

Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance

Judith Butler

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If we think about recent forms of political assembly, they do not always take place on the street or in the square. Sometimes that is because streets and squares do not exist or do not form the symbolic center for a specific political community and its aspirations. For instance, a movement may be galvanized for the very purpose of establishing adequate infrastructure, or keeping adequate infrastructure from being destroyed. We can think about mobilizations in the continuing shantytowns or townships of South Africa, Kenya, Pakistan, the temporary shelters constructed along the borders of Europe, but also the *barrios* of Venezuela, the favelas of Brazil, or the *barracas* of Portugal. Such spaces are populated by groups of people, including immigrants, squatters, and/or Roma, who are struggling precisely for running and clean water, working toilets, sometimes a closed door on public toilets, paved streets, paid work and necessary provisions. So the street is not always the site that we can take for granted as the public ground for certain kinds of public assemblies; the street, as public space and thoroughfare, is also a public good for which people fight – an infrastructural necessity that forms one of the demands of certain forms of popular mobilization. The street is not just the basis or platform for a political demand, but an infrastructural good. And so when assemblies gather in public spaces in order to fight against the decimation of infrastructural goods, to fight against austerity measures, for instance, that would undercut public education, libraries, transit systems, and roads, we find that the very platform for such a politics is one of the items on the political agenda. Sometimes a mobilization happens precisely in order to create or keep the platform for

political expression itself. The material conditions for speech and assembly are part of what we are speaking and assembling about. We have to assume the infrastructural goods for which we are fighting, but if the infrastructural conditions for politics are themselves decimated, so too are the assemblies that depend upon them. At such a point, the condition of the political is one of the goods for which political assembly takes place —this might be the double meaning of “the infrastructural” under conditions in which public goods are increasingly dismantled by privatization, neo-liberalism, accelerating forms of economic inequality, and the anti-democratic tactics of authoritarian rule.¹

I begin, then, by calling attention to the infrastructural conditions of mobilization as well as the preserving of infrastructural goods as an aim of mobilization, but not because I will give an account of the infrastructural – I hope to do that another time. I do this here because I would like to rethink the status of embodiment and vulnerability within political mobilizations.

In effect, the demand for infrastructure is a demand for a certain kind of inhabitable ground, and its meaning and force derives precisely from that lack. So the street cannot be taken for granted as the space of appearance, to use Hannah Arendt’s phrase, the space of politics, since there is, as we know, a struggle to establish that very ground. And Arendt is at least partially right when she claims that the space of appearance comes into being at the moment of political action. That is romantic notion of an embodied performative speech act, to be sure, since in any time or place that we act, the space of appearance for the political comes into being. It is not always true, of course – we can try to act collectively and no space of appearance is established, and that usually has to do with the absence of media, or particular ways that the public sphere is structured to keep such actions from appearing. Arendt clearly presumes that the

material conditions for gathering are separate from any particular space of appearance. But if politics is oriented toward the making and preserving of such conditions, then it seems that the space of appearance is not ever fully separable from questions of infrastructure and architecture.

What implications does this notion of supported political action have for thinking about vulnerability and resistance? Those are the two concepts that form the focus of this paper, and my task is to suggest a new way of understanding that inter-relationship. In a sense, we already know the idea that freedom can only be exercised if there is enough support for the exercise of freedom, a material condition that enters into the act that it makes possible. Indeed, when we think about the embodied subject who exercises speech or moves through public space, across borders, it is usually presumed to be one that is already free to speak and move. Either that subject is endowed with that freedom as in inherent power, or that subject is presumed to live in a public space where open and supported movement is possible. The very term “mobilization” depends on an operative sense of mobility, itself a right, one which many people cannot take for granted. For the body to move, it must usually have a surface of some kind, and it must have at its disposal whatever technical supports allow for movement to take place. So the pavement and the street are already to be understood as requirements of the body as it exercises its rights of mobility. No one moves without a supportive environment and set of technologies.

