

F I V E



FREEDOM'S SILENCES

HEGEL rendered philosophical what the ancient Athenian elites had struggled with existentially and tragically: if freedom inheres in the capacity to choose a course of action, then it is simultaneously realized and negated in the very act of choosing. Commitment to a particular course of action forecloses the freedom that enabled the commitment. In this regard, freedom is not merely paradoxical in its workings but self-canceling and, finally, unachievable. Hence Foucault's warning that freedom lies neither in institutions nor in ideals and proclamations, but only in practices.

As freedom is both realized and negated by choice, so is silence convened, broken, and organized by speech. Silence and speech are not only constitutive of but also modalities of one another. They are different kinds of articulation that produce as well as negate each other. Silence calls for speech, yet speech, because it is always particular speech, vanquishes other possible speech, thus canceling the promise of full representation heralded by silence. Silence, both constituted and broken by particular speech, is neither more nor less "truthful" than speech is, and neither more nor less regulatory. Speech harbors silences; silences harbor meaning. When silence is broken by speech, new silences are fabricated and enforced; when speech ends, the ensuing silence carries meaning that can only be metaphorized by speech, thus producing the conviction that silence speaks.

The belief that silence and speech are opposites is a conceit underlying most contemporary discourse about censorship and silence. This conceit enables both the assumption that censorship converts the truth of speech to the lie of silence and the assumption that when an enforced silence is broken, what emerges is truth borne by the vessel of authenticity or experience. Calling these assumptions into question means not only thinking about the relation between silence and speech differently but also rethinking the powers and potentials of silence.

Here is the way this problem unfolds politically: insurrection requires breaking silence about the very existence as well as the activity or injury of the collective insurrectionary subject. Even dreams of emancipation cannot take shape unless the discursively shadowy or altogether invisible character of those subjects, wounds, events, or activities is redressed, whether through slave ballads, the flaunting of forbidden love, the labor theory of value, or the quantification of housework. Nor are the silences constituted in discourses of subordination broken forever when they are broken once. They do not shatter the moment their strategic function has been exposed, but must be assaulted repeatedly with stories, histories, theories, and discourses in alternate registers until the silence itself is rendered routinely intelligible as a historically injurious force. In this way, those historically excluded from liberal personhood have proceeded against the spectrum of silences limning the universal claims of humanist discourse for the past several centuries.

Jews, immigrants, women, people of color, homosexuals, the unpropertied: all have pressed themselves into civic belonging not simply through asserting their personhood but through politicizing—articulating—the silent workings of their internally excluded presence within prevailing notions of personhood.

But while the silences in discourses of domination are a site for insurrectionary noise, while they are the corridors to be filled with explosive counter tales, it is also possible to make a fetish of breaking silence. It is possible as well that this ostensible tool of emancipation carries its own techniques of subjugation—that it converges with unemancipatory tendencies in contemporary culture, establishes regulatory norms, coincides with the disciplinary power of ubiquitous confessional practices; in short, it may feed the powers it meant to starve.

Neither a defense of silence nor an injunction to silence, this essay interrogates the presumed authenticity of “voice” in the implicit equation between speech and freedom entailed in contemporary affirmations of breaking silence. Borrowing tacitly from Foucault’s theorization of confessional discourse, Joan W. Scott’s problematization of experience, and Shoshana Felman’s and Dori Laub’s identification of our time as the age of testimony,¹ the essay asks whether our contemporary crisis of truth has not been displaced into an endless stream of words about ourselves, words that presume to escape epistemological challenges to truth because they are personal or experiential. It asks as well whether this stream of words does not perpetuate the crisis of which it is a symptom.

