



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

ANXIETY AFFECT ALIENS AND OTHER NON-PARANOID PERFORMANCES AGAINST CAPITALISM

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In this paper, I think through the question: what is the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and anxiety? Specifically, I ask how anxiety can be brought, through performance, into a political phenomenology of the emotions (Bartky 1990, 98) in order to combat capitalism's dominance. Rather than seeking to subdue anxiety, I argue that breaking the cycle of affect production requires a praxis-based use of alienation. I turn to Hannah Arendt to address both the political potential of emotion (through her conceptualization of public, private, and social realms in *The Human Condition*) and the crucial role of praxis in activating this potential, in relation to the strange case of alienation in theatre practice (through her writing on Bertolt Brecht). Throughout, I reflect on a concrete example of praxis: my own experiences facilitating a group that draws on a history of feminist consciousness-raising to address anxiety's relationship to capitalism.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler looks at "what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war" (Butler 2003, xii). Butler expands her work on precarity, which describes an involuntary state of non-self-determination produced by economic and social structures under neoliberal capitalism, in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Here, Butler theorizes assembly as "embodied and plural performativity" and asks how precarity is "enacted and opposed" when bodies come together to put their freedom of assembly into practice (Butler 2015, 22). Throughout the book, Butler draws on Arendt's view of action and the right to appear, but resists her division

between private and public sphere for the way it relegates the body to the level of necessity. Butler finds in Arendt's private sphere "the question of needs, the reproduction of the material conditions of life, and the problems of transience, reproduction, and death alike—everything that pertains to precarious life" (ibid., 118). How can precarious life be visible if it is private, and therefore, excluded from the space of appearance? The Arendtian public sphere is the place where speech acts occur. As I will argue here, speech acts are not enough as a tactic against precarity. Embodied acts are necessary too. In this assertion, I join Butler in the project of resisting, in the context of precarity and the necessity to live together in the face of it, a distinction between body and mind. But where Butler sees a Cartesian divide implicit in *The Human Condition* (ibid., 45), I find in Arendt an ongoing urge to bring bodymind together. Putting Arendt in conversation with affect theory, I center attention on feminist practices and theorists (Sara Ahmed, Sandra Bartky, bell hooks, Jennifer C. Nash, Kathie Sarachild, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others) whose work is too often excluded from Marxist and materialist thought. Bringing Arendt to bear on these thinkers is an affirmation that understanding emotions to be political should be a non-negotiable part of an anti-capitalist analysis. I apply their work to specific experiences from my artistic, facilitation, and teaching practice, using anxiety as a case study to understand where praxis helps generate critical thought-action—and where it falls short or is vulnerable to recuperation.

The consciousness-raising group is pivotal to this article. I began writing this article as a way to think through the questions that recur for the group, and in doing so, to map a way forward that contributes to an anti-capitalist and decolonial struggle. The consciousness-raising group is pivotal to this article. To honor this group's collective study, I occasionally deploy in this article a plural register that shares my own personal interpretation of our ongoing conversational arc. In the first part of this essay, I engage with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of paranoid reading and reparative reading to understand the dynamics at play in this consciousness-raising group's discussions, and to imagine ways forward that work to decrease popular identification with anxiety rather than to eliminate it. Anxiety as an affect is an isolating, individual experience: how can our praxis mobilize the affect, like love-politics for example, which "requires subjects to work on their selves in order to transcend their selves" (Nash 2011, 10)? In the second part of this essay, I consider tactics that are reparative rather than paranoid, looking to work done in feminist and queer theory on affect for models for politicizing emotion other than exposure and naming. Drawing together these two threads, alienation and reparative tactics, I end by proposing non-verbal models for producing alienation from anxiety as one reparative tactic. Here, I draw on Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect and on Arendt's own complex critical engagement with his work.

