AN INTRODUCTION IN THREE PARTS

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I. Power and Powerlessness in Performance

"It's been a slow process. The sinking in of how quickly the world changed" (Gordon 2020, n.p.). This is how US-American artist Kim Gordon, best known as bassist and singer of Sonic Youth, framed her personal meditations on the COVID-19 pandemic and its sudden impact on the ways of life around the globe. She intimated a gradual awareness of that which came as if without a warning—although, as Gordon was quick to add, "it's been a long time coming, you know, the abuse of the planet, the greed, the widening gap between those who are in power, want to remain in power, and the working poor."

Gordon drafted these lines back in May 2020; almost two years later, the editors of this journal issue find ourselves finalising this publication, and we find ourselves not only agreeing with Gordon in one essential way, but also wanting to extend her message into the present: it's been a slow and long process, indeed—not only the recognition of the changes from the initial outbreak of the novel corona virus, but also the keeping up with these changes, the living, loving, working, teaching, writing throughout the pandemic. This pandemic time seems to be defined not simply by a dreary lengthiness, but by an interplay of instants and durations, of onsets and delays, of agitation and exhaustion. There is the initial shock of the positive test result, and then there is the slow recovery, or the dwelling in isolation despite a lack of serious illness; for more than a few, there is the

seeming endlessness of long COVID, or worse, the end in death after days or weeks in the ICU. There is the need for the sudden restructuring of schedules in view of the most recent implementation or lifting of regulations to social interaction, and then there is the wait to see if work or private events can indeed take place; or the long process of trying to play catch-up with everything that couldn't go ahead. There is, in short, a constant back and forth, a living in crisis-mode perpetuated over months and years that, however, soon starts to feel just like an exacerbation of the crisis governmentality—crisis as a mode of governing bodies, behaviours, populations—that was already at work before the pandemic outbreak and policies (cf. The Invisible Committee 2015, 21–26; Gentili 2013). Observing the societal long-term effects of COVID-19, Franco "Bifo" Berardi correspondingly chose to speak of a "psycho-deflation," a sort of generalised long COVID state of exhaustion which he qualifies as "psychological energy" "being sapped from the social body," such that "imagination slows, and the collective body is paralyzed" (2022, n.p.).

In some sense, this journal issue too got caught up in the pandemic whirlwind of the sudden and the slow. The original timeline foresaw a publication date in the second half of 2020, but it had soon become clear that it was as impossible as it would have been absurd to try to uphold this plan. Like so many in academia, several of our contributors and us editors had to adapt to repeatedly changing teaching requirements, from purely online to blended modes of teaching, to making up for classes that had to be postponed multiple times; at the same time, new articles waited to be written while old ones still needed to be finished, and the time of writing itself was marked by a continuous recalibration in light of new developments. More importantly—and again, like so many others everywhere have experience during the past two years—there was the immediate necessity to attend to and care for one's own life and the lives of family members, friends, and loved ones. Whether it was oneself or the people close to oneself: one had to deal with the consternation over a first infection, and then repeated infections or long COVID; one had to deal with the breakdowns and repairs of social care networks, and with deaths and periods of mourning in the family. It was one of the minor challenges that, in the early months of the pandemic, not everyone happened to have access to library services and academic resources, as they could not enter the university or were stuck away from their homes and their own bookshelves.

Correspondingly, this journal issue contains several markers of a writing and editing process of interruptions and hold-ups, mostly visible in notes stating that an article was written, or that an interview was conducted, at a specific moment during the pandemic, and thus reflecting a specific knowledge and mindset of the situation at the time. Some articles were written and finalised in the first year of the pandemic, while others took longer to take shape; in many cases, it was the review and editing process that added further delays—which is to say, not least, that us editors take full responsibility for the fact that the issue is only being published now, in early 2022. More generally, though, it was interesting to observe that, in theory and philosophy more broadly, it had soon become somewhat of a common practice to add some sign-posting as a way of indicating the moment of writing in relation to the state of the pandemic; formulas such as "as I am writing this," or "I am writing this at a time when," can be read in many topical reflections from the past two years. In a sense, then, many writings of those past two years revealed or recalled the particularly

provisional character of thought, as well as the fact that writing itself is a slow medium. The process of writing, throughout the pandemic, could be seen as both intending to keep up with the quickly shifting present as well as acknowledging that it always comes after the fact, after the event has taken place.

If we choose to address the circumstances of the coming about of this journal issue in some detail, that is not least because the corona crisis concerns the issue's very subject matter. The early developments and early philosophical as well as political assessments of the pandemic made it abundantly clear that the problem of power and powerlessness was very much at stake in this present moment, amongst other things of course. So obvious was the need to think the pandemic through the prism of power, power relations, technologies of power, and governmentality that, very early on, the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2020) collated a series of philosophical responses to the virus outbreak which prepended an extract from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977)—arguably one of the most important contributions to the analytics of power from the last century; inevitably, what followed was a larger debate about the adequacy and inadequacy of applying Foucauldian notions of power (discipline, biopower, liberal governmentality, et cetera) to the new corona situation (cf. pars pro toto: Sarasin 2020).

We will not attempt to rehearse, here, the entirety or even the most critical of interventions about the obvious relations between COVID-19 and power/powerlessness; for now, we would like just to note two aspects of the debate: first, the pandemic summoned a plethora of interjections and analyses about the case of power during COVID, which was overall representative of a frenzy of diagnoses about the state of power from the past decades. Virtually anyone who recently had anything to say about power decided to take the corona crisis as a test case for their pre-established theories: from Judith Butler (2020a, 2020b) re-emphasising the thought of precariousness in light of the unequal distribution of risks during the pandemic, to Naomi Klein (2020) doubling down on her theory of the shock doctrine, to Roberto Esposito (2020a, 2020b) finding his political philosophy of immunity actualised in the most immediate sense, to Giorgio Agamben (2021) notoriously radicalising his theory of sovereignty, bio- and necropolitics, and the state of exception—these and many other voices turned the pandemic into an example for their ponderings about power. (As for Agamben's untenable arguments about the state of politics and human life during the corona crisis, recent critiques of his position have said what needed to be said (Bratton 2021; Di Cesare 2021; Kotso 2022); even those who overall remained sympathetic to his assessment of corona developments, such as Nina Power (2021), deliberately chose not to reiterate Agamben's most unfathomable comparisons about the COVID-19 policies in Italy and beyond having had worse effects on human life and freedom than the Nazi regime and the two World Wars.)

While we do not want to dismiss the critical clout of many of these assessments, we believe that the more interesting implications of the pandemic with respect to the issue of power and powerlessness might lie elsewhere, namely in the debate about the value and meaning of life that was sparked by several commentators. Apart from Agamben's hyperbolic assertions about humanity having given way to barbarism under corona conditions, other interpreters have uttered

more cautious, and yet still far-reaching concerns about the dilemma of living and organising a good life in the face of the threat of the virus. In an interview, Robert Pfaller commented: "[I]n reality, it is never about life and death, because we all have to die at some point. It is about the question as to how much of our good life we are willing to surrender in order to preserve life for an indistinct amount of time" (2020, n.p.; trans. GD); Roberto Esposito, similarly stated: "The same immunity, which serves to save life, could drain the sense out of it" (2020b, 78; see also Esposito 2020a). And Alexander Garcia Düttmann, in a reflection on the rage of theatre director Frank Castorf (2020) about political directives for social behaviour by the German government, posed the following question: "Could the cost of staying alive not be such that we lose sight of what has greater worth, perhaps art itself and other forms of thought?" (2020, 66). To this, we can add a further comment from the initially quoted Kim Gordon, who stated in a remarkably dry fashion: "I would love to play but maybe not to die" (2020, n.p.). The love to play—this love can be interpreted, in the case of Gordon the musician, as a love to play an instrument, but it can also be interpreted as exactly what it says: a love of playing as such, a love for plays, games, and therefore, a love for the lavish excess of that which is irreducible to the mere self-preservation of life. And yet: maybe we would love not to die. The ambivalence of this "maybe," the tension between a love for life as play and a love for life as survival, epitomises the problem of the value of life under COVID-19, COVID-19 the virus, the health measures, and the restrictions to social as well as artistic life.