In the course of this inquiry, silence is considered as not simply an aesthetic but a political value, a means of preserving certain practices and dimensions of existence from regulatory power, from normative violence, as well as from the scorching rays of public exposure. A link is examined, too, between, on the one hand, a contemporary tendency concerning the lives of public figures—the confession or extraction of every detail (sexual, familial, therapeutic, financial) of private and personal life—and, on the other, a putatively countercultural or emancipatory practice: the compulsive putting into public discourse of heretofore hidden or private experiences, from catalogues of sexual pleasures to litanies of sexual abuses, from chronicles of eating disorders to diaries of home births and gay parenting. In linking these two phenomena—the privatization of public life via the mechanism of public exposure of private life on the one hand, and the compulsive and compulsory cataloguing of the details of marginalized lives on the other—I want to highlight a modality of regulation and depoliticization specific to our age that is not simply confessional but empties private life into the public domain. The effect is both to abet the steady commercialization and homogenization of intimate attachments, experiences, and emotions already achieved by the market and to usurp public space with often trivial matters, rendering the political personal in a fashion that leaves injurious social, political, and economic powers unremarked and untouched. In short, while intended as a practice of freedom (premised on the modernist conceit that the truth makes us free), these productions of truth may have the capacity not only to chain us to our injurious histories as well as the stations of our small lives, but to instigate the further regulation of those lives while depoliticizing their conditions.

My concern with what might be called compulsory discursivity and the presumed evil of silences has yet another source. Notwithstanding the engagement with Foucault by many intellectuals invested in contemporary progressive social movements, there is an oddly non- or pre-Foucauldian quality to much left and liberal debate about censorship and silencing. Expression is cast either as that which makes us free, tells “our” truth, and puts our truth into circulation, *or* as that which oppresses us by featuring “their” truth in the form of pornography, hate speech, harassment, or the representation of the world from “the male point of view.”² Though one side in the debate argues for more expression on our part—for example, by making our own porn or telling our own stories—and the other argues for less on “their” part, both sides nonetheless subscribe to an *expressive* and *repressive* notion of speech, agreeing on its capacity to express the truth of an individual’s desire or condition, or to repress that truth. Both equate freedom with voice and visibility, both assume recognition to be unproblematic when we tell our own story, and both assume that such recognition is the material of power as well as pleasure.³ Neither confronts the regulatory potential in speaking ourselves, its capacity to bind rather than emancipate us.⁴

To inaugurate an analysis of the relationship between silence, speech, and freedom that questions the conventional discursive order in which they appear, I want to reflect on several passages from Foucault’s work. The first is from *The History of Sexuality*.

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. . . . Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.⁵

Foucault here marks the ambiguity of silence in relationship to power, insisting that silence functions not only as a “shelter *for* power” but also as a shelter *from* it. Foucault’s example is the putative freedom of homosexual practice in a historical age when there is no formal discourse for or about it: “the nearly universal reticence in talking about [sodomy] made possible a twofold operation: . . . an extreme severity . . . and a [widespread] tolerance.”⁶ This understanding of the ambivalent “freedom” contained in the silence or “secret” of homosexuality is corroborated by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz’s work on orality, law, and silence in the making of the Puerto Rican homosexual body, and by M. Jacqui Alexander’s tracing of the production of “lesbian” as a category (heretofore unmarked in law) by the 1986 Sexual Offences Bill of Trinidad and Tobago.⁷ Albeit quite differently, each reflects on the extent to which a silence “broken” by the production of a new public or institutional discourse may bring otherness *violently* into being as it brings a designated subject respectively into abjection, censure, or regulation. In Lugo-Ortiz’s words, “through orality, a community that aspires to a totalizing self-definition exercises its law and its violence. Silence, in this case, may then be read as a radical deconstructive proposition against any pretense to political absolutism.”⁸ In the debate over the Sexual Offences Bill that is the subject of Alexander’s study, lesbian sexuality

emerges into public discourse in Trinidad and Tobago only for purposes of stigmatizing and criminalizing it, as part of the criminalization of all extramarital and nonreproductive sexual practices. What each case makes clear is that while to be invisible within a local discourse may occasion the injuries of social liminality, such suffering may be mild compared to that of radical denunciation, hystericization, exclusion, or criminalization.