The Performativity of Knowledge: Arendt and Sedgwick

In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's formulation, paranoid theory is theory based on suspicion, where demystification and exposure are its core actions. The worst thing that can happen to a paranoid critic is surprise, so paranoid theory is constantly anticipating, constantly proceeding as if one can never be paranoid enough. Paranoia, when considered reductively, operates on the "cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, exposure of gender

roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions)" (Sedgwick 2003, 144). Sedgwick's work on paranoid theory is relevant to a discussion of anxiety and political action because of paranoia's inherent link with anxiety. While most paranoid theory is operating with much more nuance than this assumption that we'll break our chains when they finally become intolerable, its overwhelming influence as a form of knowing means contemporary theory proceeds as if it is indeed the underlying structure. This effectively erases the non-paranoid elements in theory and epistemological approaches that are other than paranoid, impoverishing critical thought by limiting the gene pool.

Sedgwick shows that our contemporary critical tactics already tend towards the paranoid. A strong affect theory, to which category paranoia belongs, is strong precisely because it propagates rather than alleviates the affect in question (ibid., 134–135). Anxiety is a marker of paranoia, one of its key signs (ibid., 128; 146), so that a paranoid approach will continue to produce and strengthen anxiety.

In addressing anxiety, I am not making use of the term in a clinical sense—any diagnosis of anxiety at use here is self-diagnosis. There is crucial and related work to be done on the relationship between precarious employment, precarious life, and mental illness. Interwoven with such questions is the distribution of anxiety and resources across class, race, and gender. Who has access to care, whose illness is recognized or allowed to appear? Some of these questions are taken up by Butler, specifically in *Precarious Life*. However, my intervention is concerned with anxiety as affect rather than as one of the so-called diagnosable anxiety disorders; I consider anxiety not as a condition to be treated at an individual level, but as a politically-produced feeling that might be made politically effective against the capitalist ideology which produces it. In these pages, my concern is with how to do the latter, with the added understanding that the link between neoliberal capitalism and anxiety go beyond affect production.

It's easy to see why paranoid tactics are linked with radical social movements. Exposing and naming power structures plays a central role in any movement that seeks to change the balance of power. Yet there are many reasons to question these actions as inherently valuable. Feminist thinkers since Kathie Sarachild realize that not only is naming not enough, it can actually be counter-productive. In a study of the relationship between self-identification as precarious workers and interiority, Noelle J. Molé shows that such self-identification leads to a systemic response in which precarious workers are "mobbed" not only vertically by their bosses, but horizontally by one another, as a way of forcing one another out of the workplace. As one of her subjects says in an interview, "I can think about saving myself if I isolate you—*mors tua, vita mea* (your death, my life)" (Molé 2010, 44). Just *knowing* that one exists in a state of precarious employment or of precarious life isn't enough to instigate change, and may in fact cause an individual to participate in maintaining precarity for others as a tactic towards lessening their own. Exposure can also have a troubling relationship to violence and oppression within power structures, where violence depends on visibility for its effectiveness (Sedgwick 2003, 140–141). Finally, in her writing on diversity work within academic institutions, Sara Ahmed demonstrates that naming something can

not only fail to bring that very thing into effect, it can even become a barrier to the named thing happening at all. She refers to this blocking function of naming as “non-performativity” (Ahmed 2017, 106). Referencing J.L. Austin’s “performatives” in her choice of terminology, Ahmed says non-performativity is at play, for example, when the writing of a diversity policy is itself used as evidence by an institution that the institution is doing a good job of addressing diversity. Sedgwick’s exploration of paranoid reading comes out of a broader commitment to asking “What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative [...]?” (Sedgwick 2003, 124). In the context of knowledge’s performativity, I take non-performativity as a crucial example of how exposure-based knowledge can perform action without actually leading to sustained action or change. An institution’s lack of diversity is exposed; it assembles a task force to write a diversity policy; it displays the policy to show that it has addressed the issue, and takes no further steps to enforce it.

At the core of a paranoid approach is the idea that knowledge, specifically the kind of knowledge produced by exposure, is *in itself* effective (Sedgwick 2003, 138): motivates political action, creates change. Non-paranoid tactics would, therefore, question the efficacy of this kind of knowledge and seek to promote action otherwise. Arendt’s critique of factual truth (in, for example, *Between Past and Future*) is just such a question. Her writing plays out non-paranoid approaches not least in showing *how* ideas appear in the world, not as thoughts that are thought but thoughts that must first of all be remembered (Arendt [1958] 1998, 90). It contains constant reminders that there is no one way to read ideas (in the sense that Sedgwick uses the word *read*, meaning: critique, analyze, interpret)—and that reading them for truth-content alone ignores that they’re produced by a complex web of human relations to which they refer.

