and economic differences on the supplies available for producing art.<sup>4</sup>

These comments, I suggest, may hold true as well for the *thessay*—and indeed, other forms of writing—in academic contexts. As Blair, Brown, and Baxter have argued, the notion that academic writing must fit into an objective, affectless idiom if it is to count as "professional" is best seen as "a masculinist disciplinary ideology, whose professionalized and seemingly liberal thematic motifs serve as a benign cover for a selectively hostile and exclusionary disciplinary practice."<sup>5</sup>

Below, I have set out to deploy this marginal genre as a pungent intervention on how we ought to imagine intellectual practice. My goal is both illuminative, a distillation of what I take to be the focal ideas argued for in this book, and invitational, a summons to a robust conversation on the futures of philosophy as a way of life.

FORTY THESES ON INTELLECTUAL PRAXIS

1. Intellectual practice is a craft, an art, and a praxis. It is a craft because it is an embodied apprenticeship in the performances of reading, listening, tasting, writing, and image-making—an exploration of the depth and breadth of the body as sensorium; an attunement to sound at its highest pitch and its lowest frequency; a connoisseurship in the textures of taste; an immersion in olfactory reception in all its pungency and subtlety; an attentiveness to line, to color, to shape; an abandonment to kinesthetic movement. It is an art because it is an adventure at the very outer edges—and limits—of the imagination. It is a praxis because it is the interanimation of mind and body, theory made flesh, and because it is a social practice, a study of and an engagement with power—from whence it is emergent; who, what, where, when, why, and how it is wielded; and, ultimately, an exercise in the arts of embodied and collective transformation.

2. Intellectual practice is a ground project. It is not a “calling” or “vocation,” in the manner of the religious summons to enter a priesthood of proselytizers, but neither is it a career or profession, fashioned to the specifications of the capitalist corporation. If the religious “vocation” is apt to mystify and sacralize the very human interests of the intellectual—in both senses of the “human” as worldly and flawed—the idea of intellectualism as a “career” suborns criticism to the commodifying and compartmentalizing logics of capitalism. Against both “career” and “calling,” intellectual practice ought to be seen as a “ground project,” a social engagement that seeks to draw upon the breadth and depth of creaturely potentiality and meaning, that aims at realizing to the fullest limits possible articulations of truth, knowledge, justice, wisdom, and the imagination.

3. The stakes of intellectual practice are nothing less than what it means to live well—a perilous, decidedly mortal quest on the meaning and form of the good life. Intellectual practice is more than a skill or activity—it is an existential commitment to a way of life.

4. The intellectual has no discrete “text,” for the intellectual’s being is a worldliness, that is to say, a responsiveness to ecologies (wildernesses and wetlands, cities and suburbs, prairies and parking lots, malls and metros); societies (politics, economics, cultures); structures (social stratifications, social movements, social institutions); artifacts (texts, images, sounds); performances (plays, operas, persons); embodiments (gestures and postures, styles and strategems); and practices (rituals, rites, rules).

5. Intellectual practice is an orientation toward an asymptotic horizon of realization. For realization—if it has any meaning at all—surely denotes that which exceeds the measurable, the standardized, the quantifiable.

6. Intellectual practice is a secular *habitus*.<sup>6</sup> It involves tarrying in the tension between creating what endures and living with the occasional and the ephemeral. A desire for the eternal is a feeble denial of human mortality; it devolves into the epistemic closure of theology, metastasizes into the zealotries of religiosity. A pursuit after the momentary disfigures the critical task by making a fetish of the fashionable and conscripts the intellectual into complicity with the factories of planned obsolescence.

7. Intellectual practice is a *habitus* of interpretation. As such, it is an extended lesson in *hermeneutics*, the tradition of scholarship concerned with various theories and modalities of interpreting texts, performances, and practices. So what then is a theory of interpretation to the intellectual? It is not a lens, for that suggests a transparent window through which the intellectual gazes out. Theories of interpretation, far from being transparent, are grounded in particular histories, are oriented by particular politics, are delimited by particular imaginaries. Nor is critical theory a toolkit, for that conjures the fantasy of the intellectual as hovering above a toolbox, here dispassionately picking the screwdriver of historicism, there deciding between the wrenches of Marxism and feminism. Rather than a lens or a toolbox, critical theories ought to be seen as vibrant interlocutors, relentlessly skeptical of the intellectual’s assumptions, interrupting the intellectual’s illusion of unmedi-

ated communion with the text, attentive to the grain, detail, and turn of the text. But, insofar as theories are interlocutors, they are not simply applied, as if ready-made and self-contained. The encounter of critic, theory, and text lays all three open to the discovery of their limitations, to what they won't or cannot say, and to what about them remains stubbornly excessive and unassimilable.