The paradoxical capacity of silence to engage opposites with regard to power—both to shelter power and to serve as a barrier against power—is rarely accented in Foucault’s thinking as a consequence of his emphasis (elsewhere) on discourse as a vehicle of power. In casting silence as a potential refuge from power, I do not think he is reneging on this emphasis or suggesting a prediscursive existence to things. Critical here is the difference between what Foucault calls *unitary* discourses, which regulate and colonize, and those that do not perform these functions with the same social pervasiveness, even while they do not escape the tendency of all discourse to establish norms by which it regulates and excludes. Through this distinction one can make sense of Foucault’s otherwise inexplicable reference to sex in the eighteenth century as being “driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence,” or his troubling example of the village simpleton whose “inconsequential” sexual game with a little girl was suddenly subjected to medical, judicial, and popular scrutiny and condemnation.⁹ Neither in these cases nor in others where Foucault seems to imply a “freer,” because prediscursive, existence to certain practices does he appear to mean that they really occurred “outside” discourse; the point is rather that they had not yet been brought into the pervasive disciplinary or biopolitical discourses of the age—science, psychiatry, medicine, law, pedagogy.¹⁰ Silence, as Foucault affirms it, is then identical neither with secrecy nor with not speaking. It instead signifies a particular relation to regulatory discourses, as well as a possible niche for the practice of freedom *within* those discourses.

Put differently, if discourses posit and organize silences, then silences themselves must be understood as discursively produced, as part of discourse, rather than as its opposite. Hence silences are no more free of organization by power than speech is, nor are they any more inventable or protectable by us than speech is. Yet, and paradoxically, silence—even that produced within discourse—may also function as that which discourse has not penetrated, as a scene of practices that escape the regulatory functions of discourse. It is this latter function that renders silence itself a source of protection and potentially even a source of power. The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution may be understood as mobilizing precisely this power against discourse, even as the amendment itself functions discursively and leads a distinctly discursive life.

If, as Foucault insists, freedom is a practice (rather than an achievement, condition, or institution), then the possibility of *practicing* freedom in the context of regulatory discourses occurs in the interstices of a given discourse as well as in resistance to the discourse.¹¹ In other words, the possibility can occur either within or against the discourse but is produced by the discourse in either case. Silence can function as speech in both kinds of practices of freedom, as becomes clear in the following anecdote offered by Foucault:

Maybe another feature of [my] appreciation of silence is related to the

obligation of speaking. I lived as a child in a petit bourgeois, provincial milieu in France and the obligation of speaking, of making conversation with visitors, was for me something both very strange and very boring. I often wondered why people had to speak.¹²

In a lecture at the Swedish Academy on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Toni Morrison also resets the conventional antinomy between silence and speech. Dwelling on the ambiguity of the power of language, she argues that certain kinds of language are themselves silencing, capable of violence and even murder, as well as themselves “susceptible to death, erasure”:

A dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring. Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than to maintain the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect, for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smothered to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor, polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago.¹³

While Morrison is here concerned primarily with bureaucratic and other official languages, any language of regulation, including those originally designed on behalf of emancipation, has the potential to become official in the sense she describes. Indeed, language that cannot form or tolerate new ideas, language that cannot tell another story or fill baffling silences, language that functions as a suit of armor—such language would seem to characterize a number of progressive political discourses that have retreated from emancipatory aims and consolidated into institutional ones. Consider how both the discourses of liberalism and of Marxism came to function in this fashion, notwithstanding their original liberatory promise. Consider as well how often the language of political identity is today experienced as a policing language, even and especially by those whom the language intended to figure for emancipation. “A husk from which the knight departed long ago . . .”

Silence can be an effect of discourse; it can also function as resistance to regulatory discourse. And just as silenced discourses may contain elements of freedom, places unnoticed and hence unregulated by powerful interests, so their disinterring, even by the well-intentioned genealogist, can signal the end of their existence as a preserve for freedom. The latter is the subject of an extended meditation by Foucault about the problem of excavating subjugated knowledges:

is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, recolonisation? In fact, those unitary discourses, which first disqualified and then ignored them when they made their appearance, are, it

seems, quite ready now to annex them, to take them back within the fold of their own discourse and to invest them with everything this implies in terms of their effects of knowledge and power.¹⁴