Finding non-paranoid tactics requires looking at the performativity of knowledge. Probing the relationship, from *The Human Condition* to *The Life of the Mind*, between private and public, Arendt calls attention to the movement and exchange between the two spheres; in my view, it is not the separation between the two that is most important, but the holding of a space of mutual influence and translation in between. Praxis, as Arendt figures it, should be understood as operating in this space between, as a hybrid kind of knowing and making meaning, one that influences public expression and shapes the private self through irreducible and recursive process. Under Arendt’s conceptualization of the public realm as the space of appearance, the public would be where the performativity (or non-performativity) of knowledge plays out; in dark times, for example, when what’s needed is revolution but all we get is restoration of old “pillars of truth,” these pillars’ fragility “is bound to become more apparent after every collapse, so that ultimately the public order is based on people’s holding as self-evident precisely those ‘best-known truths’ which secretly scarcely anyone still believes in” (Arendt 1968, 29–30). This situation represents a broken relation between public and private, in which the two cannot mutually shape one another. *How* knowledge performs, therefore, gets worked out in the connective space between public and private, through praxis. Below, I consider the ongoing anxiety consciousness-raising group I convene in Brooklyn as praxis, describing our approach and what it has taught me about the performativity of knowledge.

Writing a few years after consciousness-raising's initial emergence as a feminist strategy in the late 1960s, Kathie Sarachild traces the origins of the tactic in a decision "to raise [our] consciousness by studying women's lives by topics like childhood, jobs, motherhood, etc. We'd do any outside reading we wanted to and thought was important. But our starting point for discussion, as well as our test of the accuracy of what any of the books said, would be the actual experience we had in these areas" (Sarachild 1975, 145). Sandra Bartky, a contemporary of Sarachild who also writes occasionally about consciousness-raising, calls for "a political phenomenology of the emotions" (Bartky 1990, 98) that would analyze emotions for the way they are socio-politically constructed, remedying a Marxist tendency to under-theorize individual experience in combating ideology. This imperative, to understand and politically/critically mobilize "the ways in which the social and economic tensions [...] are played out in the lives of concrete individuals" (ibid., 14), remains at the heart of much feminist and queer theory and activism. Affect theory takes up Bartky's rallying cry around emotion; for example, that cry echoes in Jennifer C. Nash's affective politics, a term she uses "to describe how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements (or sometimes inertias)" (Nash 2011, 3). Shame gets a lot of attention in this field (Bartky, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed), as does happiness (Ahmed), love (Nash), yearning (bell hooks), and grief (Butler). To read the work of these writers is to read them thinking with/through/as bodies in the world—for example, hooks takes the reader into her childhood home to watch TV and critique politics of representation with her family (hooks 1990); Butler, to sites of assembly and protest (Butler 2015); Ahmed, into meetings of special task forces on race in the university (Ahmed 2018). They are of a piece with consciousness-raising groups as longitudinal praxis that relies on physical presence and revolutionary thinking that evolves, in community, over time.

Feminist consciousness-raising (hereafter CR) was developed by Sarachild and contemporaries who needed language to talk about how patriarchy maintains itself and tools to dismantle it. My own engagement with the term began in 2018 through Eliot Feenstra, a friend and colleague in scholarship and experimental performance-making. Feenstra was searching for similar language and tools with which to develop anti-capitalist praxis, and was reading an article written by The Institute for Precarious Consciousness (IPC), which theorizes precarity consciousness-raising "as a means to overcome the political disempowerment caused by anxiety, and create a machine for fighting anxiety" (The Institute for Precarious Consciousness 2014, 271). Feenstra experimented with the format of CR to address precarity during an artist-thinker residency that I facilitated with Sophie Traub and Ianne Fields Stewart in 2018, and compiled a zine that drew together the IPC's theses on anxiety with a practical suggested format for conducting precarity CR circles. He includes a definition of precarity as "'non-self-determined insecurity' across work and life [...] with insecure access to means to survive or flourish" (Feenstra 2018). The CR circles I subsequently began co-hosting with artist and educator Amanda Friedman in late 2018 in Brooklyn, concurrent with circles Feenstra hosted in Toronto, initially followed Feenstra's suggested format, but continue to evolve as experiments in praxis. Over time, the language has shifted from "precarity CR" to "anxiety CR", reflecting participants' unease with precarity as a term. This decision was also shaped by our desire