8. The intellectual does not fetishize a "method," but refuses the occultism of romantic "inspiration" and "intuition." Critical "method" consists in an indefatigable contextualization and recontextualization. The intellectual proceeds by acknowledgments of *embeddedness*, *embodiment*, *entanglement*, *encounter*, and *engenderment* rather than a rule, a formula, or a map. *Embeddedness* because intellectual practice is an acknowledgment of emergence in the ecological and the social; *embodiment* because intellectual practice is a self-reflexive responsiveness to reason, affect, sensation, flesh, and imagination; *entanglement* because intellectual practice is constituted by ineliminable interdependence; *encounter* because intellectual practice is the risk, the danger, the provisionality of relationship, and because intellectual practice is as much inquiry as it is serendipity; and *engenderment* because intellectual practice is an intimation of alternative worlds.

9. The intellectual *describes*, and therefore aims at a perception keyed at its highest pitch, an attentiveness stretched to its widest scale, a sensibility whetted to a fine palate;<sup>7</sup> *understands*, and therefore aims at inhabiting the uncanny, the monstrous, the alien, the strange;<sup>8</sup> *analyzes*, and therefore traces the residual and the emergent, the grain and the break, the part and the whole;<sup>9</sup> *clarifies*, and therefore exegetes, explicates, and elucidates; *explains*, and therefore contextualizes, historicizes, and hypothesizes; *complicates*, and therefore persists in the question, perseveres in the aporetic abyss;<sup>10</sup> *translates*, and therefore retrieves the discarded, listens for the resonant, gathers the fragmented; *evaluates*, and therefore puts to work political, ethical, and aesthetic judgment; *argues*, and therefore invites, reasons, and responds; and *imagines*, and therefore unfolds transformations of the self, the text, and the world.



10. The intellectual does not wield, much less claim, a possession of knowledge. Rather the intellectual inhabits knowledges: *praxis*, or critical wisdom, the arts of living; *techne*, or the techniques and technologies of craft-making, tending, care-taking, and professing; *metis*, or the lore of survival, guile, wiliness, and cunning; and *pronoia*, or the artistry of maneuver, of foresight, ruthless realism, and flexible pragmatism.

11. Intellectual practice begins with radical self-reflexivity. History deposits in subjects “an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, every intellectual practice starts with an *acknowledgment* of the violence that inhabits critical practice. It follows that it is precisely the intellectual task to persistently confront its investment in patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, religious fanaticism, ableism, and class exploitation. The labor of self-reflexivity is relentlessly recursive; disruptive of fantasies of linearity, transcendence, mastery; and ruthlessly critical of perverse ruses of reflexivity such as confession and representation. It follows, then, that such a radical self-reflexivity cannot be an individualistic, introspective process—it has to be social, and is only possible in sustained *encounter* with the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the despairing.

12. The intellectual seeks to follow questions where they lead<sup>12</sup> and therefore transgresses the moated domains of discipline, field, and guild. She is no professional, for her movements are fugitive incursions, illegible against the cadastral registers of the state; but neither is she a dilettante, nor even an amateur, for the intellectual’s crossings demand an intimacy with a terrain fraught with mortal stakes.

13. Intellectual practice tracks the movement of artifacts, performances, and practices across the four-dimensional contexts of emergence, performance, dissemination, and reception. The *context of emergence* names the political, economic, and cultural conditions of possibility for the invention of artifacts, performances, and practices. The *context of performance* refers to the time-space in which artifacts, performances, and practices are articulated or enacted, the temporal

and spatial fabric within which an association, image, narrative, idea, story, or vision takes shape on a page, a stage, a platform, or a canvas, or comes to fruition on the street. The *context of dissemination* tracks contestations over circulation, translation, and canonization of artifacts, performances, and practices. The *context of reception* is concerned with the forms in which interpreters interact with artifacts, performances, and practices. Of course, these contexts are inextricably interanimated and irreducibly entangled; they are layered, overlapping, dialectical, co-constitutive and recursive ecologies of authorship, performance, circulation, and sensibility.