This is where we would like to position our investigation of power and powerlessness in performance during the pandemic—performance understood as the art of performance, as theatre, dance, and performance in theatre institutions and elsewhere, and performance understood as such play, as a "Schauspiel," a play for the onlookers in the audience, and thus a play of onlooking that is inherently social, inscribed in the context of a social gathering. Which is exactly why theatre, dance, and performance, in the first year of the pandemic, were deemed a threat to the population's health in countries around the world, a potential death trap of people infecting each other while sitting in the stalls or having a drink in the foyer. Theatres soon argued that their ventilation systems, their ways of guiding people to their seats, of allowing less spectators, et cetera, made auditoriums safer than commercial spaces, but the latter stayed open whereas the former were closed and performances were cancelled for months, as everyone remembers all too well. Theatre makers, artistic directors, and curators subsequently claimed that performing arts were essential to life, not a mere luxury that one can easily get rid of. Thomas Ostermeier, artistic director of Schaubühne Berlin, for instance, exclaimed: "Theatre is not a luxury, it is not an ornament, it is a necessity!" (2020, trans. GD; Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda put forward the more general argument that one of the insights of the pandemic was a debate about "essential work," cf. Hamza/Ruda 2020, 6). At the same time, theatre, dance, and performance makers took the suspension of their activities as an opportunity to reconsider the very meaning of what they do. *Why Theatre?* was the programmatic title of a volume edited by Milo Rau and his NTGent (Rau, De Geest, Hornbostel 2020; cf. also Pfost/Renfordt/Schreiber/NRW KULTURsekretariat/Impulse Theater Festival 2020; Weber-Krebs 2020).

The stakes of such attempts at a self-reflection of performance perhaps became most obvious in an interjection by Branislav Jakovljević in *The Drama Review*: "At this moment, live performance is

powerless. It depends for its survival on medical science and on the pharmaceutical industry" (in The Drama Review editors 2020, 195). The notion of powerlessness is well chosen, as it allows not just for an understanding of the cancellation of performances as a however temporary interruption of theatrical activities, but also for the hypothesis that the lack of theatrical activity, and therefore, the lack of theatre and performance as play, has something to say about the very relation of power, powerlessness, and life. In other words, our question, and the way that we would like to frame this journal issue, concerns the cancellation of theatre and performance during the pandemic and how it can speak of the difference between power and life as a matter of self-preservation on the one hand, and power and life as self-overcoming on the other hand. The latter Nietzschean notion of self-overcoming invokes, of course, another term of Nietzsche that will be critical for our argument, namely the will to power. However, to unfold this argument, we will first have to invest in a more thorough understanding of powerlessness itself; for that purpose, we will introduce the thought that sparked the conception of this journal issue in 2019, before the COVID-19 crisis was known.

As we first made plans for this journal issue in 2019, we were interested in and influenced by the implications of a public discussion from a few years earlier that played out in France. In late 2015, philosopher Geoffroy de Lagasnerie and author Eduoard Louis launched a "Manifesto for an intellectual and political counteroffensive," in which they proclaimed: "To experience politics, for most of us now, is to experience powerlessness" (n.p.). They went on to say that: "How many people, in the context of meetings and seminars, have expressed to us, often overwhelmed by emotion, both a sense of anger and an inability to act and to express themselves. It's as if contemporary political and democratic structures were built around dispossession and the inability to intervene." Some of the observations that de Lagasnerie and Louis gathered to support their statement included the feeling of hopelessness vis-à-vis the hostility of EU countries toward refugees, the undermining of democratic procedures in Greece by the Troika, and the rise of right-wing and right-extremist populism. In a later essay from early 2016, authored by de Lagasnerie alone, he confirmed their original assessment:

> If I had to characterize the contemporary political situation using only one term, I would use the concept of powerlessness. […] [W]hat is unique, or perhaps exacerbated, today is our growing inability to influence the course of events. Whenever we intervene, whenever we protest, whenever we make demands of the state, these actions seem to yield ever-diminishing transformative results. (n.p.)

In response to de Lagasnerie and Louis' original interjection, Bernard Stiegler launched a fiery counterstatement that first acknowledged how "[t]he manifesto by de Lagasnerie and Louis raises necessary questions," only to assert that "in my view their way of asking them lacks perspective." Stiegler agrees that powerlessness posits an urgent philosophical challenge: "Having been inundated by critiques of power, in particular by Foucault but more generally by 'French theory,' now we must think political powerlessness—which is obviously not the disappearance of all power, and which is obviously an impotence that is not just political" (2015, n.p.). What the present moment, and what de Lagasnerie and Louis specifically seem to ask from us, therefore, is a shift in the philosophical condition of "power after Foucault" (Brown 2009). It is to think power from the

perspective of powerlessness. Yet, de Lagasnerie and Louis' broader assumptions seem to Stiegler "to be not only questionable, but dangerous." Above all, Stiegler criticises their affirmation of the figure of the intellectual, which "internalizes the opposition between 'manual workers' and 'intellectuals'" (2015, n.p.), and thus the hierarchisation of body and mind in a political economy. Indeed, de Lagasnerie and Louis' sustained belief in the societal role of the intellectual—demonstrated in the very title of their manifesto as conjuring an intellectual counteroffensive—is rather lamentable, particularly because they should be aware of the history of French theory: in the early 1970s, Foucault, in the framework of his participation in the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, set a precedent against the engaged intellectual and the intellectual's politics of representation, when he insisted that we must hear from the prisoners themselves, instead of having a philosopher speak for them.

In addition to Stiegler's critique, there is indeed further reason to be sceptical of de Lagasnerie and Louis' approach. While their diagnosis of powerlessness is crucial, their line of argumentation suggests a narrow conception of power and powerlessness that centres around the sovereignty of state democracy and its people, as the above quotations about protests and demands to the state confirm; thus, they tend to ignore once more the insights of Foucault, who famously assumed that the scope of power relations reaches far beyond state relations as well as political and juridical sovereignty. Furthermore, as their "we" implies a political state subject, a civil society insofar as it addresses itself to and is recognised by the state, de Lagasnerie and Louis' position a priori excludes those who tend not to be regarded as political subjects in the first place, the subaltern, minoritarian bodies living within and simultaneously outside of society. Powerlessness in de Lagasnerie and Louis effectively acts as a tool of ignorance vis-à-vis the more fundamental powerlessness of those with no positive relation to state powers at all.

Still, de Lagasnerie, in his second essay from 2016, formulated an important challenge:

> I believe that our contemporary political impotence stems from the fact that, in most areas of analysis, we struggle to formulate a genuine and collective critique of the past and the present—and thus we fail to produce inventive modes of critique. […] [T]he way in which operations of power are codified in critical theory often reifies the a prior political regime as a positive reference that is placed beyond question. (n.p.)

It is this challenge that Stiegler responds to, and it is the challenge that we subscribe to in this present journal issue. How, given the powerlessness and inability to engender radical change, must political philosophy, and performance philosophy as well, reconsider the very terms and methods that they employ to talk about issues of power. Stiegler, for his part, suggests that the analysis of contemporary powerlessness must be based on a critical account of the transformations in "*anthropogenesis as such*" (2016, n.p., emphasis in original), which concern, more than anything else, the innovations of technology within the capitalist matrix: as these innovations manifest an ever advancing process of exosomatisation and the proletarisation of the *savoir-vivre* (after the industrial proletarisation of the *savoir-faire*), and hence a cognitive regression without precedent in modern history, Stiegler sees the fate of humankind depend on the ability to raise a new

rationality and order, a "neganthropology," to oppose the entropic disintegration and destruction of life. For reasons that we cannot go into detail about, we will not follow Stiegler's own perspective (amongst other things, we would have to inquire whether, in using the thermodynamic and cybernetic vocabulary of entropy and negentropy, Stiegler does not affirm a conception of cognition and order that is regressive in itself, to use his own term); we do see, however, the need to investigate more fundamentally the role of the term powerlessness in given theories of power, and more specifically, its significance in Foucault and the Foucauldian tradition of analysing power.

First though, it should be acknowledged that the observation of a sentiment of powerlessness is certainly not an original trait of contemporary thought and philosophy. Suffice it to recall Hannah Arendt's preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she summed up the experience of two World Wars, the post-Fascist condition, and the beginning of the Cold War: "Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted […]—forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries. It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence […] and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives" (1973, vii). These lines, written in 1950, serve as a reminder that powerlessness, and its historical correlation with a drive toward absolute power, defined much of 20th-century developments, if not modern developments and modern rationalities overall. With respect to the modern predicament, Peter Sloterdijk therefore remarked: "Modernity as a techno-political composite has unhinged the old familiar equilibrium between human power and powerlessness" (2020, 2), namely in that the modern mind posited the liberation from humanity's passivity vis-à-vis the transcendence of God, only to find that the human excess of activity and power resulted in a circular and self-inflicted passivity—a "second passivity," as Sloterdijk called the incontrollable by-products of the totalisation of activity, thus reinstating a narrative of modernity whose contours are familiar at least since Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972 [1942]).

