

3. Fury Road

It would be fascinating to follow the stories of various characters in George Miller's 2015 film "Mad Max: Fury Road." The subtitle of the film suggests the centrality of the theme of moving with passion and purpose.¹ There is a bit of ambiguity regarding the road referenced by the subtitle, "Fury Road." It seems to be the name of the road taken by Imperator Furiosa driving the War Rig to Fuel Town and Bullet Farm where she is to trade water and mother's milk for fuel and bullets. Yet Furiosa almost immediately abandons this road and heads across the open desert to the destination she calls "the green place" in pursuit of her redemption and hope for the wives of Immortan Joe she has secreted. The word "fury" indicates an unrestrained or violent anger, rage, or passion and indeed this characterizes nearly every second of this filmic journey, so it seems impossible to not identify the track taken by Furiosa also by the term "Fury Road."

In Greek mythology Fury names a female spirit of punishment often represented as one of three goddesses, the Furies or Erinyes, who executed curses pronounced on criminals. Fury tortured the guilty with stings of conscience and inflicted famines and pestilences. Some ancient literature recounts how the Furies are persuaded by Athena to become protectors of justice and to assure the prosperity of the city of Athens. Furiosa, joined by the five wives of Immortan Joe, might be understood as modeled on these figures of Greek mythology. Perhaps the film, enhanced by its severely dystopian setting, is a version of the old story that life is a journey with every moment invigorated by the presence of grave risk yet is a moving on that must be pursued with passion and the courage to act strongly and with unwavering conviction even if supported only by hope and redemption.

If this film does nothing else, it demonstrates that, whatever the seeming conditions, one must keep moving. I can't imagine anyone experiencing this film who wouldn't repeatedly feel, "okay now these folks are royally screwed, there is no way in hell they can get out of this one" (I thought this several times), only to be shown that moving on is living on; neither are for the feeble or passionless. There evolves a situation during the last third of the film, which is devoted to the return journey to the Citadel, when Max is hanging upside down outside the driver's door between the huge wheels of the War Rig held there only by Furiosa's grip on his foot. Furiosa is seriously injured, as is Max, both victims of the crazy polecats. The War Rig is not running well allowing other huge and lethal vehicles to close in on them just inches away from Max. One of the wives has been snatched. The old Vulvalini known as The Seed Keeper is gravely wounded and dying in the front seat beside Furiosa. At this point I found myself saying, "Okay they are done for!" although I think I used more colorful language. Nux, the War Boy turned an ally to Furiosa by love, has been working on the failing engine, despite doing so while they are all traveling down the road at crazy speeds. At the last possible instant, he succeeds and the engine roars back to full power giving them the energy boost to get out of the mess. Whew! For the fortieth time.

The cars in the Mad Max films play an important role in this dystopian world. They are ingenious works of dystopian welded art. They are the magnificent "makings" of the dystopians. The vehicle art and the remarkable mechanical functioning of the cars are stunning testimony to the ingenuity of human makers at the worst of times and in the worst of situations, to the persistence of human creativity even in dystopia. The cars have their own personalities; they are larger than life characters often dwarfing their human drivers and passengers. The drivers and passengers often seem extensions of the cars rather than the other way around. Indeed, the

dystopian religion of the Citadel seems to center for many of the young men on these machines. Boys and their cars! The mechanics comprise a ritualized cult centering on cars, the “Cult of the V-8.” Their individual totems are their personally designed steering wheels. There is much to marvel in dystopian technology. It demonstrates an ingenuity and cleverness and individuality that has all but disappeared in contemporary high tech. It is a technology of raw power and movement, yet it is also one of individuality, ingenuity, distinctness, folk art, and the wholly unexpected. It is a post-manufacturing technology; that is, these makings are mostly remakings comprised of assemblages of found manufactured junk, bricolage. Surely this ingenuity and cleverness is at the heart of “steampunk” as a technology and a style. Steampunk conjoins steam era industrial technology with advanced electronic technology. In “Mad Max: Fury Road” the human powered wheel mechanized elevators that are capable of lifting the huge War Rig up the side of the butte is technologically amazing and even plausible.²