14. The intellectual understands the context of emergence as *contingent*. For that reason, she is particularly responsive to the ecological and social conditions of possibility of authorship. Intellectual practice keeps its distance from the theology of “giftedness,” the romanticism of “genius,” and the patrimonialism of “auter theory.” Instead, the intellectual registers how power coalesces in the production and distribution of legibility and enunciation and also, crucially, how alternative forms of authorship are enacted relationally and collaboratively, democratically and centrifugally. Perhaps more vitally, the intellectual seeks to be attuned to the multivalent meanings of silence, to the names that never rate footnotes and citations, to pro forma, perfunctory nods in acknowledgments pages, to the erased thinkers in the hinterlands of the metropole.

15. The intellectual works at the intersection of history, exigence, and the imagination. A fetish of traditionalism tumbles into a cobwebbed antiquarianism; a fixation with the relevant becomes a tyrannical presentism; a fascination with avant-gardism folds in on itself. The intellectual seeks, instead, to summon memory from the fugue of Traditionalism, to seize time for the urgency of the present, to ignite the imagination for the possibilities of tomorrow.

16. The intellectual understands the context of performance as an attentiveness to the imbrication of context, form, and the imaginary.

17. Intellectual practice is an extended exploration of the form, dimensions, meaning, and limits of a practice's *realization*. For the intellectual, realization is an orientation toward an asymptotic horizon.

18. The intellectual engages an artifact, performance, or practice as a contextual and formal exploration of a four-dimensional asymptotic horizon of realization: *participatory embodiment*, *knowledge*, *politics*, and *meaning*. A practice realizes *participatory embodiment* insofar as it deepens and expands sensory capacities: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic senses. It realizes *knowledge* insofar as it explores to the very limits the problematics of imagination, rationality, technique, representation, and truth. It realizes the *political* insofar as, through an extended fossicking of form, it registers the trace of its conditions of possibility, inscribes its ontological status as practice and gift through relational enunciations, summons particular subjectivities into being through its mode of addresses, and proffers a palimpsestic intimation of alternative worlds. It realizes *meaning* insofar as its form instantiates the deepest and widest encounters with phenomena that have wrought the human condition, for example, how transhistorical existential experiences (joy and pain, love and hate, desire and revulsion) are expanded as well as confounded by irreducible particularity and irrepressible eccentricity; how the emergency, the crisis, and the tragedy is lived in and through the everyday, the mundane, and the banal; and, finally, the utter ineliminability of contingency, the inevitability of suffering, and the irreversibility of death.

19. Intellectual practice is an aesthetic practice—which is to say a cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic invention, performance, dissemination, and response to the inextricably intertwined dimensions of context, form, and the imaginary. The intellectual is attentive to the trace of the temporal and spatial imaginary on form; how form, in turn, reconfigures its spatial and temporal context; and how context and form is constitutive of the imaginary. Thus construed, aesthetic criticism involves a thoroughgoing repudiation of dualistic traditions of thought that pit aesthetics against politics, form against content, the imagination against the empirical, fiction against fact.




20. For the intellectual, the impress of ideology in art-forms is not a matter of examining the doctrines and beliefs of the author as expressed in the contents of an artifact or performance. Rather, ideology is precisely most potent when form encounters the politically and existentially unthinkable. Therefore, political criticism consists in tracing the contortions that form is placed in service of, the torture by which it is stretched in order that it not see, feel, and confront what enables the practice to function.<sup>13</sup>

21. Intellectual practice is a dialectical interanimation of the *deconstructive* and the *constitutive*. The intellectual rejects the notion that critique must issue in positive prescriptions and affirmative hosannas. “Positive thinking” is neoliberal capitalism’s sibilant whisper, “positive energy” the self-satisfied woo of vulgarized mysticism. Nor does the intellectual regard as innocent the demand that criticism be “constructive” on pain of being stigmatized as parasitic on creativity. Intellectual practice is precisely deconstructive because it ruthlessly, relentlessly tests the limits of human experience and imagination. In so doing, criticism allows for *silence* insofar as it finds that language can break down and may not be adequate to the depth and breadth of existential and historical encounters, and demonstrates *finitude* insofar as it reveals the limits of human capability, the inevitability of human failure, the perversity of human agency. It is a striking fact about opposition to “negative” critique that it conceives of critique in the mode of procreation—“negative” critique is labeled “barren,” “impotent,” even “illegitimate.” Intellectual practice urgently unravels the seams of such patriarchal and heteronormative language. It is, in any case, a category mistake to conceive of deconstructive criticism as pitted in a binary opposition to the “creative” or the “constructive”; rather criticism is dialectical and therefore constitutive. Consider, for example, that, to the critic, cliché and stereotype is more than congealed idiom and enervated syntax. Rather, just as cliché is the aestheticism of the philistine, so is stereotype the sociology of the aristocrat. Intellectual practice is precisely constitutive because it breaks into the tomb of tradition to reanimate memory and history, shatters the rictus of stereotype to revitalize form and content, and subverts cliché to enliven the imagination.