Such emphasis on the defining quality of powerlessness in modern history certainly puts into perspective any alarmist claims about the exceptionality of the present moment; the diagnosis of powerlessness is a recurrent phenomenon. Yet, this does not take away from the urgency of addressing this powerlessness not as a new, but a modern phenomenon that is still, and again, asking to be considered. To underline that the debate of de Lagasnerie, Louis, and Stiegler is not the only contribution from contemporary theory and philosophy stressing the importance of again thinking through powerlessness, one can cite several other recent statements. In the study of performance and art, for instance, Bojana Kunst motivated her research on the conditions of artistic labour by stating that she was confronted with "the recurrent question of artistic powerlessness in relation to politics and contemporary methods of production. […] It appears that today artistic freedom is proportionate to artistic unimportance or the powerlessness it exhibits as regards wider social change" (2015, 1, 7).

To give another example from political theory, the above-mentioned Franco "Bifo" Berardi, in a lecture from 2016, framed his argument about a resurgence of fascism (or the right-wing populist tendencies that de Lagasnerie and Louis spoke of) in terms of impotence: "The crucial point of our

time is impotence. Impotence is really explaining this coming back of fascism" (2016, minute 15:00). It is noteworthy that Berardi speaks of impotence and not powerlessness. In fact, in *Futurability*, he elaborates: "I do not identify impotence as powerlessness. Often when lacking power, people have been able to act autonomously, to create forms of self-organisation and to subvert the established power" (2017, 41–42). On the one hand, this differentiation of impotence and powerlessness presents another oversimplified account of powerlessness, in the sense that powerlessness is again being connected to participation in democratic procedures of the state, instead of powerlessness relating to power relations in all kinds of social constructions. On the other hand, though, Berardi implicitly points to the conceptual obligation of indeed differentiating power and powerlessness or *pouvoir* and *impouvoir* from potency and impotency or *puissance* and *impuissance*, to put it in the dominant French terms. This distinction matters, as the unequal pair of *puissance* and *pouvoir* concerns a difference that has equally been formulated as the difference between *potentia* and *potestas*, and between desire and power. Famously, this is where Foucault and Deleuze's views on power diverged: whereas Foucault knows nothing but the struggle of force relations as the struggle of power and resistance on one and the same socio-political and ontological plane, Deleuze posits that the register of power is predicated upon the relations of desire that logically exist prior to power and ontologically manifest their primacy over power (Deleuze 2006b). Deleuze was often misunderstood as reintroducing, in this way, an exclusively repressive notion of power, but in fact he never dismissed Foucault's argument about the power of discipline and biopolitics actively producing bodies, subjects, norms, et cetera; however, he stated that, insofar as the realm of desire constitutes the realm of virtualities, any of their actualisations in terms of power relations constituted the exclusion of the actualisation of other virtualities, and thus the repression of the realm of the virtual in a broader sense. In short, then, the distinction between impotence and powerlessness is important insofar as the former can be said to refer to the lack of the very potential to act, whereas the latter refers to the lack of the actual ability to act, or the lack of the enactment of that potential—which is to say that impotence and powerlessness, while distinct from each other, are at the same time utterly related. We will come back to this crucial distinction later, when we propose the possibility of a Foucauldian understanding of powerlessness.

For now, it is necessary to emphasise that Foucault strictly speaking does not possess a notion of powerlessness, or impotence, for that matter. Neither in Foucault nor in analyses of power in the wake of Foucault do we find a prominent and far-developed account of what powerlessness might mean. One might go so far as to ask whether, according to Foucault, powerlessness can reflect the dynamics and logics of power at all; inversely, one might ask whether a Foucauldian approach is at all capable of responding to the current need to think through powerlessness, as it was formulated by de Lagasnerie, Louie, and Stiegler.

Of course, Foucault himself suggested that he never even proposed a theory of power (let alone powerlessness), but, rather, an analytics of power (Foucault 1978, 82); although it has since been argued that Foucault's methodological reflections on the analysis of power suggest some crucial elements of a systematic elaboration of power nevertheless (cf. Saar 2007, 204–224). The core elements are well known (cf. for instance Foucault 1978, 92–102; 2007, 1–4): that power is

everywhere, while it does not follow that everything everywhere is entirely determined by power; that the reification of power is a false abstraction, because there is no such thing as power, but only power relations; consequentially, power is not something that can be possessed, but a relation of forces that encompasses and first constitutes the subject supposedly being in power as much as the one being subjected to that power; in other words, power is not a force of the subject, but, as Butler's extrapolations of Foucault emphasised (1997), it is the matrix that first creates the subject: the *assujettissement* that implies a subjugation as much as it brings about a subject capable of acting upon and transforming the processes of subjugation.

In addition to such considerations, we find many explicit definitions of power in Foucault, the most cited one certainly stemming from his late article "The Subject and Power:" "The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government" (1982, 789). However, there is wide agreement about the fact that Foucault's understanding of power shifted all the time, and that he never settled on one notion of power (also acknowledged by de Lagasnerie, cf. 2017, 118). The dynamism of his thought of power is representative of his overall thought as having been characterised by several turning points and reversals—which recently led François Caillat to understand Foucault's endeavour as an experiment and a conscious struggle of "*Foucault against himself*" (2017, 24; emphasis in original). Interestingly, it is the fact that Foucault "demanded the right to move about and to change" (Caillat 2017, 23) that is associated with a notion of play and games. In several texts and on multiple occasions, Foucault himself evoked a sense of play in relation to his method. In an exemplary statement from an interview that was aptly titled "Le jeu de Michel Foucault" (the English translation of the interview unfortunately reads "The Confessions of the Flesh"), Foucault reported a crucial twist in the writing process of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*. As he felt that the first draft was not satisfactory, "I turned the whole thing upside down. That was only a game, because I wasn't sure …. [sic] But I said to myself, basically, couldn't it be that sex—which seems to be an instance having its own laws and constraints, on the basis of which the masculine and feminine sexes are defined—be something which on the contrary is *produced* by the apparatus of sexuality?" (1980, 210, emphasis in original). Whether this is indeed an accurate description of Foucault's creative process or not, it shows that he would like his crucial intervention against the repressive hypothesis of power to be viewed as the result of nothing but a playful subversion of his own thought, a game, and a sort of bet. As this is just one of many cases of Foucault speaking about his work in terms of play, and conceiving these speaking commitments as games, Tony Fisher and Kélina Gotman recently proposed "a 'theatrical' Foucault," who, "like the actor […] could assume many different roles and guises, no doubt in the process frustrating many of his critics" (2020, 13).

More importantly, Fisher and Gotman highlight how the theatricality of Foucault extends to his genealogies of power as staging "'theatr-o-retical'" (12) scenes in which relations of power themselves are rendered in terms of games, and the bodies and subjects involved figuring as players (this also happens to be one of the connecting lines between Foucault and Rancière, who equally presents his work as that of the construction of scenes, scenes of the distribution of the

sensible, that is; cf. Rancière 2018). Indeed, we can claim a correlation between Foucault's method of play or games and his conception of power as itself being a matter of games, and we might go so far as to suggest that the notion of power as a game is among the few constants in Foucault's late thought of power, next to the emphasis of power being characterised by force relations. In fact, what qualifies force relations as a relations of power is precisely that they play out as strategic games. Having been asked about Sartre's characterisation of power as evil, Foucault once replied: "Power is not evil. Power is games of strategy" (1997, 298), and in the same interview, he suggested that: "the freer people are with respect to each other, the more they want to control each other's conduct. The more open the game, the more appealing and fascinating it becomes" (300). This argument indeed presents one of the most crucial logics of Foucault's late reflections on power: that power is a game because it involves subjects who find themselves in force relations that do not entirely determine them, but that evoke spaces of manoeuvring, of strategic movements, and strategic or tactical resistances. Certainly, this notion of a game does not imply a voluntaristic subject, but it does imply that power is co-constitutive with certain degrees of freedom, freedoms that exist within power relations, and freedoms that concern, above all, the resistance against the very mechanisms and registers of a certain arrangement or dispositif of power. De Lagasnerie, in one of his more nuanced reflections on Foucault, stated that Foucault, in his own academic career and the way that he navigated institutions, "mustered a certain type of power against another type of power. That's what freedom is" (2017, 147). The notion of the game and its relation to power and freedom, in Foucault, thus registers as the exploitation of the minute interstices between different forms of power. And the relation between Foucault's method of playing games and his notion of power as a game concerns the ways in which Foucault's writing and his philosophical actions intervene as playful acts of resistance within games of power, meaning that Foucault never simply wrote about power, but that his writing inserted itself in the games of power that it addressed.