to specifically address anxiety as an affect rather than precarity as a structure—that is, to begin to understand anxiety as a political affect. We have approached (with curiosity) the proposition that anxiety is the dominant affect of neoliberal capitalism, produced by economic precarity, yo-yo days, present shock, telepresence, and other realities under this ideology (The Institute for Precarious Consciousness 2014).

We've never explicitly defined anxiety in our group, but agree on a number of its properties. It's a state and not an experience, so it spreads out over time. It's a motor that has to stay in motion, which can make it feel like the only thing that keeps our lives running, but also disallows rest. It can run on nothing. It feels un-containable—it spills out and creates spillage. When we're anxious, we fiddle. We twirl our hair and bite our lips and the insides of our cheeks. We pick their cuticles. Our bodies develop protrusions (hives) or holes (mouth ulcers). Anxiety is the feeling of always almost being caught up. When we *are* caught up, the motor of our anxiety continues to run, out of habit. It's specifically *not* about action; extended changes in behavior might reduce anxiety, but there's never one thing to be done that will turn it off because it isn't ever about *one thing* the way that its cousin—worry—is. It does, however, seem to be a product of our lifestyle; we can feel it increase with each project we take on, each buzz of our phone, and every email that begets another email. Because each of these increases is so particular to our own situation, it feels like our fault: "If I could just calibrate my life right, I wouldn't be anxious." Or: "If I could just cope better, care less, I wouldn't be anxious." In that sense, anxiety feels very private. And it's true that for many people, shame accompanies this feeling of fault, and produces an inability to talk about it. But this *isn't* true, generally, for my CR circles of (primarily young, white, femme-identified) Brooklyn residents in 2018 and 2019. The people in these circles are quite comfortable talking about their anxiety—and they are still, by their own diagnoses, very anxious.

After six months of this collective work, we are left with questions about what to *do* with this relationship between anxiety and neoliberal capitalism. If, as the Institute for Precarious Consciousness points out, capitalism moves on to a new affect once the current one is defeated (2014, 274), *abolishing* anxiety (as it's produced by capitalism) would only serve to make capitalism stronger: to help usher in its next phase. Indeed, there has been strong evidence during our Brooklyn CR circles of positive *identification* with anxiety and the conditions of precarity. Disconnecting (from social media, from email, from 24/7 availability) is identified by our group as perilous, something that would mean missing professional and social opportunities. Connection is normalized, and has pleasurable elements: refreshing social media feeds and checking job/grant applications gets described as an addiction, with the accompanying pleasure/desire associations; sometimes it all feels like play, like you might be able to "crack the economy game" if you keep playing. Anxiety is described as stimulating and motivating. It gets tied up with identity—where, several participants have asked, would I be without my anxiety? How would I get anything done? Identification with anxiety within our group is extremely strong, and is tied to its members' professional identities: primarily artists, cultural workers, and educators, working in industries for which there is a long history of romanticizing precarious existence via figures such as the starving artist. (A large number of us are Jewish, as well, and we've remarked together on the association of anxiety with the figure of the neurotic intellectual Jew.)

The relative homogeneity of our group in terms of race, profession, class, and gender makes it dangerous to generalize from our experience. Yet I'm not alone in noting that anxiety works by self-propagation and contagion. It's one of the central characteristics of paranoia (Sedgwick 2003, 126–127). Molé, whose subjects are Italian working class, invokes anxiety many times in her examination of worker identification with precariousness. This suggests to me that we should aim, not to lessen anxiety's effects on precarious workers, but rather to decrease their identification with anxiety—to de-normalize anxiety. A shift in intention is necessary to break the cycle of new-affect-birthed-out-of-conquered-affect that I suspect helps capitalism to mutate and evolve.