Max’s face grill inhibits and controls his speech; the chastity belts of the wives control their sexual activity. These devices are somewhat equivalent in the film it would seem; male speech compared with or equated to female sexuality. Water and mother’s milk are literally equated with gasoline and bullets as exchangeable commodities. Both Max and the wives experience liberation by the cutting away and removal of these mechanical restraints; these are personal and gendered freedoms won on Fury Road. One memorable moment is when one of the wives gives her removed chastity belt a swift kick before they travel on. Max is being drained of blood, given to Nux, the terminally ill driver of the car to which Max is attached like a hood ornament.³ Nux refers to Max as his “blood bag.” Surely Max’s posture, hanging from a cross, and his sacrifice (though an unwilling one) of his blood for others are intended to invoke the crucifixion and connect Max with Christ (the Savior). Yet, it is the flashback images of his

daughter, apparently killed before the apocalypse when Max was a cop, that repeatedly saves and motivates Max. And if there is a signal act of self-sacrifice it is done by Nux, willingly killing himself in a way that assures the escape of Furiosa and the Wives. And he does it for love. Although near the end of the film as they are nearing their return to the Citadel with Immortan Joe's body, Furiosa lay dying from her injuries. Max, still equipped with a plastic tube connected to his neck vein, attaches it to Furiosa to provide her with life-giving blood. Max, not so long on blood himself, appears to do this selflessly knowing he will likely die—his true sacrifice.

Arriving where “the green place” is supposed to be, they find only a rusted old metal power pole in a sandy desert and a motley gang of bikie chicks called the Vulvalini, remnants of Furiosa's ancestors. They learn that “the green place” has become poisoned and is no more. There seems no place to go; hope seems lost. In one of the most searing images in the film, with evening light casting her in silhouette fallen to her knees with the wind blowing the sand about her, Furiosa howls in anguish, silenced by the fury of the wind carrying her voice away into the vastness. Yet to live another day hope must prevail and Furiosa decides that they must attempt to cross the “unknown territory,” endless desert flats. She calculates that they can probably last for 160 days. Max decides to go his own way telling Furiosa, “Hope is a mistake. If you can't fix what's broken, you'll go insane.” Yet, as Max watches the women drive off into the desert, he has a vision of his dead daughter who beseeches him to take action, to get moving. Max intercepts Furiosa and the Vulvalini and convinces them that if they seek hope and redemption⁴ their only chance is to return to the Citadel.⁵ This choice of route will require them to engage the motored gangs that have been chasing them; their only weapons left are surprise and audacity.

Yet, it is clear that it is the moving itself, not the place, that fuels and enacts hope and redemption. Or perhaps better hope and redemption are ways of characterizing moving vitality.

Hope and redemption, but redemption more so, are common religious notions.

Redemption is being saved from sin and evil and it is usually something attributed to the action of god, earned by good deeds or given as grace or forgiveness. Max, a blood bag affixed to the cross shaped hood ornament on the pursuing roadster, reminds us of this old old story. In the end, he saves Furiosa's life and does so by giving her his blood connecting the plastic tube from himself to Furiosa as she lay dying; he gives his blood that she might live at the expected cost of his own life. Yet, seemingly with an endless supply of blood, Max lives as well, perhaps his own redemption.

Hope and redemption are both associated with something sought, but not yet attained. Both terms denote moving, the continuing transcending of where one is in the desire for what seems to be or is imagined to be at a distance yet remains on the horizon beckoning yet always a bit out of reach. Hope and redemption invoke a way to understand what characterizes life and the most fundamental insight is that we are *animate organisms*. The life we attribute to our being is inseparable from our *self-moving*.⁶ We don't acquire movement, we come to life as movement and our vitality is characterized by the way we move. Thus, we must recognize that hope and redemption are *corporeal concepts* that arise from human self-moving; that is, that hope and redemption are empty terms apart from the felt experience distinctive to human self-movement.

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and redemption invoke a way to understand what characterizes life, that is, we are animate organisms. The being of our life is to move. We don't acquire movement, we come to life as movement and our vitality is characterized in the way we move.

