

INDEX

- abusive relationships, 50, 66, 82, 101–2, 108
- achievement: and anxiety, 156;
obsession with self-improvement, 75–76, 79, 165
- addictions, 53
- Adorno, Theodor, 141–42, 157–58
- adversity: circumstantial oppression/
hardship (poverty, war, racism, etc.), 26–27, 42–43, 101, 113–14, 142; universal vulnerability of human beings (accidents, illness, etc.), 25–26, 28–29, 33–34, 113–14. *See also* suffering; trauma
- advertising industry, 13
- alterity, 80, 112
- American dream, 22, 77, 101
- anxiety, xiv, 141–58; and children, 81–82; crises, 148–49, 153–54; and cultivation of character, 22, 142–44, 155–58; and high achievement, 156; and overvaluation of serenity, 15–16, 145; and power relations, 84–85
- apathy, 56
- Arendt, Hannah, 80, 81, 89, 116, 157–58
- art, 58, 90, 172. *See also* creativity
- aspirations. *See* goals and aspirations
- authenticity, 9–10, 13–14, 142. *See also* character, cultivation of

- Badiou, Alain, 123–26, 128, 133, 164, 166, 172, 183n1
- Barthes, Roland, 168
- being, essential core of, x, 9, 10, 21
- beliefs, 33, 138
- Berlant, Lauren, 42
- biological drives, 14, 67–68
- Bollas, Christopher, 159–61, 165, 169
- breakdowns, 153–54
- Buddhism, 7
- Butler, Judith, 113–16
- Byrne, Rhonda, 100–101
- careers: and culturally condoned desires, 54; excessive time spent on, 139, 165; and swerve of passion, 126–28, 133–34
- character: being comfortable in one's skin, 175; and concept of essential core of being, x, 9, 10, 21; defined/described, xii, 8–11; destabilizing elements of, 154–55; as evolving entity, 9–11, 21–22 (*see also* character, cultivation of); self-loss and erotics of being, 173–74; tension between social persona and character, 9, 35, 126, 132–33, 143–44; uniqueness of spirit, 10–11, 24
- character, cultivation of, 3–29; and anxiety/agitation, 22, 142–44, 155–58; and breaking repetition compulsions, 72–75; and choice of objects and activities, 161–63; constraints due to inborn characteristics and circumstances, 22–23; and cultural conditioning, 34–36 (*see also* socialization); endlessness of process of becoming, 33; and false optimism, 22; and inability to find ultimate meaning of life as existential asset, 5–6; inflexible identities, 30–31; influences on character (*see* character, influences on); and interaction of the self and the world, 18–19, 147 (*see also* erotics of being); and loss, 43–45; and loving our fate, 23–24; and mistakes, 23; Nietzsche and, 21, 23–24; and perfection, 165; and performative repertoire, 136–37; and radical changes in life direction, 38–39 (*see also* swerve of passion); releasing earlier versions of the self, 150–51; self-improvement as obsession, 75–76, 79, 165; and specificity of desire, xii–xiii (*see also* desire, specificity of); and sudden life-changing passions (*see* swerve of passion); and translation of suffering into personal meaning, xiii, 28–29, 75–79, 151–53; and unrealized potentialities, 29–30; and utilitarian ethos, 4
- character, influences on, 22–39; adoption of culturally condoned values, 34–36; childhood experiences, 65–66; and circumstantial oppression/hardship (war, poverty, racism, etc.), 26–27; constraints due to inborn characteristics and circumstances, 22–23; and external world (objects, belief systems, ideals, etc.), 33 (*see also* sociocultural environment); and goals and aspirations, 33; negative influences, 34–36; and other people, 25, 32, 85–87; and

