

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“An afterword should leave the skin quickly, like an alcohol rub,” Anne Carson writes. An academic acknowledgement may feel like an alcohol rub, but it is meant to do the opposite: not sting, but lure in, not evaporate, but remain on it, like honey. An acknowledgment is where academics admit that we are part of what the early modern *philosophes* depict as a busy beehive. We are writing for a community of peers engaging with similar ideas, and aim to give our subjects the intellectual treatment they deserve. We are also writing within and for the context of our time. The philosophes wrote during the age of liberal revolution; I’m writing in a time that has witnessed mass violence—my country of origin included—the collapse of liberal institutions, and unprecedented environmental crisis.

The German Jewish intellectuals discussed in this book dealt with similar issues in their own time, and chose to wrestle with them by thinking about fundamental forms of equality: the equality of life, devoid of status and identity, beyond method. They used concepts of

time, the time of life, as the starting point for understanding every political, social, and economic system. They chose the language of temporal existence as a measure against which no institution can claim victory. This is what I depict in this book as an ontological equality of life, or non-anthropocentric humanism. It is the irony of history that, with time, their own critical systems were institutionalized as well, and became a matter of (academic) status. Honey indeed, but a tad too sticky and sweet. Considering that a century has passed since they began publishing their work, it is not surprising that the fault lines of their systems are becoming apparent and that the questions they asked must now be reformulated. Still, these thinkers remain a source of inspiration for those of us who want to think (and feel) with the vanquished, the underrepresented, and the “unworthy of life.”

The people and institutions I mention below have inspired my own thinking for longer than I can recall. It is a group of people whose lively intellectual cross-pollination inspired not just ideas, but an intellectual ethos I am grateful for. In other words, this acknowledgment expresses a debt much greater and longer than for this specific book. My colleagues at Lehigh University were helpful in giving me the time to complete this book with several grants and leaves that supported the work. I am deeply grateful to William Bulman and Robert Flowers for their profound institutional and personal support. Taieb Berrada and Chad Kautzer shared ongoing conversations with me about these and other topics. The Berman Center for Jewish Studies, especially Jodi Eichler-Levin and Hartley Lachter, gave unreserved support to the project. John Savage and the late John Pettegrew—dearly and painfully missed—challenged me in different, though always affectionate, ways.

I was lucky to present parts of the book in various prestigious forums, which opened new worlds of knowledge to me. Sylvie Anne Goldberg invited me to the École des hautes études (EHESS) for a monthlong seminar where I was able to present the different chapters of the book. Na’ama Rokem invited me to serve as the Greenberg Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago in the fall of 2022, where I presented the key arguments of the book to a forum that included, to my utter delight, Dipesh Chakrabarty, François

Hartog, Orit Bashkin, Michael Geyer, and Kenneth Moss. All of them became close compatriots in the fight over (the history of) time. I was lucky to win fellowships at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies (UPenn) and the Remarque Institute (NYU), where I met intellectuals I came to deeply care about. I continue to connect and share ideas and work with many of them.

Many friends offered their unwavering support during the process: I was repeatedly astounded by the generosity and never-ending patience of Ethan Kleinberg and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite. Alys George, Karin Loevy, Galili Shahar, and Eugene Sheppard, allowed me to test out ideas on them and gave helpful recommendations. Frances Tanzer read essays and parts of the final manuscript, gave me sage advice, and drew striking images that I integrated into my work. David N. Myers was not just a source of intellectual inspiration but also a personal mentor who never failed to offer support and a warm, encouraging word. In Berlin I met with Evelyn Annus, Eva Horn, Martin Treml, Arnd Wedemeyer, and Daniel Weidner, who became, to my great joy, close personal friends. The Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur und Kulturforschung (ZfL, Berlin) became an intellectual home, and I am grateful to Sigrid Weigel and Eva Geulen for their support. I consider Saul Friedlaender, Anson Rabinbach, Vivian Liska, and Enzo Traverso my spiritual and intellectual guides. Over the years, they heard much about this project and supported it in different ways.

I owe a great debt to the editors and commentators whose work deserves recognition: the brilliant Michael Lesley and Sophie Duvernoy helped me turn this incredibly dense intertextual universe into a comprehensible one. Andrea Dara Cooper, Ethan Kleinberg, and Patchen Markell were ideal readers for the manuscript, gave careful reflections on the conceptual framework, and valuable notes and recommendations. At Signale, Paul Fleming, Mahinder Kingra, and Kizer Walker embraced the manuscript with open arms, and then worked to bring it through the revision and production process swiftly and generously.

Earlier, and considerably different, versions of sections of this book have appeared in the following places: the Bachofen section in chapter 3 supported a different argument in my first book, *The*

Philosophy of Life and Death: Ludwig Klages and the Rise of a Nazi Biopolitics (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); the argument connecting Benjamin's analysis of human time to the Anthropocene was developed in "Benjamin and the Anthropocene," in *Forces of Education: Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Pedagogy*, ed. Dominik Zechner and Dennis Johannssen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 211–224. The brief reference to Paul Celan's poem "Close, in the Aorta's Arch" was the focus of a close reading in "Near the End: Celan between Scholem and Heidegger," *German Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 465–484. I thank the editors and reviewers who read those earlier essays for their careful work.

Finally, while writing this book I never ceased to think about my children, Asaf and Yael, and my partner of three decades, Avigail. I cannot think about time, life, and what it means to love these two things, without them. It makes no sense to thank someone for who they are, but I know that I owe all I do to them. This book is dedicated to them. They, and the critical intellectuals I mention above, give me the courage to adopt the motto that concludes this book: *to not build on the good old days, but on the bad new ones.*¹

1. Walter Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 219.

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