Here, Foucault's concern is less with disrupting the conventional modernist equation of power with speech on one side and of oppression with silence on the other than with the ways in which potentially subversive discourse, born of exclusion and marginalization, can be colonized by that which produced it, much as countercultural fashion is routinely commodified by the corporate textile industry. While "disqualified" discourses are an effect of domination, they nevertheless potentially function as oppositional when they are deployed by those who inhabit them. However, when annexed by those unitary discourses to which they are in putative opposition, they become a particularly potent source of regulation, carrying as they do intimate and detailed knowledge of their subjects. Thus, Foucault's worry would appear to adhere not simply to the study but to the overt political mobilization of oppositional discourses. Consider, for example, how the discourse of multiculturalism has been annexed by mainstream institutions to generate new modalities of essentialized racial discourse; how "premenstrual syndrome" has been rendered a debilitating disease in medical and legal discourses; how "battered women's syndrome" has been deployed in the courtroom to defend women who strike back at their assailants by casting them as subrational, egoless victims of male violence; or how some women's response to some pornography was generalized by the Meese Commission on pornography as the violence done to all women by all pornography.¹⁵

Consider, more generally, attempts at codifying feminist discourses of women's experience in the unitary and universal discourse of the law. What happens when legal universalism's silence about women—that is, its failure to recognize or remedy the material of women's subordination—is remedied with discourses specifying women's experience and codifying the category of women through this specification? Catharine MacKinnon, for example, expressly aims to write "women's experience into law"; but as many other feminists have remarked, this begs the question of which women's experience(s), drawn from which historical moments, culture, race, and class strata, are to be recorded. Indeed, what does it mean to write historically and culturally circumscribed experience into an ahistorical discourse, the universalist discourse of law? Is it possible to do this without rendering "experience" as ontology and "perspective" as Truth, without unifying this ontology and this Truth in the Subject of Woman, and without encoding them in law as the basis of women's rights? What if, for example, the identity of women as keyed to sexual violation is an expressly late-twentieth-century and white middle-class construction of femininity, consequent to a radical deprivatization of sexuality on the one side and the erosion of other elements of compulsory heterosexuality—such as a severely gendered division of social labor—on the other? Moreover, does a definition of women as sexual subordinates, and the encoding of this definition in law, work to liberate women from sexual subordination, or does it, paradoxically, legally reinscribe femaleness as sexual violability? If the law *produces* the subjects it claims to protect or emancipate, how might installation of women's experience as "sexual violation" in the law reiterate rather than repeal this identity? And might this installation be particularly unemancipatory

for women whose lived experience is not that of sexual subordination to men but that, for example, of sexual outlaw?

These questions suggest that in legally codifying a fragment of an insurrectionary discourse as a timeless truth, interpellating women as unified in their victimization, and casting the “free speech” of men as that which “silences” and thus subordinates women, MacKinnon not only opposes bourgeois liberty to substantive equality but potentially intensifies the regulation of gender and sexuality in the law, abetting rather than contesting the production of gender identity as sexual. In short, as a regulatory fiction of a particular identity is deployed to displace the hegemonic fiction of universal personhood, the discourse of rights converges insidiously with the discourse of disciplinarity to produce a spectacularly potent mode of juridical-regulatory domination.¹⁶

This problem is not specific to MacKinnon’s work nor even to feminist legal reform, although it emerges with particular acuteness in both. Rather, MacKinnon’s and kindred efforts at bringing subjugated discourses into the law merely constitute examples of what Foucault identified as the risk of recodification and recolonization of “disinterred knowledges” by those “unitary discourses, which first disqualified and then ignored them when they made their appearance.” These efforts suggest how the work of breaking silence can metamorphose into new techniques of domination, how our truths can become our rulers rather than our emancipators, how our confessions become the norms by which we are regulated.