- universal vulnerability of human beings (accidents, illness, etc.), 25–26, 28–29, 33–34, 113–14. *See also* suffering
- childhood, 65–69, 81–82
- Christianity, 6–7
- contemporary theory, xi, 179n6
- creativity: and desire, 12; and erotics of being, 170–73; and grieving, 43–45; and perseverance, 172–73; and sense of lack, 41, 43, 45; and solitude, 90; and swerve of passion, 125, 128; and the Thing, 48
- crises, 148–49, 153–54
- culture. *See* sociocultural environment
- daily life, 159–70; and choice of objects and activities, 161–62; day as space for articulation of our “idiom” (Bollas’s description), 159–60, 165; and erotics of being, 162–70; and love, 97; and pragmatism, 138
- Dean, Tim, 145–46
- depression, 53
- desire, 180n13; adoption of culturally condoned desires, 13, 34–35, 54–55, 67, 138–39; anchors for, 156–57; and anxiety, 158; authenticity and correlation between desires and ideals, 13–14; biological drives, 14, 67–68; children’s uncertainty about adults’ unspoken desires, 81–82; and creativity, 12; and ethics, 7–8, 55–57, 99; and failure, 153–54; and feeling of discontent/existential malaise, 11–13, 41; flexibility in sources of pleasure, 52, 94; and formative experiences, 66–69; and gluttony, 7; and human nature, 6–7; and inflexibility/holding on too tightly, 94–95; inherent rebelliousness of passion, 14; and justice, 8; mismatch between desire and satisfaction, 11–13; mistrust of, 12; as motor of human life, 6, 11; objects of (*see* goals and aspirations; material possessions; romantic relationships; Thing, the); “owning” our desires, 14; and patterns of avoidance, 92–93; and rationalism, 7–8; religious views of, 6–7; and repetition compulsion, 69–70; repression of, 8, 12–13; and science, 8; and search for transcendence, 163–64; specificity of (*see* desire, specificity of); and sudden life-changing passions (*see* swerve of passion); and the Thing, 47–51, 180n13 (*see also* Thing, the); “truth” of our desire (Lacan’s conception), x, 48; and uniqueness of spirit, 11
- desire, specificity of, xii–xiii; and meaning of life, xiii; and romantic relationships, 52; and self-responsibility, xiii; and suffering, 52; and the Thing, 47–48, 51, 53; and uniqueness of spirit, 11
- environment. *See* sociocultural environment
- erotics of being, 159–75; defined/described, 162–64
- ethics: Butler and, 113–16; and desire, 7–8, 55–57, 99; and distraction of excessive material possessions, 56–57; and empathy and

- ethics (*continued*)
 identification, 110–15; and ending relationships, 93–94; ethical failures, 111–12; and forgiveness, 108, 115–17; and health, 146; Lacan and, 55–57; moral relativism, 36–37, 138; and persistence of unconscious demons, 70–71; pursuing echo of the Thing in spite of social cost, 55–57, 127–28; and swerve of passion, 139–40; universal ethical codes, 36–37, 118–19; utilitarian ethos, 4, 16, 138; values/codes of conduct differing from prevailing social values, xiii, 37–38, 127–28; Žižek and, 110–11. *See also* responsibility
- “event” (Badiou’s conception), 124–26, 128, 139, 164, 183n1; authentic events distinguished from simulacra, 129–30, 134; moderation as antithesis of, 132; and performative repertoire, 136–37; and uncertainty, 130–31
- fate: constraints due to inborn characteristics and circumstances, 22–23; and ephemeral nature of life, 149; loving one’s fate, 23–24, 27, 29, 149; and repetition compulsion, 71–73, 75. *See also* adversity
- forgiveness, 108, 115–17
- Foucault, Michel, 184n6
- Freud, Sigmund, 63–64, 72, 117, 156, 180n3
- future, the, 151–52, 162, 165. *See also* swerve of passion
- gluttony, 7
- goals and aspirations: loss of, 44, 52; need for conscious choice of, 33; and radical changes in life direction, 38–39 (*see also* swerve of passion); and search for transcendence, 165–66
- grieving, 43–45
- health, 145–46, 156
- Heidegger, Martin, 49, 179n6, 184n8
- hoarding, 41–42
- ideals, 13–14, 33, 137, 149, 165–66
- identity: Arendt’s ethereal aura, 157–58; defined/described, xii; inflexible identities, 30–31; and performative repertoire, 136–37; tension between social persona and character, 9, 35, 126, 132–33, 143–44; and trauma, 65. *See also* character; character, cultivation of
- illness, 145–46, 156
- justice, 8, 12, 118–19
- Kant, Immanuel, 177n2
- Lacan, Jacques, 40, 45; endowing mundane things with “the dignity of the Thing,” 53, 164; and ethics, 55–57; and swerve of passion, 127; the Thing, 47–51 (*see also* Thing, the); “truth” of our desire, x, 48, 55
- lack, sense of, 41–48, 59–60. *See also* malaise, existential; Thing, the
- language, 57–60
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 184n8
- life, meaning of, 147–49; and crises, 148–49; and excessive accumula-