Hope and redemption have temporal implications. Hope suggests the conjunction of a present felt absence with its future felt presence. Hope is the attribute of experiencing in positive terms a not-yet future. Redemption implicates some history, some past, that must be set right somehow someday. Redemption is the attribute of experiencing a not-yet future conversion to positive of the currently felt negative attributes accumulated from the past. In identifying hope, rather than redemption, as what the wives seek, Furiosa is indicating the innocence of their past although a past characterized as confinement. She acknowledges her own painful and storied past by indicating her goal as redemption. These temporal implications of hope and redemption are not simply descriptive—states identified with specifiable places along the grid of time—they are also experienced and they motivate action.

Hope and redemption give specific coloration to what Renaud Barbaras referred to as “desire and distance,” terms he explored in developing his understanding of the energetics of living movement.⁷ By *desire* Barbaras does not denote some lack that can be fulfilled or even an emotion really. *Desire* is how he refers to that living force of moving, of moving on. We feel it as vitality; that bittersweet sense of going on while also departing from. Desire is a dynamic or tonus rather than a place or a need. And as desire has a temporal implication, it also has a spatial one, *distance*. A remarkable, yet obvious, attribute of living movement, as discussed by Brian Massumi,⁸ is that it is never “in” any place, yet it always implicates the conjunction of places, if virtual ones. Simply put if we attach moving to any specific place, it would cease to be moving. Moving is the very quality of not being in any place, neither here nor there. Yet moving

implicates the living connection of a virtual here with a virtual there. Moving is always relational; mover in context of moving, here in relation to there. Moving is vectored, directed, valued, and experienced because it invokes this sense of *distance*, a virtual spatiality. Moving implies a distance before there is a measurant; moving occurs in a virtual gap.

Kinesthesia, the feeling of self-moving, is grounded in proprioception, the biology that turns moving and touching (nearly synonymous) into awareness and experience. These miraculous gifts that distinguish humans among their animate kin imply a “common sense” or the awareness, even a reflective awareness, of being sentient.⁹

The most important makings have to do with moving. In the history of technological development, it is the advancement of modes of movement that has marked development. The wheel distinguishes a leap forward in early human history. Johannes Gutenberg’s press, distinguished by its movable type, was revolutionary because of how it enabled and expanded the movement of information. In more contemporary times it is the automobile and tractor that revolutionized travel and automated agriculture. The moving capacities of airplanes and space travel have interconnected the globe and the solar system. Today drones and even virtual reality are makings that advance and revolutionize moving. And, of course, the advancement of communication is the advancement of virtual movement.

Movement is the objectification of *moving*; the verb made noun, action made thing. We have become most comfortable comprehending and reckoning moving in terms of movement; the track rather than the traveling. Math and science tend to be concerned with gridified movement, with traces rather than moving in process. We see movement as captured by a line or trajectory from here to there that in being represented as a fixed object permitting the calculation of all sorts of things like speed, acceleration, and lapsed time. Yet clearly as movement, the

vitality, the actual moving, has been removed or transduced into a different form or phase of reality. Yet, even when we backfill moving as a trajectory across a piece of paper, a route on a map, a journey across a place, we can comprehend that moving involves both a here and there that are at once separate and conjoined, even copresent that is the impossibility of being present at the same time. A journey traced as a route on a map clearly has a here (or beginning) and a there (or destination) that are different and separate¹⁰; otherwise no route, no movement. Yet we can objectively simultaneously see the beginning and end points and all those points in between.¹¹ The whole process exists at once for us. In movement, we are “in” all places at the same time. In contrast, in moving we experience a common presence of here and there while being “in” neither one. While moving, our “here” is never a full presence because, were it so, we would not be moving. While moving, our “there” is a not yet, a destination, the idea of destination, a horizon even, present only as destination not as presence in place. The experience of “process,” the sense of moving, is framed in the common presence of here and there, yet with the experienced implication of uncertainty or openness or transition. And isn’t it this uncertainty (the *is* that also *is not*), this nonlinearity, that is inseparable from the experience of vitality, of life itself?