22. The intellectual sees language as deeply contextual and therefore striated by history and violence, but also constitutive and therefore an agency for creation. Because language is contextual, the Humpty-Dumpty theory of language is farcical. But because language is constitutive, the intellectual is alive to the wildness of language, its uncontainable variousness. The intellectual seeks precision without pedantry, creativity without contrivance.

23. Intellectual style is eloquence—as against miserliness or grandiloquence.

24. The struggle of the intellectual against power is the struggle of language against violence.

25. The intellectual is witness to a public culture whose evaluative vocabulary is a funhouse mirror of the lurid and the apathetic. On the one hand, the language of public culture is a vaporous hothouse of superlatives and exclamations. A person is “awesome!”; an event is “amazing!”; a listicle is “top ten!” On the other hand, communication across public culture has been evacuated of a critical lexicon of judgment—replaced by the Facebook “like” and the Twitter “fave.” This is no paradox, however: the torrent of acclamation—“greatest,” “best,” “top”—and the treacle of the sentimental— ·  · —issue from the same fountainhead of therapeutic capitalism.

26. The intellectual diagnoses an enfeebled evaluative vocabulary as symptomatic of an ideological assault on the radical imagination, fallout from a corrupt public sphere that has traduced language across the aesthetic, the epistemic, and the ethical dimensions. In aesthetics, the beautiful has been reduced to the cute, the sublime to spectacle, the uncanny to horror, the difficult to the interesting, the comic to the zany, the enchanting to the sentimental.<sup>14</sup> In epistemology, cleverness has been substituted for wisdom, information for judgment, data for warrants. In ethics, subjectivity has been reified into authenticity, affect to feelings, kindness to sweetness, solidarity to patriotism, citizenship to consumerism. The impoverishment of evaluative vocabulary bespeaks

an existential recoil from the transfiguration of human capacities and powers, an antipathy to realization.

27. The ubiquity of an aesthetics of miniaturization and infantilization is a recoil from the utopian imagination. The investment in idioms of equivocation and prevarication is a retreat from radical commitment. The obsessive fixation with the statistical is a short-circuiting of judgment. The investment in postures of irony is an accommodation to political defeat.

28. The intellectual refuses the privileging of any single aesthetic form no matter how canonized and consecrated. To the intellectual, a society's cathexis in one single aesthetic category tells a deeper story of its disavowals. Hence, the Renaissance fetish of beauty says much about the consolidation of the absolutist state in the monarchical court; the enlightenment fascination with the sublime unveils the shock and awe of European imperialist slaveholding, rape, plunder, and conquest; the postmodern pastiche reveals the flattening properties of global capitalism. Intellectual practice instead is a widening of the space of aesthetic practice, an excavation of discarded aesthetic forms, a proleptic hint of aesthetic imaginations yet to be. The intellectual orientation is that of encounter, and thus an openness to the playful and the deadly, the intriguing and the banal, the difficult and the simple, the beautiful and the sublime, the uncanny and the abject.

29. Intellectual practice consists in a loosening of rigid evaluative categories and the revaluation of ossified aesthetic qualities. Against the halloving of value, the intellectual seeks to *recontextualize*, to *reconnect*, to *reimagine*.

30. Intellectual practice conceives of technologies as contextually constitutive. Against technodeterminism, the intellectual insists on the embeddedness of technologies, how ecology and politics shape their meanings, uses, possibilities, and limits. Against technophilia, the intellectual offers a reminder that technologies are not simply instrumental—rather, they are weighted with the path-dependence of historical use,

dovetail with particular tools, enable specific affordances, make possible certain imaginaries, and cut off other ways of being. Against technophobia, the intellectual theorizes in the long arc of human agency, open to the astonishment of serendipity.