Arendt speaks to this relation; Patchen Markell points out that Arendt “insists on the weakness and fragility of factual truth, both in the sense that facts are vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of political actors, and in the sense that the ‘mere telling of facts,’ on its own, ‘leads to no action whatever’” (Markell 2018, 528). We need, as Markell proposes, “to interrupt the all-too-smooth integration of truth-claims and action” (ibid., 529) for real influence and exchange to occur between the private and the public constructed by our Brooklyn anxiety CR circles. Our circles have tended towards analysis because we are responding to neoliberal capitalism's structuring effects on our lives as something we already know. It's already exposed, already at the surface. Underneath, we continue to weave the web of human relations anew. Anxiety, by isolating us in a subjective experience iterated across many individuals, harms our ability to understand our actions within this web. Exposure alone won't heal this harm. We sit in a friend's living room and talk circles around an experience that, we agree, we share—and yet we experience these anxieties in our own unique subjective ways no one else can possibly understand. I don't think we see and hear one another any longer. Talking about anxiety is not enough.

The earlier proponents of CR already understood this. “In consciousness-raising,” Sarachild writes, “through shared experience, one learns that uncovering the truth, that naming what's really going on, is necessary but insufficient for making changes” (Sarachild 1975, 148). Like Sedgwick, Sarachild understood that uncovering the truth must not become an end in itself, but one tactic among an ecology of tactics to dismantle power structures. While feminist CR in the 1960s and 1970s U.S. was a crucial, unique space for women to gather and share experiences for the purpose of “naming what's really going on” in a social structure that kept many of them isolated from one another in the domestic sphere, such spaces now abound on social media, which excels at providing forums to share personal experiences. The iterative in-person (i.e. embodied) nature of CR, on the other hand, is not improved on or replaced by the internet. Our group increasingly uses structures that activate these aspects of CR and seek to make use of presence in the room. By agreement, we take no individual notes; instead, we take collective notes on a large sheet of paper that is rolled up at the end of each meeting for us to encounter anew at the beginning of the next. We do breathing and mindfulness exercises, and we share in a communal meal. At several meetings, we've made use of instructions for collective sound-making from Pauline Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations*, developed for ongoing mostly non-verbal meetings hosted by Oliveros during roughly the same time period as feminist CR.¹ These have been experiments towards moving away from the paranoid act of naming, and instead integrating speech and action to come into a new relationship with anxiety. What is this relationship, and how can we come up with better tactics to approach it?

The relationship between speech and action forms the spine of Arendt's *The Human Condition*, and there are already suggestions in this mid-twentieth-century work of what we actually have to fear from what we now call "anxiety". The destruction of the common world results, Arendt writes, when "men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 58). Arendt remarks that action is frustrating because it can never fully convey the who-ness of a person (ibid., 180–83). Rather than take this as evidence that a person's essence can't enter the space of appearance, I want to think about this in terms of the disruptive, embodied knowledge produced by understanding the alienation effect in performance, a technique associated with the epic theatre of director, playwright, theorist, and poet Bertolt Brecht. The alienation effect feeds on exactly this space between action and who-ness. The task is not to resolve this space, but to remain permanently conscious of it.

What more is needed to turn affective anxiety into (political) movement, instead of inertia (Nash 2011, 3)? As another example of praxis that might be used to put precarious workers in active relation with their anxiety, I turn to the alienation effect. Linking this performance technique with affect theory suggests that when a person is alienated from her anxiety, it can become an object available to her to think with.

An Audience of Affect Aliens

Arendt's decade long engagement with Brecht is examined and re-framed by Markell. In offering a new reading of Arendt's work on Brecht, Markell understands Arendt to be emphasizing poetry's potential to trouble what we accept as "fact". Oddly enough, in *Men in Dark Times* Arendt primarily considers Brecht as a poet and not as a theatre artist, although in the essay she searches for the political nature of his poetry. As she puts it elsewhere, "the theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 188). Markell touches on Brecht as a theatre-maker: "Arendt's emphasis on the need to interrupt the all-too-smooth integration of truth-claims and action [...] resonates with Brecht's own efforts, in the Epic Theatre, to generate the 'alienation that is necessary to all understanding'" (Markell 2018, 529). But because Arendt is focused on Brecht's poetry, this is about as far into the issue of alienation as Markell goes.