And we could certainly make a list of how this idea of a body, supported and agentic, is at work implicitly or explicitly in any number of political movements: struggles for food and shelter, protection from injury and destruction, the right to work, affordable health care, protection from police violence and imprisonment, from war, or illness, mobilizations against austerity and precarity, authoritarianism and inequality. So, on one level, we are asking about the

implicit idea of the body at work in certain kinds of political demands and mobilizations; on another level, we are trying to find out how mobilizations presuppose a body that requires support. In many of the public assemblies that draw people who understand themselves to be in precarious positions, the demand to end precarity is enacted publically by those who expose their vulnerability to failing infrastructural conditions; there is plural and performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being acted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods. But these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting these very powers; they enact a form of resistance that presupposes vulnerability of a specific kind, and opposes precarity. What is the conception of the body here, and how do we understand this form of resistance?

If we make the matter individual, we can say that every single body has a certain right to food and shelter. Although we universalize in such a statement (“every” body has this right), we also particularize, understanding the body as discrete, as an individual matter, and that individual body is itself a norm of what the body is, and how it ought to be conceptualized). Of course that seems quite obviously right, but consider that this idea of the individual bodily subject of rights might fail to capture the sense of vulnerability, exposure, even dependency, that is implied by the right itself, and which corresponds, I would suggest, with an alternative view of the body. In other words, if we accept that part of what a body is (and this is for the moment an ontological claim) is its dependency on other bodies and networks of support, then we are suggesting that it is not altogether right to conceive of individual bodies as completely distinct from one another. Of course, neither are they blended into some amorphous social body, but if we cannot readily conceptualize the political meaning of the human body without understanding those relations in

which it lives and thrives, we fail to make the best possible case for the various political ends we seek to achieve. What I am suggesting is that it is not just that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that makes its own life and action possible. As I will hope to show, we cannot understand bodily vulnerability outside of this conception of relations.

One clear dimension of our vulnerability has to do with our exposure to name-calling and discursive categories in infancy and childhood, indeed, throughout life. All of us are called names, and this kind of name-calling demonstrates an important dimension of the speech act. We do not only act through the speech act; speech acts also acts upon us. There is a distinct performative effect of having been named as this gender or another gender, as part of one nationality or a minority, or to find out that how you are regarded in any of these respects is summed up by a name that you yourself did not know? We can, and do ask, “Am I that Name?” How do we think about the force and effect of those names we are called before emerging into language as speaking beings, prior to any capacity for a speech act of our own? Does speech act upon us prior to our speaking, and if it did not act upon us, could we speak at all? And perhaps it is not simply a matter of sequence: does speech continue to act upon us at the very moment in which we speak, so that we may well think we are acting, but we are also acted upon at that very same time.

Several years ago, Eve Sedgwick and I spent some time thinking about the relationship between performance and performativity. Sedgwick found that speech acts deviated from their aims, very often producing consequences that were altogether unintended, and oftentimes quite

felicitous. For instance, one could take a marriage vow, and this act could actually open up a zone of possible sexuality that takes place quite separately from marriage, understood as the publically known and accepted institution that apparently organizes sexuality in conjugal forms. She underscored the sense of how a speech act could veer away from its apparent aims, and this “deviation” was one sense of the word queer, understood less as an identity than as a movement of thought and language contrary to accepted forms of authority, opening up spaces for desire that would not always be openly recognized.

In my earlier work, I was interested in how several discourses on gender seemed to create and circulate certain ideals of gender, generating those ideals but taking them to be natural essences or internal truths that were subsequently expressed in those ideals. So the effect of a discourse – in this case, a set of gender ideals - was broadly misconstrued as the internal cause of one’s desire and behavior, a core reality that was expressed in one’s gestures and actions. That internal cause or core reality not only substituted for the social norm, but effectively masked and facilitated the operation of that norm. The formulation that “gender is performative” became the basis for many long discussions on topics including two quite contrary interpretations: the first is that we radically choose our genders; the second was that we are utterly determined by gender norms. Those wildly divergent responses meant that something had not quite been articulated and grasped, about the dual dimensions of any account of performativity. For if language acts upon us before we act, and continues acting in every instant in which we act, then we have to think about gender performativity first as “gender assignment” – all those ways in which we are, as it were, called a name, and gendered prior to understanding anything about how gender norms act upon and shape us, and prior to our capacity to reproduce those norms in ways that we might

choose. Choice, in fact, comes late in this process of performativity. And then secondly, following Sedgwick, we have to understand how deviations from those norms can and do take place, suggesting that something “queer” is at work at the heart of gender performativity, a queerness that is not so very different from the swerves taken by iterability in Derrida’s account of the speech act as citational.