31. The intellectual understands the context of dissemination as *generative* rather than as a transparent conduit for the transfer of finished artifacts to readers or audiences. For example, schools do more than simply inform students about books—they delimit possibilities for authorship. Galleries and museums do more than display artifacts—they radically define what counts as “art.” Award-conferring institutions do more than recognize great performances—they determine what is canonized. Advertising agencies do more than persuade consumers to buy products—they generate desire.

32. Intellectual practice cuts against institutional forms of canonization invested in the consecration of selected artifacts as objects of veneration. It cuts against a traditionalism that conceives of artifacts as a patrimonial inheritance sired by Great Fathers, biologically reproduced by Great Sons, and solely possessed by Great Civilizations. It is skeptical of the invention of a counter-canon of artifacts that purports to represent minoritized identities. Rather than take as given the ahistoricism of canonization and its investment in genealogies of cultural supremacy and purity, criticism theorizes the context of dissemination as the induction of bodies into the deep structures of literacy—written, visual, and oral.<sup>15</sup>

33. What conservatives call “tradition,” intellectuals know as the slaughter-bench of history at which entire peoples have perished in genocide, the remnant generations consigned to grinding and abject poverty, and their oral and written archives of learning and memory destroyed beyond retrieval. The conservative’s “cultural heritage” are “spoils” in a “triumphal procession in which today’s rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot.” Tradition “owes its existence not only to the toil of the great geniuses, who created it, but also to the

nameless drudgery of its contemporaries. There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism.”<sup>16</sup>

34. The intellectual engages the context of dissemination as a site of translation—and therefore, as a practice of encountering the stranger, the traveler, the foreigner, the exile, the homeless.

35. “Always contextualize!” This is the single most urgent imperative for the intellectual in the age of Google algorithms, of Yahoo information aggregation, of Amazon search-engine optimization, of YouTube click-bait, of Wikipedia “expertise.”

36. The context of reception, for the intellectual, is fraught with background. Critical reading demands an acknowledgement of the thick palimpsests upon which the text is written—its conscious and unconscious influences, its polyglot languages and idioms, its multiple authors and editors. It involves a recognition of the historical particularity within which the reading practice is embedded—its hermeneutical horizons, its social imaginary, its distinctive sensibility. It invites an attunement to the ecological texture of the event of reading—the temperature in the room, the smells of the book, the surrounding sound.

37. The intellectual understands the context of reception as an embodied practice. For that reason, reception is the interanimation of the senses—cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic. To receive is to *see*, not simply spectate; to *listen*, not simply hear; to *touch*, not simply feel; to *savor*, not simply taste; and to *participate*, not simply watch.

38. For the intellectual, reception is an embrace of vulnerability, an acknowledgment of loss, a revelation of incompleteness. The intellectual is neither a consumer, bullish after the latest bauble at the local bazaar, nor a tourist, shuttled through the flood-lit boulevards of vanity fair. She is a walker in the city’s cobble-stoned backstreets, a traveler in the country’s overgrown footpaths.



39. The intellectual responds not only to the summons of the text but also to audiences ignored and erased, to forgotten and unrealized publics.

40. Intellectual practice is a relentless refusal of narrative closure. It gathers the utopian in the face of the hegemony of *la pensée unique*: remembering, where genocidal amnesia seeks to erase its bloodied trail of tears; witnessing, where fascism seeks to shock with spectacle; and imagining, where capitalist realism beguiles with false choices. It is for precisely these reasons, moreover, that intellectual practice refuses the consolations of moralism. It gives the lie to the theodicean platitudes of the modern age: the fantasy that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice; the ideology that everything happens for a reason; the wishful belief that good always triumphs over evil; the sentimentalism that love conquers all; the supernaturalism that “extreme, undeserved, and uncompensated suffering”<sup>17</sup> will be redeemed in the hereafter. Against this, the intellectual animates justice, practices wisdom, and instantiates the beautiful, the sublime, the uncanny, and the ordinary.

#### A FUTURE FOR THE INTELLECTUAL IMAGINATION

The *thessay* above does not aim for exhaustiveness. It is, instead, a summons to debate and therefore provisional; a response to exigence and therefore improvisational; a clarification of concepts and therefore pedagogical; a rearticulation of affiliations and therefore dialectical; a renarrativization of history and therefore imaginative; and a call to action and therefore performative. Thus this book is written to hail philosophy into a robust conversation on its ontology, epistemology, axiology, and *telos*.