We might well spend a lifetime engaged in the process of appreciating and comprehending the inseparability of moving and vitality; it is certainly among my obsessions. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s remarkable book, made even more so with an extensively revised second edition, *The Primacy of Movement* (1999, rev. ed. 2011), goes far in this endeavor.¹² She points out that we do not learn to move; moving is not something we are capable of doing yet must acquire. Rather, as animate beings, we are born moving; even prenatally our mothers are assured of our aliveness as they feel us moving. A stillborn describes a newborn that is still, that

doesn't move; it is a baby born without life. Yet, throughout our lives, we certainly learn many kinds of movings; Sheets-Johnstone calls them "I cans." The life cycle is often articulated as the tracing of modes of motility that mark distinct phases in our journey (note the metaphor) through life—from creeping and crawling to walking to doddering. There is a primary connection between moving and living; an identity. Shared motility connects us with all animals and creatures; modes of motility help distinguish among animal groupings.

Hope and redemption then might valuably be comprehended in terms of moving. I propose that hope and redemption are distinctive ways of shaping the factors of desire and distance that comprise moving; moving as vitality. Perhaps, simply put, hope and redemption articulate life force in some specifiable terms. Both terms provide a sense of direction and motivation, a desire and distance in Barbaras's terms, that we might comprehend as moving or living movement. We might understand that one's life is a journey fueled possibly (necessarily?) by hope and redemption. Quite commonly stories of life are told in just these terms: movement, hope, redemption. We may appreciate the importance of these words in terms of their correlation with specific qualities of moving and those qualities include passion and fury.

It is fascinating to me that in the development of AI most the attention has been and continues to be on debodied minds, calculating brains in boxes that don't move. Robotics is the bodying of AI and it is proving highly difficult to create bodies with smooth and efficient movement. Recent DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) competitions in robotics demonstrated how difficult it is for robots to accomplish such simple tasks as going up stairs and opening doors; tasks my 18-month-old grandson has totally mastered. The joking response to those who express fear about the advancement of intelligent robots is that there is no need to panic, just keep your doors closed.¹³

The larger implication of the positions supported by Sheets-Johnstone and others is that the moving body has a primacy in the formation of concepts, experienced and aware knowings, and I would also say to the constituency of identity. Barbaras shows that moving is essential to perception. This places primacy also on experience, repetition, felt learning rather than solely on algorithms constructed by some young male programmer who likely hasn't had much variety or depth of living experience. Think about how such a person might code values for friendship, good parenting, love, jealousy, parental attachment to child, empathy, fear, handling paradox, appreciating beauty, enjoying music, being touched, expressing feelings, growing old; the list is endless. Academics, like programmers, are typically body and movement challenged and body and movement deprived; lifestyles/occupations characterized by sedentary sitting immobility. So too are business people—we don't call them "suits" for nothing—just picture those enormous rooms filled with cubicles. Our children no longer go out to play; few even walk to school. What is our "fury road"?

There is a long history of associating god, or creator, with perfection, with finality, with completeness. From Pythagoras to Kepler, to comprehend the design of the world was to contemplate how god surely made it; and the first principle was that the manifest universe had to reflect god's perfection. Despite placing the sun in the center of the solar system, a blasphemous claim unthinkable to most and completely at odds with anyone's daily observations, Copernicus nonetheless represented the planetary orbits as perfect circles centered on the sun because he felt, despite knowing differently, that he had to reflect god's perfection in terms of perfect circles. Indeed, geometry came to be preferred to arithmetic because it offered whole perfect forms whereas arithmetical formulations quickly gave rise to perplexing irrational numbers like Pi and the square root of two. The understanding of god as creator, god as perfection, has long shaped

the efforts to comprehend all of god's creations from humankind to the whole universe. In many religious traditions god is looked to in order to provide the final word, the answers to the seeming incomprehensible. The very ideas of faith and belief are often associated with a sort of comfort and relief and confidence and peace associated with the embracing of what is otherwise beyond resolution or human comprehension.

Believing in god's perfection, holding to a faith that god's creation is purposeful, even if humanly incomprehensible, has commonly resulted in the identity of religion itself with these godly attributes. Religion, it is reckoned, in having to do with god (or gods) is thus godlike itself and therefore perfect or at least "good." I believe there is a connection between the tendency to limit religion to a palliative and soothing and gap-filling explanatory function and the staidness and ossification of religious institutions and traditions. One might read the stories of the Garden of Eden as associated with the creation of "gaps," separations that engender movement and are coincident with life itself. In essential ways, creations, makings, are necessarily separations that create gaps. God's perfection may be comprehended as much in the profundity of this supremely confident act—leaving gaps, imperfections, novelty—as in some sense of identity with absolute unity and the perfections of geometric figures.

