PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

SITES OF APPEARANCE, MATTERS OF THOUGHT: HANNAH ARENDT AND PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

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This special issue of *Performance Philosophy* examines the thresholds, borders, and dialogues between Hannah Arendt's work and performance philosophy, bringing together contributions that investigate political resistance, thought, and practice. In our call for papers, we began with a provocation: *we live in Arendtian times*. Though it would give her no comfort to know it, Arendt's 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* has been in near constant citation during this period of strong-man politics and resurgent ethnic nationalism. After the 2016 US election, it was reportedly out-of-stock on Amazon (Griswold 2017), and Arendt scholar Roger Berkowitz (2017) provides a thorough analysis of its relevance to alt-right politics and the rise of Donald Trump (see also Bernstein 2018). Meanwhile, her diagnosis of the predicament of those fleeing persecution and abandoning their countries of birth—as she herself did ("We Refugees" [1943] 1994)— remains all too relevant with regard to the deprivation of legal status to refugees. As Arendt pointed out, refugees continue to lack the rights that are recognised even for those who have broken the law, but are instead outside the law (Arendt [1951] 1973, 267–302), and her discussion of 'the right to have rights' prefigures recent analyses by Agamben (1995, 2005), Rancière (2004), Gündogdu (2015), and others.

Arendt's life-long inquiry into the nature of political experience and rule asks questions not only about the process of thinking and the condition of plurality, but also about appearance, freedom, dissent, and authority. In her thinking from and with history, her engagement with the realms of the social and political, and her probing questions of authority and legislation as much as those of sensing, togetherness, and citizenship, Arendt's work provides a point of entry to thinking through and on appearance as a political problem, and thinking as a problem of appearance.

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):1–7
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51291
ISSN 2057-7176

In this issue, we foreground Arendt's position on thinking as a kind of seizing, a searching for what is beyond its reach, and beyond what is already in appearance (Arendt 1971). This provocation also implicates a wilful decision to orient attention not only to Arendt's body of work, but also to entanglements that this makes manifest: human and non-human, thinking and action, appearance and absence, and public and private. As a thinker moving between ecologies of knowledge, Arendt advocated a philosophy that was actively engaged in the world—sometimes described as a 'hermeneutic phenomenology' (Borren 2013). At the same time, Arendt was sceptical of disciplinary labels, and committed to praxis as a political, and hence civic responsibility: "No theories. Forget all theories," were reportedly her first words to her students (Arendt 2009, xxii).

As a public thinker, Arendt gained widespread attention for the way in which she chose to bear witness to the Eichmann trial (Arendt [1963] 2006); and she kept an intellectual diary, her *Denktagebuch*, as an extraordinary document of her intellectual journey through her life (see Storey and Berkowitz 2017). Her work on thinking as always 'out of order', 'interrupting all other activities' (Arendt 1971, 82), and her unfinished examination of judgment, offer a resistant poiesis of reflection and praxis, whereby critique is an embodied operation of withdrawal, action and appearance. Arendt's work has also inspired artistic and activist interventions: in 2015, for example, Tania Bruguera launched the *Hannah Arendt International Institute for Artivism* in Havana with a hundred-hour reading of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt's philosophy is an activist philosophy, in which thinking and doing are inseparable.

Arendt's conception of politics is what we might call a performative politics, based on 'action'. Rather than restricting politics to the operations of coercion and brute force, or a politics oriented toward certain ends, Arendt was interested in 'spaces of appearance', which 'come into being whenever [people] are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government' (Arendt [1958] 1998, 199). This Arendtian performative politics is also one predicated on a gentle conflict, a 'warfare between thought and common sense' (Arendt 1971, 92)—one with contentious differentiations between the social and the political, but also one where thought and collectivity are necessarily embroiled. This conflict shaped Arendt's presence as a woman working in political philosophy, whose place in intersectional debates on democracy, citizenship, and the politics of exclusion remains an ongoing debate (Pitkin 1981, Young-Bruehl 1982, Dietz 2002), offering a poetics of the publicness of political life.