So let us assume, then, that performativity describes both the processes of being acted on, and the conditions and possibilities for acting, and that we cannot understand its operation without both of these dimensions. That norms act upon us implies that we are susceptible to their action, vulnerable to a certain name-calling from the start. And this registers at a level that is prior to any possibility of volition. An understanding of gender assignment has to take up this field of an unwilled receptivity, susceptibility, and vulnerability, a way of being exposed to language prior to any possibility of forming or enacting a speech act. Norms such as these both require and institute certain forms of corporeal vulnerability without which their operation would not be thinkable. That is why we can, and do, describe the powerful citational force of gender norms as they are instituted and applied by medical, legal, and psychiatric institutions, and object to the effect they have on the formation and understanding of gender in pathological or criminal terms. And yet, this very domain of susceptibility, this condition of being affected, is also where something queer can happen, where the norm is refused or revised, or where new formulations of gender begin. Although gender norms precede us and act upon us (that is one sense of its enactment), we are obligated to reproduce them (and that is a second sense of its enactment). Precisely because something inadvertent and unexpected can happen in this realm of “being affected” we find forms of gender that break with mechanical patterns of repetition, deviating

from, resignifying, and sometimes quite emphatically breaking those citational chains of gender normativity, making room for new forms of gendered life. The theory of gender performativity, as I understood it, never prescribed which gender performances were right, or more subversive, and which were wrong, and reactionary. The point was precisely to relax the coercive hold of norms on gendered life – which is not the same as transcending all norms – for the purposes of living a more livable life.

Gender performativity does not just characterize what we do, but how discourse and institutional power affect us, constraining and moving us in relation to what we come to call our “own” action. To understand that the names we are called are just important to performativity as the names we call ourselves, we have to identify the conventions that operate in a broad array of gender-assigning strategies. Then we can see how the speech act affects and animates us in an embodied way – indeed, the field of susceptibility and affect is already a matter of a corporeal registration of some kind. Indeed, the embodiment implied by both gender and performance is one that dependent on institutional structures and broader social worlds. We cannot talk about a body without knowing what supports that body, and what its relation to that support – or lack of support – might be. In this way, the body is less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living. In this way the dependency on human and other creatures on infrastructural support exposes a specific vulnerability that we have when we are unsupported, when those infrastructural conditions start to decompose, or when we find ourselves radically unsupported in conditions of precarity.

Both performance studies and disability studies have offered the crucial insight that all action requires support, and that even the most punctual and seemingly spontaneous act

implicitly depends upon an infrastructural condition that quite literally supports the acting body. This idea of “support” is quite important not only for the re-theorization of the acting body, but for the broader politics of mobility – what architectural supports have to be in place for each of us to exercise a certain freedom of movement, one that is necessary in order to exercise the right to public assembly. In the same way that we claim that the speech act depends upon its social conditions and conventions, we can also say that the performance of gender more generally depends upon its infrastructural and social conditions of support. This bears implications for a general account of embodied and social action, but also for understanding the bodily risks that women take walking on certain streets at night, assembling in public squares (the sexual assaults in Tahrir Square would be an example), and transgendered people risk in walking on the street or gathering in public assemblies.

All public assembly is haunted by the police and the prison. And every public square is defined in part by the population that could not possibly arrive there; either they are detained at the border, or have no freedom of movement and assembly, or are detained or imprisoned. In other words, the freedom to gather as a people is always haunted by the imprisonment of those who exercised that freedom and were taken to prison. And when one arrives in public or common spaces with radical and critical views, there is always an anxious or certain anticipation that imprisonment will follow. Sometimes we walk, or run, knowingly in the direction of prison because it is the only way to expose illegitimate constraints on public assembly and political expression. In Gezi Park, some who were assembled were detained, and others were hurt. The lawyers who came to help those who were detained were themselves detained; and sometimes the medical workers who came to help the injured were themselves subject to injury. And yet a

new group would arrive, members journalists, health professionals, lawyers, replenishing the network of support. With Pussy Riot, demonstrations broke out in major cities all across the globes, and internet forms of solidarity emerged to put pressure on governments and human rights agency to press for the release of those imprisoned and to object to the conditions of political imprisonment. Both of these examples compel us to turn our attention to political imprisonment, and to the institution of the prison-industry as a global mechanism for the regulation of citizenship. In the United States, two-thirds of prisoners are Black men, and nearly every person on death row is a person of color. Angela Davis has argued that the prison in the US continues the work of slavery by suspending the very rights of citizenship for people of color; it becomes slavery by other means. At the same time, prisoner solidarity networks are among the most important grass-roots movements, and in places like Turkey, Chile, Argentina, Serbia, and Palestine, women are at the forefront of those struggles.