Alienation is an overdetermined word; I witness this when I teach the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, commonly translated as "alienation effect," to students. The term produces an instantaneous reaction through which it's hard to teach. My students assume that Brecht meant a theatrical production should seek to alienate its audience, generally thinking this means the audience should be confused and think that the play is "weird". The result: an activated audience that asks questions, rather than an audience that leaves the theatre satisfied by a resolved, cathartic emotional journey. While this isn't a total misreading, it misinterprets the way that the V-Effekt is supposed to work on the audience, and it overlooks the fact that it works on an actor-methodological level as well. Actors working in Brechtian theatre are trained not to identify with

their role. In performance, a gap is maintained between actor and character, created through various kinds of acting styles, and bolstered by anti-illusionistic design elements and the inclusion of song, narration, and an “epic” dramaturgy (plays unfold in stand-alone episodes, rather than building tension along an Aristotelian plot trajectory). Actors comment on their roles rather than immerse themselves in them, working with what Brecht termed *Gestus*² to build quotable gestures and movements that reveal characters’ relative degree of oppression within an economic class structure. The point is not to confuse the audience—in fact, quite the opposite: the audience should recognize the gesture, but at the same time find it *unfamiliar* (Rouse 1984, 32).

Brecht’s theatre intends to create active political subjects, and importantly, it does not do so through truth-telling alone. Alienation is crucial to its political possibility, not just for its audiences but also for the performers who use the techniques. The source of confusion around the V-Effekt has to do with the tension between different uses of the word alienation. An alienated subject might refer to two quite different states of being. On the one hand, there is the person so alienated from her conditions that she feels powerless and isolated, incapable of action. On the other hand, there is the person who recognizes, through an awareness of her own alienation, the need for revolutionary change. The first of these two is the quintessential member of what Arendt calls “the society of the jobholders,” the final stage of development in the modern world which requires acquiescence in a “dazed, ‘tranquilized,’ functional type of behavior” and in which there is great danger that thought and action have become meaningless or impossible (Arendt [1958] 1998, 321–322). Anxiety, as an affect that tends to reproduce itself, to isolate, and to maintain itself by causing the anxious subject to identify with it, is a mechanism under neoliberal capitalism that keeps people functioning without (politically) acting. Without collapsing the difference between Arendt’s vision of modernity and my own critique of neoliberal capitalism’s effects today, we can draw out similarities in Arendt’s argument that a shift to private concerns leads to the *loss of the world* under modernity—and that this is part of the mechanism that makes modernity the time of oppressive regimes. If it is difficult to act under oppressive regimes, from totalitarianism to capitalism, it is even more difficult to think within them (ibid., 324). The exciting political possibility of alienation comes from its integration of thought and action, its remembering, through praxis that is deeply embodied. In this sense there is a strong link between the V-Effekt and feminist CR, where the latter aims to create “the consciousness of a being radically alienated from her world and often divided against herself,” as Sandra Bartky puts it. “Understanding, even beginning to understand this, makes it possible to *change*” (Bartky 1990, 21).

A particular manifestation of this radically alienated and divided being is Sara Ahmed’s theorization of the affect alien. Ahmed’s affect alien is made happy by the “wrong” things (Ahmed 2017, 64)—wrong because they do not benefit the dominant (heterosexist, patriarchal) ideology. Ahmed’s central example is the wedding, imagined in advance as the happiest day of one’s life. The affect alien is not against happiness per se, but she refuses to make a quest for happiness the guiding principle of her life. I suggest another example of a politically-mobilized affect alien can be found in Butler’s description of the grieving subject in *Precarious Life*: the self is called into question by its relation to the Other that has been lost. In grief, one is “not at one with oneself” (Butler 2003, 28). This alienation from the self through loss, Butler argues, produces a larger “we” (21). Learning to

see political possibility in grief can make one a grief affect alien, but this ‘alienation’ is the opposite of isolating. As Ahmed points out, when we feel out of tune with the world around us, things become available to us to examine (2017, 42).