Arendt's influence on contemporary political philosophy can be seen everywhere, whether explicitly acknowledged or not: in Chantal Mouffe's distinction between politics and 'the political' (Mouffe 2000, 20); in Jacques Rancière's idea of the 'partition of the sensible' and matters of appearance, in which '[p]olitics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable' (Rancière 2009, 13); in Jean-Luc Nancy's account of 'co-appearance' or 'compearance' (Nancy [1986] 1991) and the plurality of being (Nancy [1996] 2000); in Giorgio Agamben's biopolitics (Agamben 1998); in Wendy Brown's investigation of neoliberalism's undoing of the *demos* (Brown 2015); and in Judith Butler's explicit invocation of Arendt in relation to the 'movement of the squares' and arguments for agency in plurality (Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Butler 2015). Whereas Arendt

herself focused perhaps too much on an idealised view of the Greek *polis* (Euben 2000), a performance philosophy might ask where and how these spaces of appearance can emerge, and in what ways performance can be a modus of thinking the political in Arendtian philosophy.

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This issue begins with Margaret Werry asking 'What's Left of Rights?' in the wake of numerous philosophical critiques of the Western rights-bearing subject, as well the ongoing historical failings of the category and instruments of human rights. But in events such as the 2017 Whanganui settlement, in which the parliament of Aotearoa New Zealand granted personhood to the Whanganui river and acknowledged a new collective entity, Te Awa Tupua, Werry sees the emergence of a post-human rights that are not tied to a sovereign, autonomous subject. While such a view needs no justification within Māori cosmology, it radically refigures Western rights discourse, and Werry offers a 'perverse, post-human, and even queer return' to Arendt's thinking, arguing that Arendt's commitment to 'vitality' in reimagining foundations of human rights can be the basis for a reading of 'Arendt the ecologist'—a view that invigorates *performance* with a non-human political capacity.

Arendt's work in *The Human Condition* introduced key concepts such as 'action' and 'appearance'—but what kind of action is thinking? This is the question at the heart of Arendt's later work *The Life of the Mind*, to which Diana Damian Martin returns, drawing on Arendt's suggestion that thinking *itself* is dangerous (1971, 76). Whereas Arendt tends to figure thinking as withdrawal into a private domain, as opposed to the publicness of action, Damian Martin draws on more recent affect theory to explore the porosity of private and public and to re-position this withdrawal as interruption. Damian Martin is particularly interested in this as a model for what she calls 'nonconforming criticism' as an activity that is not based on the application and affirmation of existing knowledge and values, but instead an embodied, vulnerable, uncertain process, 'a way of making appear'. In her encounter with Wassily Kandinsky's abstraction of a series of postures of German Expressionist choreographer Gret Palucca, based on photographs by Charlotte Rudolph, Damian Martin tracks her own slipping attention as a form of unfinished thought and a 'hopeful dazzlement'.

This question of Arendt's, 'what is the difference between thinking and doing?', is also the question that is randomly drawn as the starting point for *Think We Must* (2017), a year-long '"thinktanking" performance' by Panopoly Performance Laboratory. As one of the participants in this project, Esther Neff examines the Arendtian relation of thinking and doing in the context of feminist and anti-colonial political discourse—not just as abstract concepts, but as practical questions that informed the working of the thinktank itself: 'how can this/a (p)articular assembly intentionally perform thinking actions that do something?', they ask themselves.

Inspired by the ongoing actions of The Institute for Precarious Consciousness, Cory Tamler also enquires into modes of collective gathering, with particular attention to the legacy of feminist consciousness-raising. Understanding anxiety as 'the dominant affect of neoliberal capitalism', Tamler argues that alienation—a familiar strategy of politically-engaged theatre—holds potential

for an interrogation of anxiety as political phenomenology, generating a mobilising rather than isolating affect. Tamler reads Arendtian conceptions of public and private, and thought and action, in relation to queer phenomenology and Brechtian alienation, making a case for a reparative practice through the deployment of an alternative politics of anxiety.