Though this kind of regulatory function is familiar enough to students of legal and bureaucratic discourse, it is less frequently recognized and perhaps more disquieting in putatively countercultural discourse, when confessing injury can become that which attaches us to the injury, paralyzes us within it, and prevents us from seeking or even desiring a status other than that of injured. In an age of social identification through attributes marked as culturally significant—gender, race, sexuality, and so forth—confessional discourse, with its truth-bearing status in a postepistemological universe, not only regulates the confessor in the name of freeing her, as Foucault described that logic, but extends beyond the confessing individual to constitute a regulatory truth about the identity group: confessed truths are assembled and deployed as “knowledge” about the group. This phenomenon would seem to undergird a range of recurring troubles in feminism, from the “real woman” rejoinder to poststructuralist deconstructions of her to totalizing descriptions of women’s experience that are the inadvertent effects of various kinds of survivor stories. Thus, for example, the porn star who feels miserably exploited, violated, and humiliated in her work invariably monopolizes the feminist truth about sex work, as the girl with math anxieties constitutes the feminist truth about women and math; eating disorders have become the feminist truth about women and food, as sexual abuse and violation occupy the feminist knowledge terrain of women and sexuality. In other words, even as feminism aims to affirm diversity among women and women’s experiences, confession as the site of production of truth, converging with feminist suspicion and de-authorization of truth from other sources, tends to reinstate a unified discourse in which the story of greatest suffering becomes the true story of woman. (This may constitute part of the rhetorical purchase of confessional discourse in a

postfoundational epistemological era: confession substitutes for the largely discredited charge of false consciousness, on the one hand, and for generalized truth claims rooted in science, God, or nature on the other.) Thus, the adult who does not manifestly suffer from her or his childhood sexual experience, the lesbian who does not feel shame, the woman of color who does not primarily or “correctly” identify with her marking as such—these figures are excluded as bona fide members of the identity categories that also claim them. Their status within these discourses is that of being “in denial,” of suffering from “false consciousness,” or of being a “race traitor.” This is the norm-making process in traditions of “breaking silence,” which, ironically, silence and exclude the very persons these traditions mean to empower.

While these practices tacitly silence those who do not share the experiences of those whose suffering is most marked (or whom the discourse produces as suffering markedly), they also condemn those whose sufferings they record to a permanent identification with that suffering. Here, there is a *temporal* ensnaring in “the folds of our own discourses” insofar as our manner of identifying ourselves in speech condemns us to live in a present dominated by the past. But what if speech and silence aren’t really opposites? Indeed, what if to speak incessantly of one’s suffering is to silence the possibilities of overcoming it, of living beyond it, of identifying as something other than it? What if this incessant speech overwhelms not only the experiences of others but also alternative (unutterable, traumatized, fragmentary, or unassimilable) zones of one’s own experience? Conversely, what if a certain modality of silence about one’s suffering—and we might consider modalities of silence to be as varied as modalities of speech—*articulates* a variety of possibilities not otherwise available to the sufferer?

In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi proffers drowning as a metaphor for the initial experience of entering a concentration camp, particularly for those who did not speak German or Polish: “filled with a dreadful sound and fury signifying nothing: a hubbub of people without names or faces drowned in a continuous, deafening background noise from which, however, the human word did not surface.” This is a drowning in a world of unfamiliar as well as terrifying words and noise, a world of no civil structure yet so crowded with humanity that one’s own humanness becomes a question. Primo Levi makes drowning function as a symbol for a lost linguistic order that itself signifies a lost civil order, for being at sea in words that do not communicate and by which one cannot communicate.¹⁷ In a radically different context, Adrienne Rich also relates drowning to speech: “Your silence today is a pond where drowned things live.”¹⁸ Allowing, perhaps perversely, Rich’s words to rest on Levi’s, need her line only be read in its most obvious meaning—as an injunction to speak or die, a mandate to speak in order to recover the drowned things, recover life? What if the accent marks were placed differently, so that silence becomes a place where drowned things *live*—a place where Levi’s drowning inmates survive despite being overwhelmed by the words that fill and consume the air necessary for life? What if the drowned things *live* in the pond, where it is silent, as they could not survive if brought back into the exposure of light and air, the cacophony of the camp? What if silence is a reprieve from drowning in words that do not communicate or confer recognition, that only bombard or drown?¹⁹ Is this not one way also to understand

the Constitution's Fifth Amendment, an amendment that was often seized as a literal lifeline by those the House Un-American Activities Committee persecuted in the 1950s?