- tion of material goods, 41–42;
flexibility of meaning, xiii;
inability to find ultimate mean-
ing of life as existential asset,
5–6, 18–20; and releasing earlier
versions of the self, 150–51; and
specificity of desire, xiii. *See also*
meaning
- life worth living, 3; and anxiety, xiv,
15–16 (*see also* anxiety); and
benefits of a sense of lack, 41,
43, 45; and choice of objects and
activities, 161–63; and cultiva-
tion of character (*see* character,
cultivation of); and cultural ideal
of balanced, harmonious life, x,
15–17, 141–42, 144–45, 154–55;
ephemeral nature of life, 148–50;
and erotics of being, 162–70, 172;
and performative repertoire, 137;
and unconscious blueprints, 79.
See also daily life
- love: falling in love, 49–50, 54, 96,
124–25, 156–57; and inducing
the sublime in daily life, 97; vs.
infatuation, 129; loving what
we “would never believe twice”
(Badiou’s conception), 124;
and swerve of passion, 124–25,
133–34; waning of passions, 130.
See also relationships; romantic
relationships
- malaise, existential, 11–13, 16–17,
40–41, 49–51
- marriage, 88–89, 95
- Marx, Karl, 164
- material possessions, 41–42, 56–57,
138–39
- meaning, 4–5; and conventions
of contemporary theory, xi;
inability to find ultimate mean-
ing of life as existential asset,
5–6, 18–20; and releasing earlier
versions of the self, 150–51; and
search for transcendence, 165–66;
translation of suffering into
personal meaning, 28–29, 75–79,
151–53; and universal vulnerabil-
ity as a gift, 28–29. *See also* life,
meaning of
- memory, 106–7, 150
- midlife crisis, 149
- moral relativism, 36–37, 138
- Muselmann*, 111–12
- narcissism, 47, 49, 50
- New Age philosophies, 100–102,
104–8, 145, 157, 162
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 21, 23–24, 27,
29, 77
- nihilism, 135, 137–39, 165
- nostalgia, 150
- Oliver, Kelly, 99, 116
- optimism, false, 22, 41–42
- past, the, 162; benefits of own-
ing the past, 104–8; childhood
experiences, 65–69, 81–82; and
releasing earlier versions of the
self, 150–52; trauma and forget-
ting the past, 106–7. *See also*
suffering
- perfection, 165
- performance, 136
- personality. *See* character
- Phoenix metaphor, 152
- Plato, 125
- political commitment, and swerve
of passion, 125, 128, 139
- positive thinking, 100–102

- present, the: and erotics of being, 162–70; living in the “now,” 104–8, 162
- public persona: and performative repertoire, 136–37; tension between social persona and character, 9, 35, 126, 132–33, 143–44
- punctum* (Barthes’s concept), 168
- rationalism, 7–8, 12
- relationships, 80–98; abusive relationships, 50, 66, 82, 101–2, 108; and anxiety, 81–85; children’s uncertainty about adults’ unspoken desires, 81–82; distinguishing inspirational vs. unhelpful relationships, 32, 88; ending, 92–94; and flexibility, 94; formative experiences and interpersonal dynamics, 68; grieving the loss of a loved one, 43–45; holding on to detrimental relationships, 87–89, 93–94; and inflexibility/holding on too tightly, 94–95; influence of early caregivers, 65–66; influence of people on each other, 25, 85–87; interactions with strangers, 83–84; interpersonal enigmas, 81–85; marriage, 88–89, 95; and narcissism, 49, 50; and patterns of avoidance, 92–93; and power relations, 84–85; stigma against singleness/overvaluation of relationality, 88–90, 97–98; and the Thing, 49–51; and the unconscious, 81. *See also* romantic relationships
- religion, 6–8, 47, 164
- repetition compulsion, 63–64, 68–75, 100, 105
- repression of desires, 8, 12–13
- responsibility, xiii, 99–119; and breaking repetition compulsions, 72–75; and compassion for the weaknesses of others, 109; and ending relationships, 93–94; and forgetting the past, 106–7; and forgiveness, 108, 115–17; and gender, 108–9; and inner opacity, 114, 115, 119; and New Age philosophies, 100–102, 104–8; responsibility for one’s words and actions, 103–4, 108–9, 116–19; self-responsibility and the blueprints of behavior, 63–78; and swerve of passion, 134–35; and the unconscious, 99, 108–9, 117
- risk, 96, 146–47
- romantic relationships: and disillusionment, 53, 96; expectations about, 95; falling in love, 49–50, 96, 124–25, 156–57; falling in love with the “wrong” person, 54; and holding on to detrimental relationships, 87–89; idealization of the lover, 96–97; and inducing the sublime in daily life, 97; and interpersonal enigmas, 83; loss of loved one, 52; marriage, 88–89, 95; and narcissism, 49, 50; and revitalization of disclaimed aspects of the self, 86–87; and risk, 96; and specificity of desire, 52; stigma against singleness/overvaluation of relationality, 88–90, 97–98; and swerve of passion, 126; and the Thing, 49–51; valorization of, vs. other aspirations, 91–92
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 40