Stories of creation are also accounts of separation and we often call them by the interestingly ambiguous term "myth," meaning both the truth before there is a measure of truth and things that are false yet believed to be true. To create, to make, is to set apart, even if it is a making in one's own image. Michelangelo's painting, "The Creation of Adam" (1511-12), on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel reminds us of the gap. God's and Adam's forefingers are outstretched towards one another, but they do not touch. There is a gap, the separation that marks creation. The identity yet separation of God, the Heavenly Father, and Jesus, incarnate as

man, correlates with the gap of creation; the persistent irresolvable issues raised when “man” is made in the likeness of god, yet has free will and the capacity to sin; in other words, to act apart from the accordance with God.

The gaps of makings, that might be characterized as desire and distance, constitute moving and life. Making and creating, the setting thing made apart from maker, are coincident with moving. This gap is also the space of freedom and violence.¹⁴

Such stories, such structuralities, are not distinct only to Christianity, but also to religions throughout the world. In Bali, a place I’ve spent some time, the benevolent beings live in the mountains, the malevolent near or in the sea. Balinese life is overwhelmingly occupied with keeping these forces in their proper locations despite the constant and inevitable occurrence to the contrary. Daily offerings, constant festivals, persistent prayer, and dozens of actions occupy Balinese people in much of their daily lives and their makings constantly respond to this living in the gap.

The shortfall of the limiting understanding, in the simple terms, that “religion is good” is in a sense the identity of “religion” with a specific conception of god as perfection. This understanding of religion ignores the gap that is an essential aspect of creation, of making, of moving. And, it could be argued, indeed I firmly believe, that it is this gap that both conjoins and sets apart that is the generative force of living religions; this chiasm is the way we understand the religious quality of moving. While religions are often comforting and reassuring, they are even more so confounding and exasperating. Both hope and redemption involve what is “not yet” in some sense, yet present in imagination or principle. Religion occurs as the human experience of and response to the graspable ungraspable, the intimately known unknowable, the all-caring all-knowing awful. Remarkably these very qualities that are presented in the grandest

possible terms in religions are the same as those that characterize moving or vitality; an aesthetic of the impossibles.

Based on the history of religions, we might well understand religion not as simply “good,” but more powerfully and accurately as playing out, as moving, in the chiasmatic gap that conjoins but forever holds apart; the dynamic connection of the categorically separate (god and human), yet the inseparability of creator and created, maker and made, here and there. Religious traditions chart the course of religious lives as passionate journeys on Fury Road.

There is a particular reason that I feel this re-imagination of religion, or the recovery of an essential yet overlooked distinction of religion, is of particular importance to the grappling with the current issues of “intelligence” and “making.” As I will show in a number of iterations and developments on this theme, I believe that the approach to the advancement of machine intelligence; specifically, artificial intelligence to achieve human intelligence or even advance beyond human intelligence is currently based on the principle of closing gaps, that is, for the intelligence to develop with increasing efficiency and complexity of algorithms so that it can imitate human intelligence with diminishing distinction. It is a common goal of robotics (including AI) to increase the quantity of data that can be processed by an increasingly refined (and even machine self-refined) algorithm so as to produce the “right” answers. As I’ll recount the story in more detail later, this was the impressive and breakthrough approach to IBM’s development of Watson. In this present development, it appears that what is considered important and the key to approaching human intelligence, is a closing of the gaps by producing more “right” answers. The current trajectory towards development of AI/robotics is almost totally devoted to the closing the gap between machine and human. Indeed, the imagination of the future time when this goal is achieved is considered a point often labeled a “singularity.”

The perspective I'm considering here is that the history of the rise and advancement of human intelligence, a history that might be recognized as importantly inseparable from religion, has been one of creating and maintaining "gaps," separations, openings, chiasms; for these are essential to creativity, novelty, discovery, making, and intelligence. Mistakes, errors, misjudgments, confoundment, incredulity, incongruity lead to creative thought and significant development.