This possibility, of course, is heavy with paradox insofar as drowning already signals death, and a pond where drowned things live therefore harbors death rather than life. But the paradox may be a productive one: perhaps there are dead or deadening (antilife) things that must be allowed residence in a pond of silence rather than surfaced into discourse if life is to be lived without being claimed by their weight. Certain experiences—concentration camp existence or childhood abuse—may claim their subjects and be conserved when they are incessantly remembered in speech, when survivors can only and always speak of what they almost did not survive and thus cannot break with that threat to live in a present not dominated by it. What if, too, this endless speaking about one's past of suffering is an attempt to expurgate guilt about what one did not do to prevent the suffering, an attempt that is doomed insofar as the speaking actually perpetuates the guilt by disavowing it?²⁰

If to speak repeatedly of a trauma (which, by definition, carries wordless and even unintelligible content) is a mode of encoding it as identity, it may be the case that drowned things must be consigned to live in a pond of silence in order to make a world—a future—in parameters not fully given by the trauma. Put slightly differently by Primo Levi, “a memory evoked too often, and in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype . . . crystallized, perfected, adorned, *installing itself in the place of the raw memory and growing at its expense*.”²¹ Many contemporary narratives of suffering would seem to bear precisely this character; rather than working through the “raw memory” to a place of emancipation, discourses of survivorship become stories by which one lives, or refuses to live, in the present. There is a fine but critical distinction here between, on the one hand, reentering a trauma, speaking its unspeakable elements, and even politicizing it, in order to reconfigure the trauma and the traumatized subject, and, on the other hand, narrating the trauma in such a way as to preserve it by resisting the pain of it, thereby preserving the traumatized subject. While such a distinction is probably not always sustainable, it may be all that secures the possibility that we dwell in something other than the choice between a politics of pain and a politics of pain's disavowal.

To be sure, trauma is only one potential constituent of identity and its problematic relationship to speech and emancipation. Subordination is lived in many ways that have little or nothing to do with trauma. Thus, we might ask more generally if, by putting all into discourse, those attempting to emerge from a history of subordination do not risk sacrificing the rewards of any fragile hold acquired on autonomy and on the capacity to *craft* their lives and experiences rather than living almost fully at the behest of others. If, as Hannah Arendt maintained, some experiences “cannot withstand the glare of public light without being extinguished,”²² do those traveling under the sign of queer, colored, or female not set at risk this recent, tenuous, and partial acquisition? Consider the pleasures of writing and other artistic practices, therapeutic work intended to fortify or emancipate rather than discipline (femininity) or “cure” (homosexuality), relatively uncoerced sexual lives, and some modicum of choice in reproductive and productive work. When all such experiences are put into discourse—when sexual, emotional, reproductive, and artistic

lives are all exhaustively chronicled and thereby subjected to normativizing discourses—might this imperil the experiences of autonomy, creativity, privacy, and bodily integrity so long denied those whose subjugation included, *inter alia*, sexual violation or other deprivations of privacy? Are those subjected through sexuality, race, and gender so habituated to being without privacy and autonomy that they would compulsively evade and sabotage them? Do we presume we have nothing of value to protect from public circulation and scrutiny? Are we compelled to reiterate the experience of the historically subordinated: to be without a room of one's own, without a zone of privacy in which lives go unreported, without a domain of creativity free from surveillance—this time by our own eyes? Are we so accustomed to being watched that we cannot feel real, cannot feel our experiences to be real, unless we are watching and reporting them?

While there are disturbing ways in which the practice of compulsory discursivity would appear to recapitulate the historical, psychopolitical terms of subordinated subjects, there are also ways in which this practice coincides with a contemporary cultural tendency toward the glorification of banal personal experiences and unschooled opinions. Ours is a time of diarrhetic speech and publication—from the unfathomable amount of technical, political, commercial, and personal information that travels the Internet to the opinionated ignorance that animates much of A.M. talk radio. As many cultural critics have noted, notwithstanding or perhaps in proportion to the rise of illiteracy and aliteracy in the United States, today anyone's political opinion is worthy of the radio waves, and everyone's personal life is worthy of television exposure, a memoir, and, of course, a blog. Is this phenomenon, with its ability to displace world events and learned reflection, an effect of the confessional subject run amok, along with its hold on Truth in a post-foundational age? Or is it a kind of anxious filling of the void where meaning, profundity, and world history are said to have lived prior to their disenchantment? To what extent does the populist valorization of the common man, common sense, and the common experience recall the disdain for knowledge and reflection that was, historically, part of the material out of which European fascism was fashioned?