Feminism is a crucial part of these networks of solidarity and resistance precisely because feminist critique destabilizes those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice, and it criticizes those institutions and practices that inflict violence on women and gender minorities, and, in fact, all minorities subject to police power for showing up and speaking out as they do. We are now witnessing mass movements against gender in France, in several Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Slovakia, and these are allied with movements against reproductive freedom, gay marriage, against lifting constraints imposed upon women's literacy, employment, and expressive freedoms. Time and again we hear from government authorities in several parts of the world that equality and freedom go against the "common norms" of a national culture, or that equality, freedom and justice, are unrealistic, or

that equality and freedom are dangerous, posing grave security risks to the nation or to Europe or, indeed, to civilization itself. The Russian government accused Pussy Riot as “attacking the soul of man.” Few struggles are more important than those that call into question so-called “common norms” by asking, whose lives were *never* included in those norms? Whose lives are, in fact, explicitly excluded from those norms? What norm of the human constrains those common norms? And to what extent is that a masculinist norm? Can we perhaps mobilize all the expression of the senses, including sound and image and to lay claim to a free and livable life, to a sensate democracy?

I have suggested that we rethink the relationship between the human body and infrastructure so that we might call into question the body as discrete, singular, and self-sufficient and I have proposed instead to understand embodiment as both performative and relational; relationality includes dependency on infrastructural conditions and legacies of discourse and institutional power that precede and condition our existence. I am also suggesting that certain ideals independence are masculinist, and that a feminist account exposes the disavowed dependency at the heart of the masculinist idea of the body. This is different from saying what women’s bodies are or what men’s bodies are. I am not making those claims, but only showing what I take to be a masculinist conception of bodily action that should be actively criticized. My reference to dependency may well include dependency on the mother or the caretaker, but that is not the primary form of dependency that concerns me here. By theorizing the human body as a certain kind of *dependency* on infrastructure, understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance the human itself proves to not to be divided from the animal or from the technical world, we foreground the ways in which we are vulnerable

to decimated or disappearing infrastructures, economic supports and predictable and well-compensated labor. We are then not only vulnerable to one another – an invariable feature of social relations – but this very vulnerability indicates a broader condition of dependency and interdependency which changes the dominant ontological understanding of the embodied subject.

Of course, there are many reasons to be opposed to vulnerability, but in the final set of my remarks, I want to argue against the idea that vulnerability is the opposite of resistance. Indeed, I want to argue affirmatively that vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment. I know that speaking about vulnerability produces resistance of various kinds, and not just the kind of political resistance that I hope to show requires vulnerability as part of its very structure. There are those who worry that vulnerability, if it becomes a theme or a problem for thinking, will be asserted as a primary existential condition, ontological and constitutive, and that this sort of foundationalism will founder on the same rocky shores as have others, such as the ethics of care or maternal thinking. Does a turn to vulnerability seek to reintroduce those particular modalities of thinking and valuing back into public discourse – is it smuggling in discounted paradigms for reconsideration?

The resistance to vulnerability is also sometimes based on political grounds. After all, if women or minorities seek to establish themselves as vulnerable, do they unwittingly or wittingly seek to establish a protected status subject to a paternalistic set of powers that must safeguard the vulnerable, those presumed to be weak and in need of protection? Does the discourse of vulnerability discount the political agency of the subjugated? So one political problem that

emerges from any such discussion is whether the discourse on vulnerability shores up paternalistic power, relegating the condition of vulnerability to those who suffer discrimination, exploitation, or violence. What about the power of those who are oppressed? And what about the vulnerability of paternalistic institutions themselves? After all, if they can be contested, brought down, or rebuilt on egalitarian grounds, then paternalism itself is *vulnerable to a dismantling* that would undo its very form of power. And when this dismantling is undertaken by subjugated peoples, do they not establish themselves as something other than, or more than, vulnerable? Indeed, do we want to say that they overcome their vulnerability at such moments, which is to assume that vulnerability is negated when it converts into agency? Or is vulnerability still there, now assuming a different form?