We can, conclude, for now, that Foucault's notion of power as strategic games installs a register of power and resistance from which the idea of powerlessness is entirely absent. It might seem, then, that Foucault's elaborations on power cannot actually tell us much, or anything, about powerlessness. And yet, in a passage from "The Subject and Power," Foucault does, in a rare moment of exception, explicitly talk about powerlessness, or total impotence, to be more precise. In the final pages of the article, he introduces a difference between power relations and relations of strategy, which leads him to stating:

> It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape. Accordingly, every intensification, every extension of power relations to make the insubordinate submit can only result in the limits of power. The latter reaches its final term either in a type of action which reduces the other to total impotence (in which case victory over the adversary replaces the exercise of power) or by a confrontation with those whom one governs and their transformation into adversaries. Which is to say that every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power, and every relationship of power leans toward the idea that, if it follows its own line of development and comes up against direct confrontation, it may become the

winning strategy. In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal. (1982, 794)

In Foucauldian discourse this passage has, to our knowledge, only been commented upon by Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, who take the differentiation between power relations and strategic confrontations to signal a difference between as well as a correlation of power and war as the defining quality of governmentality, such that they conclude: "*governmentality* […] *organizes, governs, and controls the reversibility of wars and power*" (2016, 282, emphasis in original). While we agree with this interpretation, our focus is nevertheless a slightly different one. What matters to us, in our discussion of powerlessness, is that Foucault effectively introduces the case of "total impotence" as a limit phenomenon of power. As the quoted passage suggests, impotence is the result of a shift in how subjects relate to each other via free and playful actions; where the game of power and resistance transforms into strategic confrontations of adversaries that fight to assume victory over each other, the elements of play, of freedom, and ultimately of power itself are being overruled by relations of war, violence, and domination which can indeed amount to the total impotence of one of the sides involved. In this sense, powerlessness can be said to constitute the outside as much as the desired end point of power. Power tends to strive for the realisation of a state of powerlessness which annuls power itself in the realisation of a state of domination, Foucault himself having distinguished the violence of domination from the freedom of power more than once (very clearly, for instance in 1997, 299).

There remains, however, the important detail that Foucault in fact does not speak of powerlessness, but "total impotence." With respect to this distinction, we can take up our earlier discussion about the difference between the register of power and powerlessness on the one hand, and potency and impotency on the other. What Foucault seems to imply in his decision to speak not only of impotence, but total impotence, is that the absolute limit of power, which is war, violence, and domination, consists in the total destruction of the very potential to act, not merely, as would be the case with powerlessness, the negation of the enactment of a potential. In other words, we can draw up two or even three levels of the negation of power: the inability to act (powerlessness), the inability to conjure the potential to act (impotence), and thirdly, perhaps, the utter lack of relation to any kind of action, potential, or agency whatsoever (total impotence). Where powerlessness might still include the potential of action, freedom, and play, impotence and total impotence instead describe a relation which must result in utter hopelessness indeed. Having said that, powerlessness designates not merely a lesser form of impotence, but on the contrary, powerlessness can be understood as a relation and state in which the rules of power no longer entirely apply, while the horror of impotence does not apply either. As such, powerlessness hints at a state of potency, of potentiality, virtuality, or desire, which, although always to be thought of in correlation with the issues of power and impotence, can still claim a however limited space of more radical freedom. It is, in some sense, the radical freedom of the potential to play, or the freedom of playing with force relations in their virtuality, without their immediate actualisation. Not least, a further differentiation between game and play seems useful at this point: whereas the games of power involve rules, norms, et cetera, the play and radical freedom of powerlessness

denote a potential space without any such regularities and regulations. This, in our view, is the deeper sense of powerlessness that we can derive from Foucault, a sense that we derive from playing with Foucault's thought itself, and therefore perhaps somewhat moving beyond it. Having said that, if de Lagasnerie, Louis, Stiegler, and others are right to claim that our present moment is another modern moment defined by powerlessness, then we would like to propose that this powerlessness concerns not simply the inability to participate in the free games of power and resistance, but that, at the same time, it concerns the state of the potentiality or virtuality of force relations as such, and how we care for them, nurture them, or destroy them.

On this basis, we would like to come back to the initial context of our discussion, the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the question of power and powerlessness, in this context, can be understood as a question of life and the values and meanings attributed to it. When philosophers like Pfaller, Esposito, and Düttmann voice their concerns about life being reduced to a matter of self-preservation, it might seem, at first glance, that power and powerlessness are concerned with respect to a merely biological and vegetative state of species-survival. Butler once suggested that power, in Foucault, is indeed a matter of self-preservation (2002, 17), and that would imply that powerlessness is the inability to preserve one's life, or the life of the species. But as the previous argumentation has shown, quite the opposite is true: power and powerlessness in Foucault do not address self-preservation and the realm of necessity, but the potential of the play of forces in the realm of freedom. Even where biopower and biopolitics are concerned, one might argue that the historical ways of managing the health of populations as outlined by Foucault is yet another example of power as a strategic game. It is an existential game, as it refers to self-preservation, but insofar as it is a game, it is not identical with the necessity of self-preservation; rather, it designates the contingent ways in which the preservation of the social and collective body is being regulated.

Butler's misinterpretation of Foucault in this respect is very revealing, as she refers Foucault to Spinozist notions of power and life, which indeed tend to posit the primacy of self-preservation with respect to power (on self-preservation in Spinoza, and with respect to Nietzsche, who is crucial for our further argument, cf. Rotter 2019). However, in doing so, Butler ignores what Deleuze (1988, 71) and others have called Foucault's "profound Nietzscheanism." Foucault himself professed his gratitude and indebtedness to Nietzsche in many ways, for instance by stating that "Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so" (1980, 53). Without wanting to retrace a genealogy of Nietzsche in Foucault, we will state that the notion of power as strategic game can indeed be understood as a reiteration of Nietzsche's will to power. To be sure, Nietzsche's will to power is a many-faceted notion that, from Heidegger onwards, has been interpreted in contradictory ways, which is why we will only entertain a selective reading of it. What seems essential to us is that the will to power, as Nietzsche had his Zarathustra say, is the expression of the principle of life as self-overcoming, not self-preservation. To be precise, life itself, in speaking to Zarathustra, asserts that: "I am that *which must always overcome itself*. [...] Indeed, the one who shot at truth with the words 'will to existence' did not hit it: this will—does not exist! For, what *is* not can not will; but what is in existence, how could this still will to exist! Only where life is, is there also will; but not will to life, instead—thus I teach you—will to power!" (2006, 89–90, emphasis in

original). It is on the basis of Nietzsche's idea, according to which life wills power and thus wills the overcoming of itself, that Foucault can propose power as a matter of strategic games of freedom. In fact, one might say that, from Nietzsche to Foucault, the notion of the game substitutes for the notion of the will. To be precise, the point here is not that, in Foucault no longer referring to the will, he ridded himself of the subject—because the subject was already negated in Nietzsche's own understanding of the will. Nietzsche was clear about the fact that the concept of the will, in being an abstraction and a reification, falsely suggests a consciousness or a subject as the cause of power (cf. 1999, 19, 25, 26). The point is that, in the same way that Nietzsche's will to power, according to Deleuze (2006a, 49–52), defines the differential element of force relations, Foucault's notion of the strategic game has the function of accounting for the fact that power is always more than mere relations of force: it accounts for the process through which the quantitative relations of forces accept qualities, qualities of power and resistance. Combining the terminologies of Nietzsche and Foucault, we can say, therefore, that the freedom in power is the freedom of life overcoming itself, in the strategic and playful relation of life's forces. And yet, insofar as Nietzsche's will to power speaks of a will to dominate, and thus of struggle and war, the will to power implies, at the same time, the strategic confrontation between adversaries that lets power aspire to the total subjugation of the other in a state of powerlessness or even impotence.

If interpreted against the backdrop of these considerations, the debates about the values of life during the past two years of the corona pandemic and corresponding political restrictions can be conceived as touching upon the very ability and potential of enacting the powers of life. A virus that is neither dead nor alive raised the question as to whether the modes of governmentality employed to contain the virus let the powers of life drift toward unmediated struggles, domination, and powerlessness or not. But finally, and crucially, where does all that leave the art of performance, given that artistic performances could not be shown to audiences for several months during this state of the renegotiation and restructuring of the relations of power and life, or life as power? What about the powerlessness of performance in the corona crisis?

To address this final question, we propose to take another look at Nietzsche's will to power, and its genealogy within his own writing. As Volker Gerhardt (2011) pointed out, the germination of the will to power in Nietzsche is immediately connected to art itself. In aphorism 548 from *The Dawn of Day*, when Nietzsche first ponders what he would later coin the will to power, he declares that we must "find out, indeed, to how great an extent force has been overcome by something higher, which it now obeys as a tool and instrument." And he goes on to speak of

> the spectacle of that force which a genius does not lay out upon works, but upon himself as a work, that is, his own self-control, the purifying of his own imagination, the order and selection in his inspirations and tasks. The great man ever remains invisible in the greatest thing that claims worship, like some distant star: his victory over force remains without witnesses, and hence also without songs and singers. (1911, 331, translation adapted by GD. The English translation reproduces "Kraft" as "power," which is misleading, especially for our discussion; "force" seems to be a more fitting translation.)