While each of these speculations may shed partial light on the explosion of banal and personal talk in the public media, the most important explanation may issue from a telling feature of this kind of expression—namely, that very little of it bears the character of either social connection or reflection. Most of this speech confesses, pronounces, or declares, and practically none of it is aimed at developing community with others or with working through experience or transforming understanding. In other words, speech that is aimed at bringing us together and that glorifies the common person paradoxically eschews the tonal and idiomatic material of connection. This paradox must be read as a symptom, and in particular a symptom of the predicament of the sovereign subject in a world of historically unparalleled global complexity and contingency. This subject who is so radically in need of external resources for understanding its context and production in our time is deprived of those very resources through pronunciative speaking. Indeed, the heavily defended creature conveys through this noncommuning speech, this tenacious dwelling in his or her own experience and opinion, a kind of rampant individual xenophobia that itself must be read as a terrible fear of disintegration or dissolution

through connection, as the anxiety of an already profoundly weakened or disintegrated subject. The cult of personal experience and opinion, then, warns of the shakiness of the sovereign subject and of its extreme vulnerability to domination, even as this warning is expressed as a kind of hypersovereignty and hyperindividualism.

If the compulsion to put all into discourse can be read as a problematic remnant not only of particular histories of subordination but also of more generic anxieties of our time, then our capacity to be silent in certain venues might become the measure of our desire for freedom, including a desire to resist this discourse of anxiety masquerading as populism. The measure of this desire, of course, requires carefully distinguishing between the pleasures and freedoms of silence on the one hand and habituation to being silenced on the other. Also necessary is a second distinction between keeping one's counsel in order to articulate a spectrum of nonobvious possibilities and silence as the consummate gesture of passive aggression. Moreover, the desire for freedom requires not only the development of skills for silence but of skills for speech that is neither confessional nor normative in a moralizing sense (the latter, according to Nietzsche, is always a symptom of subordination or identification with subordination). Freedom requires the capacity for a kind of public speaking that neither demands concurrence from others nor entails the establishment of new norms by which to live; rather, this kind of speech willingly proffers ideas one would argue with and modify according to other characterologically public (as opposed to confessional) arguments.

It is tempting to end on this note. But it favors one side of a paradox about silence and silencing without recalling the other. For while silence can be a mode of resistance to power, including to our own productions of regulatory power, it is not yet freedom precisely insofar as it constitutes resistance to domination rather than its own discursive bid for hegemony. Put another way, one challenge to the convention of equating speaking with power and silence with powerlessness pertains to the practice of "refusing to speak" as a mode of resistance. Here, even as silence is a response to domination, it is not *enforced* from above but rather *deployed* from below: refusing to speak is a method of refusing colonization, of refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or in subjection through regulation.

Yet it would be a mistake to value this resistance too highly, for it is, like most rights claims, a defense in the context of domination, a strategy for negotiating domination, rather than a sign of emancipation from it. In *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, the black legal scholar Patricia Williams coins a provocative phrase that captures this feature of silence as discourse. Following a disturbing encounter with some obnoxious young students who jostled her off the sidewalk in a largely white college town, she speaks of "pursuing her way, *manumitted into silence*."²³ In this paradoxical locution, Williams intimates that purchased emancipation from slavery conferred a right to silence, one to which, however, she is also condemned. "Manumitted into silence"—emancipated into silence—no longer a subject of coerced speech, no longer invaded in every domain of her being, yet also not heard, seen, recognized, wanted as a speaking being in the public or social realm. Perhaps then, one historical-political place of silence for collective subjects emerging into history is this crossed one: a place of potentially pleasurable reprieve in

newly acquired zones of freedom and privacy, yet a place of “freedom from” that is not yet freedom to make the world.