- science, 8, 12, 172
- The Secret* (Byrne), 101
- self: defined/described, xii; releasing earlier versions of the self, 150–51. *See also* character; character, cultivation of; public persona
- self-surrender, xiv; and erotics of being, 159–75; self-loss and creativity, 172–73; and the swerve of passion, 123–40
- serenity, overvaluation of, 15–16, 141–42, 144–45, 154–55
- simulacra, 129–30, 134, 162
- socialization, 46–47, 67, 70, 143–44, 174. *See also* childhood
- sociocultural environment: adoption of culturally condoned desires/values, 13, 34–36, 54–55, 67, 138–39; and collapse of tradition, 19; and conformity, 34–38; crowded nature of modern life, 89; and cultural ideal of balanced, harmonious life, x, 15–17, 141–42, 144–45, 154–55; cultural transformation, 46, 48; and health, 145–46; influence of childhood experiences, 65–66; interaction of the self and the world, 18–19, 45–47 (*see also* relationships); Lacan and, 45–46; and mistrust of desire, 12; and nihilism, 135, 137–39; pursuing desires in spite of social cost, 55–57, 126–28; and risk, 146–47; and self-loss and erotics of being, 173–74; stigma against singleness/overvaluation of relationality, 88–90, 97–98; utilitarian ethos, 4; values/codes of conduct differing from prevailing social values, xiii, 37–38, 127–28
- solitude, 90–91, 98
- spiritual practices, 26, 76, 103, 157, 163. *See also* New Age philosophies
- suffering, xii; circumstantial oppression/hardship (poverty, war, racism, etc.), 26–27, 42–43, 101, 113–14, 152; common views of, 77–78; and cultivation of character, 152; and desire, 7, 52; due to words and actions of other people, 25, 101–4 (*see also* abusive relationships); identifying with the suffering of others, 111–15; idiosyncratic ways of experiencing loss and deprivation, xiii; and language, 58–59; and living in the “now,” 104–8; and positive thinking, 100–102; translation of suffering into personal meaning, 28–29, 75–79, 151–53; universal vulnerability of human beings (accidents, illness, etc.), 25–26, 28–29, 33–34, 113–14. *See also* trauma
- swerve of passion, 38, 123–40; authentic events distinguished from simulacra, 129–30, 134; Badiou and, 123–26; and choice of investments in life, 127, 133–35, 174; and ethics, 139–40; the “event” (Badiou’s conception), 124–26, 128, 139–40, 183n1; examples, 124–27; and responsibility, 134–35; staying faithful to new aspirations, 128–32; and tension between social persona and character, 126, 132–33; and uncertainty, 130–31; waning of passions, 130–31, 133

- Thing, the, 47–51, 162, 180–183;
 endowing mundane things with
 “the dignity of the Thing,” 53,
 164; and formative experiences,
 67; and inducing the sublime in
 daily life, 97, 163–64, 166; and
 language, 57; pursuing echo of
 the Thing in spite of social cost,
 55–57, 127–28; and repetition
 compulsion, 69–70
- time, and erotics of being, 168–70
- tolerance, 110–12, 114
- transcendence, xiv, 127, 162–70
- trauma: and abusive childhoods, 82;
 circumstantial oppression/hard-
 ship (poverty, war, racism, etc.),
 26–27, 42–43, 101, 113–14, 152;
 and cultivation of character, xiii,
 75–79; and forgetting the past,
 106–7; formative experiences and
 the unconscious, 65–66, 68–69
 (*see also* repetition compulsion);
 and inflexible identities, 31; as a
 major ingredient in identity, 65;
 metabolizing traumas, xiii, 75–79;
 and storytelling, 58–59; universal
 vulnerability of human beings
 (accidents, illness, etc.), 25–26,
 28–29, 33–34, 113–14
- unconscious: Freud and, 72, 117; and
 interpersonal ethics, 99, 108–9,
 117; intervening in unconscious
 patterns, 72–75; persistence of
 unconscious demons, 70–71; and
 relationships, 81; uncertainty
 about unconscious influences,
 110; unconscious emotional
 scripts and predictability of
 life, 64–65. *See also* repetition
 compulsion
- utilitarianism, 4, 16, 138
- values: adoption of culturally con-
 doned values, 34–36; and moral
 relativism, 36–37, 138; utilitar-
 ian ethos of modern culture, 4,
 16, 138; values/codes of conduct
 differing from prevailing social
 values, xiii, 37–38, 127–28
- Williams, Bernard, 3, 10
- Woolf, Virginia, 90
- world, external. *See* adversity;
 relationships; sociocultural
 environment
- writing, 58, 170–71
- Žižek, Slavoj, 110–11