In *The Dawn of Day*, the "something higher" that reigns over force, or again, the differential element of force, is still being referred to as "reason" (331), whereas it will later be given the proper name of the will to power. More importantly, however, it is the figure of the genius, and certainly, the artist genius as the human being that fashions their own life, which serves as the example of the will to power.

At the same time, when Nietzsche speaks of the artist, he tends to have a specific artist in mind, namely the actor. This is already apparent in how Nietzsche, in the quoted passage, invokes the "spectacle of that force which a genius" lays "upon himself as a work." Adding to that, and without having to go into much further detail, we can evoke a late note from Nietzsche, in which he recollects his main insight from the exchange with Wagner, namely: "that I discovered and recognised the actor at the root of every artist, what is typically artistic: for this I needed my contact with that man, and it seems to me I think more highly, and also worse, of both the actor and the artist than previous philosophers have done" (2003, 70). Now, if the actor is the expression of the artist and the artistic par excellence, and if the artistic genius is the figure par excellence of the will to power, then we can conclude that the actor is the paradigmatic subject of the will to power: the will of life to overcome itself, and, as we might add, to engage in the process of power as the overcoming of power itself toward powerlessness—toward the virtuality of play, that is. Theatre and performance, in this sense, are not any other field of the expression of the will to power, but they constitute and represent the Nietzschean understanding of art as interpreted by Deleuze: "art is a 'stimulant of the will to power', 'something that excites willing'. […] According to Nietzsche we have not yet understood what the life of an artist means: the activity of this life serves as a stimulant to the affirmation contained in the work of art itself, to the will to power of the artist as artist" (2006a, 102). Theatre and performance, insofar as the actor is the artist of artists in Nietzsche, are the scenes and stages of play in which the will to power is being stimulated, and crucially, this stimulation suggests in yet another way the realm of virtuality: theatre and performance stimulate the will to power, but they do not necessarily exhaust or enact it, which is to say that theatre and performance keep power in a state of powerlessness as the state of the non-actualisation of the potential to act, and to act strategically, to fight, to dominate, to rule.

Having arrived at this point of our argumentation, we seem to possess two different understandings of the powerlessness of performance: first, the powerlessness of performance that refers to the closure of theatres and the cancellation of performances in a—however legitimate or illegitimate—effort to curb the spread of the novel corona virus in the pandemic; and second, the powerlessness of performance that unfolds when performances do take place and when performance enacts, or rather does not quite enact, by way of its "afformative" (Hamacher 1994) or "non-performance" (Moten 2017) character, the virtuality of games of power, and thus a play. Ultimately, though, these two notions of powerlessness are related: the cancellation of performances during the corona crisis resulted in performance's inability to perform the inability of power, which would reveal its potentiality. In other words, the social problem of the cancellations of performance in the early phases of the COVID-19 crisis was this: at a time when the question of life presented itself as a question of the imaginable excesses and limits of power and the will to power, the very artistic medium that stood at the beginning of Nietzsche's inquiries into the will to

power, and the very artistic medium that enables, perhaps like no other, a playing with the games of power on the stage of play and imagination—that is, on the stage of theatre—was not available to us, not available to society. If, in light of this, we wanted to return to the declaration of Thomas Ostermeier and others that theatre and performance form necessary elements of life, then we could argue that, if they are indeed necessary to life, that is because they do not relate to the self-preservation of life, but to the self-overcoming of life as reflecting and affecting itself in the play of theatre. At the same time, as theatres have since opened again, and as performances are being shown again, we believe that performance should reflect on the artistic and social aftermath of this interruption of its process. How will theatre and performance continue and perhaps transform after this experience of the interruption of its tools of power/powerlessness? While we do not want to and cannot anticipate the possible answers to this question, we hope that we have put forward some arguments that can shed light on the implications of what the question entails.

(*Georg Döcker*)

II. Powerlessness, Democracy, Resilience

One of the strongest cases one might make about the theatre is in being seen as an 'instrument of authentic democracy' (McGrath 2003, 133) or at least as being a prerequisite for such a project, a project, nonetheless, by no means unfounded; to start with, it was upon this very idea that theatre was invented which, then, also gave birth to its citizens one of the greatest guarantors of human freedom; the political constitution of democracy. If we traced the origins of theatre in ancient Greece, we'd find ourselves in 534BDE at the City state of Athens of Pisistratus. Pisistratus knew that the main problem of Athens was that its citizens were made up of four warring tribes which for most of the sixth century BCE had divided the city-state by clan conflicts and had led to power rulers that governed by force – known as "tyrants." To avert this harsh reality that he felt prevented the city of Athens from living peacefully and from prospering, Pisistratus came up with the genius idea of the ancient Athens annual theatre festival. Suddenly everything changed; for the first time the four tribes were brought together into a common space at which they were also made to share a common experience. They watched and celebrated together all theatrical activity at a single place and time, which was an action that pushed them to form a strong common sense of an Athenian citizenship as one body politic. Indeed, this tremendous shift in the Athenian consciousness was something of a revolution (Leipzig 2010). Within a generation, in 508 BCE, democracy began when the aristocratic ruler at the time, Cleisthenes, introduced a series of reformations to the Athenian constitution. As Adam Leipzig observes, "the next 104 years were the 'golden age' of Athens. Democracy flourished, and so did the theatre—Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides all wrote their plays during this period, and competed with each other at the annual festival" (ibid.).

Now let's fast-forward to our contemporary democracies of a globalised world at the mercy of a pandemic, COVID-19. It could be argued that in times of crisis, the need for theatre becomes even more urgent, and yet in a fast-spreading pandemic, theatre has been challenged more than ever. The pandemic, which necessitated the closure of all public spaces, was seen to hand the theatre two options: to either re-calibrate its several thousand years of live enactment into a transmissible

live recording for a virtual audience, or not be at all. This is not to say that all was lost. Without a doubt, in the mist of trying times, such a challenge may also carry the seeds of an opportunity to reform the artform of theatre and innovate its very nature. And yet, no matter how promising such a challenge might be, especially when seen in the name of continuous artistic evolution and creative reformation, there was still a rather bleak picture painted, one that spoke about the closure of theatres in times of crisis when theatre was needed the most.

Let's take a moment and stay with this reality. What does it mean to shut theatres? On the one hand, of course, we have the human and economic cost in that people are out of work and the multimillion theatre industry suffers a huge blow. But on the other hand, closed theatres also signal a threat to our uncompromised sense of democratic freedom, a sense that felt particularly shattered the further down we moved into Covid. That is not to argue that theatre should have ignored the health fatalities of a deadly pandemic, or perhaps that theatre should demand any exceptional treatment to continue and run. For nobody would have wanted that, not the public, not even theatre-makers themselves. Rather what we need to focus on here if we are to fully grasp the deeper implications of the closure of theatres during Covid is the fact that the reality of death from Covid simultaneously *became* the real death of theatre. A death, however, that alarmingly implicates us with a sense of powerlessness in our modern democracies. It's easy to understand the effects of feeling powerlessness within an authoritarian state, but what if this same degree of powerlessness is to be equally experienced in democracies today, in which in principle, at least, people are credited with power, freedom and responsibility? To understand this uncomfortable implication between powerlessness and our democracies that this current health crisis brought to the surface, we may need to turn to the modern Greek Philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis who makes a direct link between theatre and democracy. He views the essence of theatre *in its questioning* which operates just like philosophical questioning, and—here is where we need to pay attention—"does not halt before any postulate presented as ultimate and unchallengeable" (1997, 105). In other words, theatre and its questioning in a society should not and cannot stop if democracy is to preserve its fundamental right to freedom, justice, and equality. As Castoriadis further explains:

> The same [questioning that we find in theatre] goes for democracy. In its genuine signification, democracy consists in this, viz., that society does not halt before a conception, given once and for all, of what is just, equal, or free, but rather institutes itself in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew within the framework of the 'normal' functioning of society [...]
> I will say that a society is autonomous not only if it knows that it makes its laws but also if it is up to the task of putting them into question. (ibid)