Finally, there are justified political objections to the fact that dominant groups can use the discourse of “vulnerability” to shore up their own privilege. In California, when white people were losing their status as a majority, some of them claimed that they were a “vulnerable” population. Colonial states have lamented their “vulnerability” to attack by those they colonize, and sought general sympathy on the basis of that claim. Some men have complained that feminism has made them into a “vulnerable population” and that they are now “targeted” for discrimination. Various European national identities now claim to be “under attack” by new and established migrant communities. We can see that the term has a way of shifting, and since we may not like some, or even many of the shifts it makes, we may find ourselves somewhat awkwardly opposed to vulnerability. Of course, that is a rather funny thing to say, since we might conjecture that any amount of opposition to vulnerability does not exactly defeat its operation in our bodily and social lives. That seems to be a minimal truth that we can accept

from psychoanalysis. And yet, do our political objects to vulnerability make us into psychoanalytic fools? And do our psychoanalytic affirmations of vulnerability make us complicit with political positions we do not condone?

When we oppose “vulnerability” as a political term it is usually because we would like to see ourselves as agentic, or we think that better political consequences will follow if we see ourselves that way? If we oppose vulnerability in the name of agency, does that imply that we prefer to see ourselves as those who are only acting, but not acted upon? And how might we then describe those regions of both aesthetic and ethics that presume that our receptivity is bound up with our responsiveness, a zone in which we are acted upon by what we find at the same time that we act upon it in certain ways? Does the opposition to vulnerability also imperil a host of related terms of responsiveness, including impressionability, susceptibility, injurability, openness, indignation, outrage, and even resistance? If nothing acts on me against my will or without my advanced knowledge, then there is only sovereignty, the posture of control over the property that I have and that I am, a seemingly sturdy and self-centered form of the thinking “I” that seeks to cloak those faultlines in the self that cannot be overcome. What form of politics is supported by this adamant mode of disavowal?

As I have tried to suggest by calling attention to the dual dimension of performativity, we are invariably acted upon and acting, and that this is one reason why performativity cannot be reduced to the idea of free, individual performance. We are called names and find ourselves living in a world of categories and descriptions way before we start to sort them critically and endeavour to change or make them on our own. In this way, we are, quite in spite of ourselves, vulnerable to, and affected by, discourses that we never chose. In a parallel way, I want to

suggest that there is a dual relationship to resistance that helps us understand what we mean by vulnerability. On the one hand, there is a resistance to vulnerability that takes both psychic and political dimensions; the psychic resistance to vulnerability wishes that it were never the case that discourse and power were imposed upon us in ways that we never chose, and so seeks to shore up a notion of individual sovereignty against the shaping forces of history on our embodied lives; on the other hand, the very meaning of vulnerability changes when it becomes understood as part of the very practice of political resistance.² Indeed, one of the important features of public assembly that we have recently seek confirm that political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability, and that plural or collective forms of resistance are structured very differently from the idea of a political subject that establishes its agency by vanquishing its vulnerability – I take this latter to be a masculinist ideal.

Regardless of the psychological resistance to vulnerability, there are legitimately political criticisms of some of its appropriations. Most prominently, there are those who argue that vulnerability cannot be the basis for group identification without strengthening paternalistic power. Once groups are marked as “vulnerable” within human rights discourse or legal regimes, those groups become reified as definitionally “vulnerable”, fixed in a political position of powerlessness and lack of agency. All the power belongs to the state and international institutions that are now supposed to offer them protection and advocacy. Such moves tend to under-estimate, or actively efface, modes of political agency and resistance that emerge within so-called vulnerable populations. To understand those extra-judicial modes of resistance, we would have to think about how resistance and vulnerability work together, something that the paternalistic model cannot do. The second major objection is that there are too many cynical and

