

through love
through falling

an introduction to a conversation with
Juliet Brough Rogers

Bodies that have lost their authority and desire its recapture. Selves that tremble, until strange. Mutilated others, reduced to their meaningless flesh. Although specific and diverse in scope, the work of Juliet Brough Rogers could be said to continually return to the dynamics of these incomplete bodies — these bodies that are cut, split, or fallen — and their movement towards the impossible objects of their desire. Explicitly political in orientation, her analysis moves through a variety of contexts, ideas and positions — such as the relation between female genital mutilation and the law, the pleasure of torture, or the scene and script of political protest — these bodies, and their desiring pieces becoming not exceptional, nor necessarily evident, but a shattered and shadowy starting point for analysis. Surveying these shadows, tracing the gaps between intention and effect, between the conditional and the unspoken, Rogers comes to haunt her reader with urgent and uncomfortable questions: How might actions that intend change instead reinforce identity? How can we understand the political effects of violence? How might mourning freedom become a necessary political act?

These questions are however preceded by more foundational ones — what is meant by an incomplete body? Why are the objects they move toward impossible? Using Lacanian psychoanalysis as a tool, Rogers employs a model of subjectivity that is fundamentally split, shaped by lack and riddled with excess — a subjectivity whose once seeming continuity of desire has been irreversibly broken apart and restructured by the forces of language and the law. This restructuring entails an ongoing process of subjection — of being *subject to* these forces — a reality where language can neither reflect nor maintain any essential object or meaning, where the law takes effect through regimes of prohibition, regulation and suppression. This process, as Rogers reminds us, hurts — the law functioning as a cut, language as loss — a scene of trauma where the self and its desire can never be the same again. Crucially the trauma of this lack is not static, but rather dynamic, its presence and force constantly mediated and maintained by those we call or imagine as father, master, policeman, doctor, captain, judge, leader, king or sovereign — or the many other symbolic and physical bodies that represent and enact the law.

It is from within this shattered scene of trauma, between the subject and the sovereign, that love stages its intervention — as the fantasy of escaping the cut of the law, as the continual attempt at recapturing the lost object. As such love becomes a force that transforms these incomplete bodies into sites of impossible economies — where investments and attachments are made with objects that balance on a promise — to live without loss. These promise-objects — these fleeting assemblages of knowledge and flesh — are always shifting and multiple, refusing any ordinary form or knowable shape, caught in the flow between desire and the sovereign, or whomever the figure is who can give this object back, who can reverse this foundational cut. Love, as this material fantasy, as a violent hope, or as a failed repetition of completion, is thus a constant effect of and investment in the law and the sovereign who symbolises it.

Turning to Rogers' work, this space of the incomplete body — its economies, promise-objects and sovereigns — is always already public space. It is through the inter-relation of legal precedents, psychoanalytic case studies, cultural texts and identity positions, that Rogers draws out this contingent and shifting scene of love, its pleasures and mutilations, its exclusions and denials. Although the complexity of Rogers' analysis can only be truly captured in its detail — a requirement impossible within the scope of this text — what first becomes important is the connection Rogers makes between love and freedom — that the completion love promises translates politically into an investment in a social ideal of freedom. This investment leads to complex and multiple effects, where for instance, any call to constrain or prohibit the actions of others — to say 'yes' to the law of the sovereign — becomes an attempt to direct the the cut of the law elsewhere, to construct a scene where the sovereign 'only loves me' at the exclusion of unloveable others. Love, in this way, constructs a fantasy where freedom becomes something to be given by the sovereign so long as you follow his script, a fantasy that becomes painful and impossible when the sovereign arbitrarily takes it away.

To follow the trajectory of Rogers' work, the failure of love to return becomes exhausting. If protection or freedom cannot be secured, what would it mean to reject the love of the sovereign? What would it mean to resist the symbols of the law? This, to conclude, would signify something like falling for Rogers, seeking to fall between the shadows of subjectivity, falling outside the sight of the sovereign, and balancing ambivalently between complete destruction and unknowable possibilities.