In an attempt to contain an unrestrainable pandemic, theatre and its ability to question, an ability that preserves democracy, came to a halt, and with this, much of our understanding of what democracy means for us today or has become. Because if theatre, of all the arts, as McGrath insists, "works at the interface between the creative and the political, calling together audiences of citizens to contemplate their society or its ways" (2003, 137–8), then theatre *must* stay operative in times of

crisis if theatre is to meet its highest purpose; that of safeguarding our democracy. But what if this is not possible in a pandemic crisis as we have seen, which restricts physical interaction and altogether eliminates physical participation to social spaces such as theatres? Certainly, such a prospect is disappointingly pessimistic, yet we still may arrive at a hopeful outcome by repositioning the terms of the original problem, such as, let's say, the impact of covid on theatre, and in effect, our understanding of democracy. Assuming, for instance, that a powerless theatre gives way to what might be considered a perverse insecurity in modern democracies, a perspective that arises from the problem of non-knowing, as a result of an environment that is erratic, unpredictable and unsettling as that which we have experienced during Covid, then it may be more useful to think about this situation as *insecure* and see what this insecurity tells us when placed in relation to the nature of governance and applications of biopower. In a situation, therefore, of being fundamentally and essentially vulnerable, in the sense that, as Covid has taught us, is never fully known or expected, the state usually moves from using life (in its inherent frailty) as a strategic asset to attempting to control life. Michel Foucault has already explained this of course in his writings on biopolitics, and has shed much light onto the operations of such an undertaking which, for him, comes down to introducing economy into political practice:

> to govern a state will mean [...] to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his households and goods. (2000a, 207)

Such economies of power lead to a particular style of governance which, for him, comes under the prism of what he describes as "biopower." In biopower, the central concern of the state revolves around the question of the management of populations. Once this question becomes problematised, the state devises an apparatus to solve the problems created by them. So, in a rather paradoxical way, this very apparatus that is meant to manage the problem is also simultaneously reinforcing this problem by the fact of being the state's central concern, and therefore, in effect, the state comes to justify the apparatus (Rose (2014, 216). In this sense, biopower, which describes relations of power in the management of populations, reproduces simply by reinforcing the ostensible cause for the emergence of these power relations (Foucault 2007, 2). The problem with Foucault's theory on biopower, however, is that Foucault effectively talks about state-management, and how the positive procedures of state could protect citizens from famine and disease while, at the same time, making them more independent. Therefore, he ends up legitimating the role of the state as biopower via its capacity to manage the very life of its citizens. But in this case, problems are perpetuated partly as a response to contain or prevent them and partly by the fact that they are needed so that they can be managed.

Let's now return to theatre and start to sketch out an alternative perspective to biopower discourses, or any such discourses for that matter that play out on power/resistance binaries. For we should not forget that, for Foucault, the individual relationship to the state is always offered as a contest over freedom: "Power," Foucault indicates,

> is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are 'free' […] at the heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. (2000b, 342)

A similar dynamic is found at the work of Giorgio Agamben in which the focus is on the struggle over the "sovereignty of man over his own existence" (1998, 137). Although Agamben's central concern is not the examination of governmentality and its biopolitics per se, his emphasis on "sovereignty" describes a conception of the political subject as always already submitted to a biopolitical apparatus. This apparatus also positions the subject's life as fundamentally vulnerable, which brings him to the figure of his Home sacer over whom the state has complete power, including the power to reduce this figure to "bare life." Bare life defines the realm of natural life (*zoe*) which, once such life has become politicised through a process of exclusion inclusion, can turn into a Home sacer who can be killed but not sacrificed, as Agamben stresses. What this tells us is that the life of the Homo sacer is not only unworthy and removed from legal protection, but natural life *as such* is also devalued. This devaluation receives in Agamben's thought key political significance.

For if the state is in a position to freely choose to protect or expose the citizens as we see in Foucault's analysis of governmentality and biopower, for Agamben, the state is equally a biopolitical apparatus but one that further operates at a threshold that posits the life of the political subject as fundamentally vulnerable. And by shifting his emphasis, Agamben's main concern is not about the mechanisms of governmentality and biopower, but about a biopolitical conception of sovereignty that predicates power relations between subject-state and subject-him/herself in terms of powerlessness and vulnerability. The essential struggle that takes place, for Agamben, therefore is always between two wills; the will of the sovereign versus the free will of the individual subject, which then further becomes a struggle over the "sovereignty of man over his own existence" (1998, 137). It is a struggle, ultimately, made on the premise that "life" is a state decision and it is up to the state to decide whether to protect, expose, extend, shorten, promote, or diminish one's life (Rose 2014, 218). The irony, especially after our experience with a persisting pandemic, is that the state in biopower discourses is presented as the sole decision maker about the worth of one's life and whether to live a life or not, and yet ignores the fact that life itself is an unattainable source whose elemental dimension, fragile existence, unpredictability and untameable enormity makes it into an ungovernable principle.

Let's once again return to Covid. The condition of being exposed to the virus was not the state's decision. Neither was the agent of powerlessness, vulnerability, and death that engulfed the world a choice made by the state. And yet, the virus of the pandemic was the one already threatening our safety, laying claim on us, robbing us of our freedom, if not altogether of our lives. What the state could only do and did was *to respond* to the outbreak of the virus. The elemental nature of life, of which the coronavirus (like any virus) is another part, situates the individual as always already at life's mercy. The subject in this light is confronted by "life's essential negativity" (Rose 2014, 219), which presents itself as "a negative anterior dimension that transcends human capacities and defies all governance" (ibid.). So if, then, the subject is viewed as already not free

but perpetually exposed and dependant on a set of demands that must be governed, then what is needed are approaches to the dimension of life in which human capacities, instead of wishing to control or command life, aim at responding to life's complexity. And here is where theatre, I believe, can reclaim its original purpose as a prerequisite to democracy, *by responding*, even if only in frail and evanescent whispers, still responding nonetheless, and responding with resilience.

The concept of resilience covers a wide spectrum of meanings, from how one relates to the event of crisis or exterior threat, to how the subject becomes interpellated from an active, self-creative subject to a passive, responsibilised subject. When we thus refer to resilience, we necessarily imply an inner transformation that takes place and is embedded in the concept of resilience. This transformation usually starts with the resetting of the relations between oneself and an object or environment which then becomes a matter of interrelationality between subjects and objects or environments. Resilience talks about adaptability, reflexivity, and sensitivity to thinking and acting in a world that appears to be facing the limits of traditional forms of governing and the liberal modernist politics of representation. As a form of governance, resilience "cannot be grasped in the modernist binary understanding," as Chandler reminds us (2014, 202). There cannot be a "clear division between 'the private ethical sphere – the government of the self – and the public political sphere – the government of others'" (ibid.). Resilience-thinking, then, describes the kind of processes that are outward-looking and self-reflexive and which, although arguably are focused on the development of the government of the self, are equally processed-based understandings of the government of others. When it comes to the ruling of subjects, resilience-thinking approaches power as governing processes of complex life and proposes a different approach founded on indirect processes of governance to be understood as processes of reflexive self-knowledge of the complex embedded nature of power.

The connection here with theatre might not be immediately evident, but there is a lot, I believe, that resilience-thinking can lend to theatre, most importantly an adaptable, self-reflexive operative scheme in the face of crisis and a new language of representation with which theatre can transform its medium and persevere. A resilient theatre thus would offer an understanding of itself and the world as a complex set of overlapping emerging processes, in which a new language of representation would reflect on subjects and objects as embedded in these processes. We should bear in mind that in today's complexity of life, politics can no longer function as discourses of liberal and modernist certainties. The previous political poles that made a clear distinction between a right-wing and a left-wing politics has collapsed and transformed into a set of neoliberal policies that are only being reiterated in different terms each time depending on the occasion and one's ideological predisposition. The world, societies, individuals, international relationships, humanity, natural life, all have fallen into one complex, interdependent assemblage that still needs to be governed. A resilient theatre would recognise this (mess) complexity and propose an always relational, content-dependent engagement with its artform whose key concern would be to reflexively and adaptively manage contingent outcomes as they emerge from assemblages or relational ensembles of varying degree of transiency. Theatre, as an operational system, too, would have to adapt to, or resists of, an external world, being itself already embedded in complex relational processes and interrelationships with the concept of governance in an age of complexity.

It would be more useful, therefore, to think about resilient theatre as a forum of discursive representation through which theatre could negotiate itself and its relation to the emerging problem of governing complexity. If theatre becomes inoperative or irrelevant in times of crisis, as we've seen especially in the first part of the pandemic, a theatre that was seen to predominately display its own powerlessness, it is because theatre lacked a new language of representation that would offer theatre a mode of thinking and acting in a complex world that would allow theatre to make sense of its power. Ironically, one of the effects of coronavirus was to stage the powerlessness of theatre which theatre itself could not articulate before precisely because it lacks this language of representation. A resiliently predisposed theatre is also and undoubtedly a political theatre of resistance in the sense that it draws attention to the various operations of governance but does so by interrelating itself to processes of governing of which it seeks to challenge or destabilise.