If it seems peculiar to associate alienation with emotion, as it does to my students, we should take a second look. Alienation is produced not by distance but by a shift. An affect alien seems emotionless only when viewed from the perspective of someone whose experience of the world aligns with dominant meaning-making. A recent study linking Arendt and Brecht analyzes Arendt’s laughter, reinscribing her “rarely acknowledged” humorous tone and resisting critics who ignore it to defend her work’s “moral seriousness” or who “reduce it to a ‘distancing’ device” (Horsman 2010, 16–17). Similarly, the association of Brecht with the word “alienation” leads to the common misinterpretation that epic theatre is emotionless theatre. In reality, Brecht never sought to banish emotion from theatre, but rather to shift the relationship of both actor and audience to emotion. Where in Aristotelian theatre, the audience laughs and cries *with* characters, in epic theatre the audience cries when a character laughs and laughs when a character cries. In other words, Brecht’s ideal theatre would produce both an audience and an ensemble of affect aliens. And indeed, Ahmed’s theorization of the affect alien sounds a lot like a description of *Gestus*:

What happens when domestic bliss does not create bliss? Laura [in the film *The Hours*] tries to bake a cake. She cracks an egg. The cracking of the egg becomes a common gesture throughout the film, connecting the domestic labor of women over time. To bake a cake ought to be a happy activity, a labor of love. Instead, the film reveals a sense of oppression that lingers in the very act of breaking the eggs. [...] Feminist archives are full of scenes of domesticity, in which domestic objects become strange, almost menacing. (Ahmed 2017, 63)

It may seem paradoxical: a conscious experience of estrangement itself might be necessary for change, but the ultimate goal is to *combat* the oppressive estrangement that, as Arendt states, “may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known” ([1958] 1998, 322). To resolve this paradox, we should approach alienation as praxis, as it is for Brecht, rather than try to expose it as a state of being. To return to Sedgwick’s distinctions, this would be a shift from a paranoid use of alienation to a use that is reparative—that is, one that is hopeful, allowing that the future might be otherwise than the present (Sedgwick 2003, 146).

Beyond Speech, Beyond Paranoia

A well-known goal of CR is creating the “click”: the moment when you see the world around you in a different light because you’ve understood something new (to you) about structures oppressing you. The imagery of the click has sisters in “zap” action (Sarachild 1975, 165), feminist snap (Ahmed 2017, 194–195), and the “flash” (Sedgwick 2003, 139). These sudden, staccato words are meant to express sudden, staccato actions that mark an extreme change in directionality of thought, comprehension, action, or relation to a person or community due to the exposure of oppressive structures. However, to focus on producing the click is, I would argue, a paranoid, anxious tactic. A

different model or metaphor can be found in Arendt's "web of human relationships," made up of "innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions" that interact in such a way that "action almost never achieves its purpose"—and yet, Arendt emphasizes, action is the only thing that is real (Arendt [1958] 1998, 184). The web of human relationships exists wherever human beings live together and connects the action of an individual to the public thus constructed; action manifests in the web as stories. This model is not at odds with CR as praxis. Shifting emphasis from the click to the nonlinear effect of gathering iteratively over long time spans shows that practices like CR lead participants not just towards individual understanding, but to *act* within a web of human relationships—a communal and recursive form of understanding. Each action reweaves the web. Such a shift in emphasis is like shifting one's understanding of a theatre work's meaning from its effect on its audience during performance to a view that includes its entire organism: rehearsals, institutions and funding, the impact on the creative team.

Expanding anxiety CR in this way could involve bringing non-verbal techniques specifically intended to alienate participants from their neoliberal capitalism-produced anxiety into the circle. For contemporary examples of a kind of V-Effekt, it might not be enough to look to Brechtian theatre, which has been so aesthetically influential that all theatre is now in some sense Brechtian. We might look to Yup'ik dance and performance-maker Emily Johnson and her company Catalyst Dance, whose ongoing project *Then a Cunning Voice and A Night We Spend Gazing at Stars* includes formal sewing bees and drop-in quilt-making, as well as storytelling sessions and community meals, none of which are external to the project or auxiliary events in service of a culminating event. Creating the conditions necessary for them to happen, they are governed by an Indigenous protocol that incrementally shifts the behavior of all non-Indigenous people and institutions who interact with it, and alienates those who come into contact with the project from an experience of a settler-colonial United States as the natural order of things.