Religion and science are often set in tension with one another; religion and the humanities broadly finding themselves in a receding position with decreasing value. When one's notion of religion or even the humanities is that it provides "right" answers to all possible questions, it would seem this continuing imbalance is inevitable. And, it seems that when we understand intelligence almost exclusively in terms of deriving the "right" answer, then we can join those who believe it won't be long until AGI (artificial general intelligence) is achieved. Surely also under this impoverished understanding, religion will be of decreasing importance; it has a radically shifting and diminishing role, into the future.

What I propose is that in the contemporary period we are arriving at sets of concerns that allow us to return to reconsider earlier periods when there was complementation and continuity between religion and science, between practical life and the academy. When we realize that the issues raised are valuable because their very insolubility is what connects them with vitality and creativity, we open both science and religion, daily life attitudes and academics, to the exploration of the novel, the gaps, the irrational numbers, and the copresents that have long been the core of the vital life. Science and religion align when one approaches issues of creation and making; these are matters of horizon, present yet seductive in always being more than what can be grasped. Machine intelligence can be directed toward what programmers call goals,¹⁵ yet

machine goals are not equivalent to “hope,” they are unfeeling mechanical gestures, imitations developed on the analysis of mass amounts of “information” (big data) that have been captured from observations somehow connected with what some humans have called hope. There is a gap between the mechanically imitated and the felt, yet it is a gap whose creative potential for insight is being ignored in the efforts to eliminate it.

¹ Warner Brothers Pictures, “Mad Max: Fury Road - Official Main Trailer” YouTube Video, 2:31, March 31, 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEJnMQG9ev8&feature=em-share_video_user

² Abduzeedo, “Mad Max Vehicles,” last modified May 20, 2015. <http://abduzeedo.com/mad-max-vehicles>.

³ Notably attaching humans to the front of vehicles is not new to this film having also occurred in “Road Warrior.” And there is even a hint of the polecats in that film as well.

⁴ As Max is trying to convince the women to return to the Citadel, Nux traveling with the women is among the first to accept the plan saying, “It sounds like hope.” Pressing his plan to Furiosa, Max says to her, “At least if we go that way we might together find some kind of redemption.” He offers his hand to her and finally she accepts the plan and grasps Max’s hand.

⁵ This journey might be understood in many possible ways, yet surely it is a primary gesture that makes a place one’s home. Yet, taking moving and gesturing radically it gives a nuanced meaning to the adage “there’s no place like home.” This would mean that home is not a place so much as an unattainable designation associated with certain values enacted through gesture. This mobilizing of the idea is compatible with the phrase “home making” as an action never

completed. The moving approach also gives insight into the phrase “you can’t go home again” suggesting that it is relationship, thus moving/gesturing, rather than place, that has primacy.

⁶ Despite the awkwardness of this hyphenated term I use it to be more precise. It indicates movement that a body actively performs as opposed to passive movement as in a vehicle. Based on Barbaras’s use, I also see the term synonymous with his “living movement.”

⁷ Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*.

⁸ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2002), 4.

⁹ Various Aristotle’s “common sense” or *aisthesis*, Christian Hübner’s “coenesthesia,” and Daniel Heller-Roazen’s “inner touch.” For references to all these see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archeology of Sensation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Yet, of course, as “Fury Road,” “The Fantastics,” and life itself show the end point is often a return to the beginning.

¹¹ I find it helpful to understand this “representation” of moving in terms of Charles Sander’s Peirce’s theory of signs. The map image is what he called *iconic* in that it allows the whole of process to be represented as present.

¹² Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Amsterdam, Netherlands, John Benjamins, 1999, rev. ed. 2011). See also Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *Inside and Outside: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Animate Nature* (Exeter, UK, Imprint Academic, 2016).

¹³ Boston Dynamics has trained its creepy headless doglike robot to doggedly open doors. Guardian News, “Human v robot dog: Boston Dynamics takes on its door-opening SpotMini,” YouTube Video, 0:58, February 20, 2018.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=W1LWMk7JB80

¹⁴ See chapter below “Violent Delights”

¹⁵ See Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 186.