self-interested appropriations of “vulnerability” by dominant groups, sometimes by colonial powers, who claim to be made unacceptably “vulnerable” by those who seek equality, democracy, the end of colonialism, or reparation for past injuries. In those instance, it is their privilege which has become “vulnerable” to being undone by increasing demands for equality and freedom. This use of “vulnerability” effaces the condition of vulnerability in which precarious populations live, and constitutes an ideological seizure of the term to expand and rationalize inequalities. In my view, “vulnerability” ought not to be affirmed as an existential condition, even though we are all subject to accidents, illness, and attacks that can expunge our lives quite quickly. Even so, it would not be a sufficient politics to embrace vulnerability or to get in touch with our feelings, or bare our faultlines as if that might launch a new mode of authenticity or inaugurate a new order of moral values or a sudden and widespread outbreak of “care.” I am not in favor of such moves toward authenticity as a way of doing politics, for it continues to locate vulnerability as the opposite of agency, and to identify agency with sovereign modes of defensiveness, and to fail to recognize the ways in which vulnerability can be an incipient and enduring moment of resistance. Once we understand the way vulnerability enters into agency, then our understanding of both terms can change, and the binary opposition between them can become undone. I consider the undoing of this binary a feminist task.

To summarize: vulnerability is not a subjective disposition, but a relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge upon or affect us in some way. As a way of being related to what is not me and not fully masterable, vulnerability is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and responsiveness are not clearly separable from one another, and not distinguished as separate moments in a sequence.

Of course, I am aware that I have used “resistance” in at least two ways: first, as the *resistance to* vulnerability that characterizes that form of thinking that models itself on mastery; second, *as a social and political form* that is informed by vulnerability, and so not one of its opposites. I have suggested that vulnerability is neither fully passive nor fully active, but operating in a middle region, a constituent feature of a human animal both affected and acting.³ I am thus led to think about those practices of deliberate exposure to police or military violence in which bodies, put on the line, either receive blows or seek to stop violence as living blockades or barriers. In such practices of non-violent resistance, we can come to understand bodily vulnerability as something that is actually marshaled or mobilized for the purposes of resistance. Of course, such a claim is controversial, since these practices can seem allied with self-destruction, but what interests me are those forms of non-violent resistance that mobilize vulnerability for the purposes of asserting existence, claiming the right to public space, equality, and opposing violent police, security, and military actions. We may think that these are isolated moments in which a group decides in advance to produce a blockade or to link arms in order to lay claim to public space or to resist being removed by the police. And that is surely true, as it was in Berkeley in 2011 when a group of students and colleagues were assaulted by police forces on campus at the very moment they were practicing non-violent protest.⁴ But consider as well that for transgendered people in many places in the world and women who seek to walk the street at night in safety, the moment of actively appearing on the street involves a deliberate risk of exposure to force. As we know, this is certainly true of groups who gather without permits and without weapons to oppose privatization and rally for democracy, as we saw in Gezi Park in Istanbul last June. Although such groups are shorn of legal and police protection, they are not

for that reason reduced to some sort of “bare life.” There is no sovereign power jettisoning the subject outside the domain of the political as such; rather, there is a renewal of popular sovereignty outside of, and against, the terms of state sovereignty and police power, one that involves a concerted and corporeal form of exposure and resistance.

Vulnerability can emerge within resistance movements and direct democracy precisely as a deliberate mobilization of bodily exposure. I suggested earlier that we had to deal with two senses of resistance here: resistance to vulnerability that belongs to certain projects of thought and certain formations of politics organized by sovereign mastery, and a resistance to unjust and violent regimes that mobilizes vulnerability as part of its own exercise of power. I have now tried to suggest that the body is exposed both to police force and to photographic capture, and that on certain occasions, not all, photographic journalism still has the power to exploit and reverse visual icons of sexualized violence. The scene of vulnerability is one in which there is always a force field to which any creature is exposed, and that includes both humans and their animal counterparts. It is not a subjective feature of the human nor is it precisely an existential condition. It names a set of relations between sensate beings and the force field of objects, organizations, life processes, and institutions that constitute the very possibility of livable life. And these relations invariably involve degrees and modalities of receptivity and responsiveness that, working together, do not precisely form a sequence. In political life, it surely seems that some injustice happens and then there is a response, but it may be that the response is happening as the injustice occurs, and this gives us another way to think about historical events, action, passion, and forms of resistance. It would seem that without being able to think about vulnerability, we cannot think about resistance, and that by thinking about resistance, we are

already underway, dismantling the resistance to vulnerability in order precisely to resist.

¹ See Wendy Brown's work on the privatization of public goods.

² For this double sense of resistance, see Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance*, London: Verso, 2007.

³ Hayden White, "Writing in the Middle Voice" in *The Fiction of Narrative*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) pp. 255-62

⁴ <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/UC-campus-police-move-in-on-student-protesters-2323667.php#photo-1828735>