We might also look to social or situational choreography, such as *Parliament*, a work by artist Michael Kliën which unfolds over a span of three hours to several days or more, as a search for new ways of being in relation, nonverbally, to the other people in the room. It begins with an explanation of a set of directives that structure the behavior of the participants. The directives frame the situation as a recursive observing-oneself-observing-others. The explanation takes about twenty minutes. From there, *Parliament* wordlessly "runs": it is a technology that non-deterministically structures the ensuing hours of the situation. When I took part in it in December 2018, I experienced it as both simple and profound: it alienated me from my accustomed way of attaching meaning to gesture and touch.

We might also look to artist Simone Leigh's *Free People's Medical Clinic*. Two years of research led to a month in 2014 during which many bodies and actions turned a house in the Weeksville neighborhood of Brooklyn into a community center, health clinic, and performance space. Fusing elements of performance, installation, duration, and community partnerships, the *FPMC* enacted a complex transhistorical layering (including attendants in anachronistic costumes who had taken a preparatory etiquette class) that made space for the bodies and actions of black women in a common understanding of public health across time, both as recipients and givers of care. The

aesthetics of the strange-in-the-familiar created a productive alienation effect that juxtaposed Weeksville's historical significance as one of the first free black communities with the tangible presence of the still mostly African-American neighborhood's very current lack of access to public services.

In our Brooklyn anxiety CR circles, we have learned that the greatest barrier to action is not that we are unable to describe our anxiety (we are), but that we are unable or unwilling to detach ourselves from it, to disidentify with it. A paranoid method of CR based on naming and exposure through discussion should not be discarded, but it also isn't enough. Reparative tactics, as mentioned above, are world-building; they create story. Arendt is critical of the way that the only people in modern society who are still capable of acting are scientists, and she warns us against a form of action that "acts into nature from the standpoint of the universe and not into the web of human relationships", lacking "the ability to *produce stories* and become historical" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 324; emphasis mine). I look to theatre and performance techniques as a way of expanding CR practice not only because these are the tools, as a theatre artist, with which I'm familiar, but also because theatre produces stories, and because performance does not exist outside of the web of human relationships.

The participatory, relational, or immersive turn in visual arts and theatre tends to refer to artworks that claim to create a unique, impactful experience for audiences by asking them to participate in and co-create the work while viewing it. Many critics are rightfully skeptical of this claim, particularly where the relationship is a fleeting one, and one in which "participants" have no substantive agency outside the prescribed conditions of the event. But it is still possible to take performance practices seriously as long-term study that deeply impact performer and ensemble through participation. There is no need to seek an audience external to the process in order to extend CR practice using performance. I'm interested in the potential of expanded, longitudinal processes that engage multiple circles of audience-participants throughout the process of making them. Drawing on these processes to develop reparative methods, based on praxis-based alienation through embodiment, to specifically address anxiety would enable participants to look at anxiety as something strange—as something strange-making—rather than something to be eradicated. This approach is intended to break the cycle of capitalist production and recuperation of affect, and instead make of anxiety a politically mobilized affect.

"The thinker who wants the world to know the 'content' of his thoughts," Arendt writes, "must first of all stop thinking and remember his thoughts" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 90). In the word *remember* there is something other than a mental process differentiated from thinking: there is a mind-body act, a re-remembering, the gathering up the pieces of thought made and caught in the web of human relations and assembling them into a being that is a reminder of the living, relational process of thought.

Notes

¹ I learned about Pauline Oliveros and her sonic meditation group through Liz Kinnamon, who attended one of our CR circles and whose dissertation focuses on the history of CR, including projects like Oliveros' which often did not self-define as CR.

² *Gestus* has a number of different, at times contradictory, definitions in Brecht; the relevant one here is the *gesellschaftliche*, or social, *Gestus*, "the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships in which the people of a particular epoch stand to each other" (Brecht 15: 346).

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Biography

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