Now the problem for theorists such as Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper is that resilience is often considered a suspect term, one reason of which is that it is usually thought as being opposed to "critical-thinking" (2011, 145). But as Chandler argues in his important book, *Resilience, the Governance of Complexity*, it is critical thought rather than resilience-thinking that has been central to the transformation of neoliberal thinking into a discourse of governance. On this same line of argument, we can further question whether critical-thinking and resilience-thinking are "indeed in an external relationship to one another" (2014, 220). And by extension, whether theatre, as a place in which critical perspectives are formulated, enacted or, at least, continuously imagined and re-imagined, perhaps has much to learn from resilience-thinking and by acting upon it. If we accept that theatre's capacity for critical embodied thought extends theatre into the real realm of power (in the sense that we spoke at the beginning as safeguarding democracy and freedom), then it could equally be argued that part of the crisis that theatre faced (and is still facing in an on-going pandemic) was precisely because its critical capacity was rendered powerless by this same power realm of governance that its forms of representation extend to. What resilience-thinking might offer theatre, then, is an alternative language by which new form of representation may become possible.

It seems to me that such an undertaking becomes particularly imperative for theatre in our times of reoccurring crises, when theatre may come to a halt once again at any time, and may again become deprived of the very thing that it is supposed to do; arguably, to enact critical questioning of its society and powers today. Slavoj Žižek's insightful observations might be useful here when he explains how resilience-thinking can promote radical critical thought in ways that resistance to power becomes again possible (2012, n.p.). For him, the main problem with resistance today is that we cannot make sense of power relations and of how to resist power because we don't have this language: "we feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom […] all the main terms we use […] are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it" (ibid.) By extension, in a society battered by crisis and adversity, there is something urgent about theatre and its "ability to contribute to humanity through its engagement with people, communities and political processes," as McGrath insisted (2002, 133). Such a theatre, however, presupposes a theatre that is able to resist, a theatre that is also functional and critical

at all times. But if this is not always possible, as we've seen with the Covid restrictions which prohibited physical proximity and social gatherings, theatre should and must persist by seeking new forms of operation and a new language of representation by which theatre can facilitate social and networked relational encounters without relying on theatre's traditional forms of production captured by capital and the state. In other words, if we were to contemplate an image of a powerful theatre, a theatre that can offer an inner, therapeutic, solution to any given emergent crisis, then this could only be possible by ways of recalibrating theatricality, its forms and tools, in ways that invest in complex and resilient thought processes. Again, Žižek's analogy about how resilience-thinking can inform radical critique seems to be speaking to the heart of the problem that theatre is facing today. As Žižek figuratively explains:

> The situation is like that of psychoanalysis, where the patient knows the answer (his symptoms are such answers) but doesn't know to what they are answers, and the analyst has to formulate a question. Only through such patient work a program will emerge. (ibid.)

Theatre is "the patient" and has been the patient for a while. Covid only made its symptoms more pronounced to the point that it has become impossible to ignore anymore. The old ways of doing theatre, and the ways of thinking about theatre, even the nature of the artform of theatre itself, are in great need of change if theatre is to stay relevant and responsive to occurring circumstances of our times. Asking the right questions is indeed what is needed right now if theatre is to play an important role in shaping our "social imaginaries," as Castoriadis believed, protecting the project of our modern democracies. For McGrath, too, this would be down to reclaiming roles and duties that have been forgotten. His list is long:

> [Theatre needs to once again see] its role as setting in motion the major forces, the conflicting ideologies, the central realities of our time, as finding the theatrical images and characters, style, and language for such setting in motion, as the fearless pursuit of the consequences of such setting in motion, as struggling to extend the limits of our thinking about our society, as breaking out of the closure and complacency of much western civilization, as risking the *hubris* of the personal and political, as becoming an excellent part of the socializing process, the *paedia* of our *demos*, and as making its work available to the whole of our society, not to the few. (2002, 139)

What Castoriadis's and McGrath's noble aspirations shares with Žižek's ontological understanding of the solution to the crisis of powerlessness is the urge for democratic politics that require the development of social responsiveness. When the subject today, like its theatre, has been disempowered, has forgotten its past or reasons for being, has become assimilated to power structures and capital, then a way forward might be to turn to resilience by developing autonomous capacities, through self-reflectivity—through collective and individual work. The case of a renewed democratic theatre is a case of a powerful theatre. But any demand of power for the theatre today is the same demand of power for the people. In resilience-thinking the extension of democracy has no limit through social capacity-building, through empowered communities or the

empowerment of decision-making individuals. Furthermore, given the unknowability of the world in which a new crisis may be around the corner, such a demand of a renewed democratic theatre that is simultaneously the result of an empowered society, necessarily becomes an endless process of obtaining access to the "reality" of life as complexity and enabling existing capacities. This would mean again the need for a resilient theatre to be put in place, the kind of theatre that sets out to think differently about the world as much as about the nature of theatre itself. Not merely in terms of different formalistic concerns around the theatre. Rather about its essence. A resilient theatre, therefore, is a transformative theatre in a true Nietzschean sense, as a mode of "transvaluation" (2003a, 19). It will be seen to celebrate incapacity over capacity, unknowability over knowledge, failure over success. This transformative dynamic is what also transvalues the value of theatricality, which transvaluation, once taken place, might prove theatres' greatest power of all. At this point, we should not forget either that although resilience may have risen from a position of powerlessness, resilience does not reject the position of power *per se*, or the value of a power structure. Rather the removal or displacement of power is in creating new understandings that think differently about the meaning of power in a complex world. The power that results, for Chandler, from "the capacity to think autonomously and responsively in a world of change and of complexity is the power of resilience" (2014, 178), which theatre can make its own. Such an effort would require an ontological understanding of theatre, its art and purpose, so that the problem of complex emergent realities, often accumulating into crises as we have experienced with Covid, is to be understood as a reality against which power is powerless. And this might be the answer of theatre *during* and *in* crisis today, and of the theatre of the future.

(*Eve Katsouraki*)

III. Powerlessness and the Aesthetics of Theatre and Performance

Among the many elements currently determining the producing, staging, and debating of theatre, dance, and performance, the intertwined factors of power and powerlessness hold a particular urgency. Rather than a focus only on political power or a general re-politicisation of performing arts claiming political impact, we seem to be witnessing a plurality of approaches targeting in a more substantial sense the relations and mechanisms which regulate the distribution of power relations on the many levels of artistic, aesthetic, social, political or economic actions and events. In this sense, power and powerlessness are not restricted to political power or party politics, neither to the impact of grand narratives such as neoliberalism or neofascism, but, rather, they include and emphasise all kinds of operative steering of the abilities to act or foster the appearance of events, whether situated in the political realm or not.

In the case of theatre, dance, and performance, the interrogation might focus on why and how a sphere of hope is being created that is never realised and maybe must not be realised if the performing arts are to remain art. The historic and contemporary practices of performing arts— independent production and rehearsal structures, artistic projects and formats—that possibly reshuffle power would need to be put to the foreground. Finally, the idea of a powerless state of being could be contextualised as the founding promise of the modern discourse of art and

aesthetic freedom, provoking the question about a possible understanding that we can make of aesthetics in the here and now.

Foucault's descriptions of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) still show a passionate attachment to the old formation of sovereign power as a type of power that works top down. Foucault's analyses of power mainly focus on the technologies and practices of submission by either discipline and control or internalisation and governance, but leave the side of becoming a subject, or even an individual, unexplored. Recalling Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories of Subjection* (1997), in which the philosopher unfolds a critical view of Foucauldian theory of the reciprocity of subjectivity and power, the subject can be understood as existentially depending on the conditions of power that it needs to internalise in order to come into being. Why, then, do subjects in society and art develop a "passionate attachment" (Butler 1997, 6–10) to that which subjects them? The answer is somewhat paradoxical: The very act of internalisation makes the subject assume its actions as its own, thereby creating the subject's freedom. Thus, freedom is not possible without the act of internalisation or, generally speaking, exist outside specific modalities of power that the subject applies to itself. Power, we might suspect, is an ambivalent effect, which, on the one hand, subjects the subject-to-be from the outside, but on the other hand equally emanates from a desire of being subjected, because the very act of subjection produces effects of play and freedom. What is more, subjective faculties are unruly faculties or forces that may never be entirely controlled. They exceed normalisation because they may never be entirely subjected and thus appropriated by the subject-to-be. The Foucauldian disciplined subject, therefore, comes into being on the shaky ground of power that risks its own powerlessness by the very subjects it produces.

German philosopher Christoph Menke (2003) has shown that Foucault's descriptions of the disciplined body in his book *Discipline and Punish* owe very much to the then newly established philosophical discipline of aesthetics. In fact, Foucault's disciplinary subjects are aesthetic subjects in the sense that they are both practical subjects: they learn how to do things. While learning how to do something, the subject-to-be also acquires a certain habitus. It forms and shapes, amongst other things, its capacity for taste. The increase in capacities, then, is considered to be an increase in the autonomy of the subject with regard to its agency. However, for Menke, the subject of discipline depends upon the very fact it is never in total possession of itself. Since the very foundations for discipline to be able to produce a docile body are forces that need to be harnessed, a residue or surplus of ungovernable energy must remain as the "dark" *Doppelgänger* of the subject (Siegmund 2019), leading to experimentation with and exploration of norms and individual freedoms (Menke 2003, 120). The subject that is disciplined and disciplines itself to a certain degree must in a state of active passivity surrender to its very own powerlessness in order to disrupt normative strategies. For Menke, although aesthetics and discipline are two sides of the same coin, the disruptive side of the subject is the subject literally coming into play in aesthetics, i.e., art. If since the late eighteenth century powerlessness designates an area outside the subject's rational and conscious control, it produces a desire to create and change norms. Desire, therefore, is always desire for something not-given or present, but absent that is irrecuperable thereby exceeding

totalisation. The disciplinary subject of self-possession only comes into being because it harbours within itself something that it cannot possess.

Here, we can bring back Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the will to power into the argument again. If, for Nietzsche, the actor is the blueprint for the artist, what does the actor actually do in order to will power, which does not only preserve life, but overcomes it? It is the very moment the actor becomes a performer submerging him- or herself into what Nietzsche famously calls the Dionysian part of the profession, giving in to the play of forces, as Menke argues, that dissolve any notion of control, agency, and form only to emerge from the depth of play with an image of himself (Menke 2018). In the Apollonian retrieval of control, he then presents this image to the audience only to jeopardise it again and again during the time of the performance. The play of loss of control and the regaining of control, of play and game establishes at the very centre of art or performance the crucial realm of powerlessness. Thus theatre, dance, and performance play a double game of powerlessness: as a strategic game of power relations acted out within or against the institutions, and as play of powerlessness that is at the core of aesthetic reflection itself. Powerlessness is inherent in theatre, dance, and performance as its aesthetic dimension as the will to power that overcomes life within life itself.

But is this logic, which emanates from Foucault's model of disciplinary power, still in operation in our contemporary societies of (digital) control? In his famous "Postscriptum on Control Societies" (1992), Gilles Deleuze draws our attention to the fact that, in the age of digital data and digital capitalism with its global flow of capital, our societies have mutated into control societies. Control societies no longer need discipline and its product, the modern subject, to function. Whereas old disciplinary regimes and their theatres were based on the production of subjects or individuals that they would empower by discipline, control societies do not need subjects and their aesthetic re-presentations or unruly playfulness anymore. Because in the flow of data to be marketed, physical or even pictorial representations of the subject are replaced by statistics, data charts, and curves. Regimes of control eradicate the Other and by implication, desire, altogether. As Jon Mckenzie (2001) has shown, while the development towards performance regulated control societies had already begun after the Second World War, its effects became dominant only after the end of the Cold War during the 1990s. To the performance paradigm, it is not important what you perform, but how you perform, i.e., it is imperative that you perform at all (Döcker 2021). As long as one produces data, the circulation of information is guaranteed. What, at first sight, looks like an increase in representational forms of the subject on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and other social media turns out be its opposite. The number of images produced are valueless as (individual) images, but for the data and network connectivity they produce underneath their pretty surface. In the age of digital data control, powerlessness seems to be complete precisely because data does not need to form a subject to produce value.

The argument between Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, Edouard Louis and Bernard Stiegler about the nature of our contemporary notion of powerlessness, has specific implications for theatre and performance. While Menke and Nietzsche's arguments still rely on the dialectical play between power and powerlessness that shape the aesthetic subject that is an actor, Stiegler's diagnosis does

away with the subject and, by implication, with the actor or performer all together. This is what he implies when, as Georg Döcker points out in his part of the introduction, he refers to today's powerlessness resulting from the "transformations in *anthropogenesis as such.*" At this point we run up against the very limits of power, its state of total impotence, that emerges at the horizon of Foucault's thinking. If there are no more subjects whatsoever, then life itself becomes powerlessness as such and *tout court*. If Eve Katsouraki, in her introductory part, argues for a new and resilient "language of representations" for theatre that "offer an inner, therapeutic, solution to emergent crisis" by reconfiguring its social relations, Stiegler's view points towards the end not only to representation, but to any form of potentiality and presentation, since sites of resilience, for him, no longer exist—but he does not consider that a new language of theatre may be possible. In what Stiegler calls the "synchronisation of consciousness by the hyperindustrial dispositif" (2017, 81), different forms, behaviours, and individual lifestyles are streamlined, optimised, and scaled. Singularities, which for Stiegler, are inextricably linked to desire as that which makes the subject singular, are turned into particularities. As opposed to the singular, the particular is measurable. It belongs to a "profilabe list, a check list" (82). Thus, destruction of singularities "functions on the basis of an essential frustration" (ibid.) because the objects consumed do not bring pleasure or satisfaction but only enforce the emptiness of the subject. It produces frustrated subjects of desireless powerlessness. While powerlessness in the disciplinary regime is productive, powerlessness in the control regime only produces "disgust" (83).

Different types of power, it seems, correspond to different forms of theatre and their organisation. Referring to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's study on the *New spirit of capitalism* (2018 [2005]), the dispositif of control in the field of theatre, along with network capitalism, produces specific organisations for the production and distribution of performances. Next to the old theatre houses handed down to us from history, in which the old form of entrepreneurial capitalism and its disciplinary mechanisms lives on, over the past thirty years production houses and centres for a new type of theatre have come into being. They produce a certain type of performer—namely the "performer," often professionally untrained, but skilled, educated outside the traditional theatre academies, as opposed to the actor or actress whose practice depends on specific techniques. It also produces a certain type of knowledge which prefers process to product, open relational types of performances generating content in situ in the performance itself, which may not be easily separated from other types of knowledge, say academic knowledge, and its performances, say a lecture.

Yet, we need to be careful not to mirror discipline or control directly in artistic practices and their institutions. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault may not have made the paradox of power and aesthetics, as described above, sufficiently clear. His reflections on the dispositif, however, begun in 1977, two years after the publication of *Discipline and Punish*, take up the issue. Foucault underlines that no subject may be reduced to the power configuration that brought it about. Dispostifs vectorise their elements for strategic purposes to give them a specific spin and direction. Its subjects and bodies are irreducible to the dispositif that produced them, otherwise they would be used up and made unavailable for future changes, adjustments, and even redirections of the dispositif should an "urgence" occur (Aggermann, Döcker, and Siegmund 2017, 14–15). The

disciplined subject's body is, unlike in the realm of sovereign power, not a mechanical body, but a docile living body available for learning and change. Since they resist total subsumption under the dispositifs, as Gilles Deleuze in his vitalistic reading of Foucault points out, these bodies produce their own exterior, where the forces work to potentially reconfigure the dispositif producing other lines of flight (Deleuze 1988, 59–80). If the aesthetic is the practice that plays out the subject's unruliness by dialectically playing with the form of theatre and its momentary dissolution in formlessness, it follows that neither the traditional actor as a disciplined subject nor the contemporary performer as a product of control dispositifs in what they do simply express and repeat social or economical changes. While both are manifestations and articulations of certain dispositfs, they are not identical to them. While the traditional actor produces an excess of imagination by using fictions, the performer produces different types of relationality with the audience or participants of the performance. The figure of the performer is an expression of contemporary subjectivity or, if we believe Giorgio Agamben, the destruction of subjectivity (Agamben 2009). The performer as an aesthetic subject producing art is at the very same time, however, someone who provides the means and practices to work on the conditions of contemporary subjectivity and to reflect upon their mechanisms and conditions of being by producing something unruly that exceeds the very conditions of this being. If the powerlessness of sovereign power lies in its representation, and the powerlessness of disciplinary power lies in the unruly subject, where does the powerlessness of control lie? Since control no longer needs the subject, because it dissolves any kind of integrated subjectivity into a stream of data that may cohere across bodies and individuals that regulate themselves via cybernetic feedback loops, it is hard to find loci of resistance. Either the theatre, who finds it hard to do away with subjects and their individual bodies anyway, in a Benjaminian gesture of belatedness reclaims some kind of unruliness from the disciplinary dispositif, or, if this appears to be only a rearguard and therefore futile action, it must find some space in its artistic strategies in bringing data streams and feedback loops to collapse. It is desirable to desire powerlessness, because it is in powerlessness that the power of theatre resides.

(*Gerald Siegmund*)

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