Continuing the thread of re-reading Arendt in relation to the micropolitics of affect, Leonie Persyn focuses on the specific moment of hesitation that we experience in each and every living moment, the moment of 'non-breath' between inhalation and exhalation (and vice versa), as a repeated instance of Arendt's idea of natality. Persyn suggests that we might map Arendt's schema of the phases of action onto the sequence of movements that make up a breath; and more than this, that breath might become analogous to a speaking action, a gesture of intimacy between actor and spectator, as illustrated in the choreography of Kinga Jaczewska. And in the films of Chantal Akerman, Persyn sees the motif of breathing as a site of conflict and negotiation between private and public worlds.

Arendt's influential idea of 'spaces of appearance', the temporary sites of politics that erupt through public speech and action, is a shared point of departure for articles by Sevi Bayraktar and Luke Matthews. Bayraktar draws on extensive interviews and field work in Istanbul to address the ways in which Turkish activists create 'choreographies of dissent' in response to the restrictions on public assembly and dissenting speech imposed by the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Whereas the state implements a strategy of forced dispersal, prohibiting gathering in central spaces such as Taksim Square, Bayraktar argues that activists re-deploy dispersal as a counter-tactic, mobilising temporary, transient spaces as sites of political action; and moreover, they appropriate and re-use traditional folk-dance structures for a 'choreopolitics' of pluralism and solidarity. Noting Arendt's ambivalent (and sometimes contradictory) deployment of the idea of the theatre as a model of public action, Matthews presents Heiner Goebbels's self-described 'theatre of absence' as a possible political theatre, one founded not in representational politics but in creating conditions of spontaneity, plurality, and appearance. Across many of Goebbels's works, but in particular his 'no-man-show' *Stifters Dinge* (2007), Matthews identifies an 'empty centre' that permits a 'freedom of perception'—and indeed a source of pleasure in that freedom.

Finally, this collection on Arendt concludes with an engagement not just with Arendt's ideas, but with the life of Arendt herself—or at least 'putatively' so. In Miriam Shenitzer's exhibition of faux-artefacts from Arendt's life, Michael Zank finds a vivid manifestation of the fragmentation of collective history that characterises the twentieth century. In the disappearance of the 'real' Arendt amidst this fabricated collection of anecdote and biographical remnants, the past 'remains' (as Rebecca Schneider argues), but as an ethical call to our own remembrance.

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This issue of *Performance Philosophy* also includes two additions to our recurring sections, [Margins] and ReViews. Although not connected to the reflections on Arendt, these articles share with all the contributors to this volume an interest in a politically informed performance, and the

performativity of politics, that allows for an expanded openness to who or what counts as politics, and a resistance to forces that would foreclose on the possibility of action.

[Margins] was imagined and created by editor Kélina Gotman as a space within the academic journal for creative, non-standard approaches to writing and works for the (digital) page. This issue marks Gotman's final contribution as editor, as she is handing over responsibility for this section, in the form of a provocation from Meghan Moe Beitiks. Drawing on her experience as an artist, facilitator, and audience-member, Beitiks wonders what it might mean to think of facilitation as a life practice that can be extrapolated from the artistic realm to address the fundamental need 'to be heard and understood'—a need that might extend to nonhuman actors and inanimate matter. Her work addresses itself to a series of tables: activated in performance, as a surface for other objects, or even as an object of interest for a curious bull.

The ReViews section, edited by Will Daddario and Ioana Jucan, invites contributors to engage with a work or event that they have already encountered at least one before in the course of their lives, and in this issue, Josh Widera revisits a work that he experienced particularly very in his life indeed: *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* by children's author Dr. Seuss. In the Seuss story, oobleck is a green goo that falls from the sky and sticks to everything, literally clogging up the daily operations of its imaginary kingdom. In our world, oobleck is also one of the names given to a mixture of cornstarch and water that is simple to make, but complex in its behaviour: a non-Newtonian fluid that behaves like a liquid or solid depending on the energy with which one interacts with it, such that slow-moving objects can be absorbed, but a quick blow will be repelled. Drawing on contemporary thinkers of plasticity and resistance, Widera advocates for 'becoming oobleck' as political strategy, 'a recipe to simultaneously absorb care and reject force'.

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As contributors to this special issue have examined, Arendt's body of work, and its implications for phenomenology, governmentality, rights, and ecology, offer productive ways through which to consider a praxis that is performative, but also iterative and affective. Arendt's body of work is a thinking in motion, imbued with a political poetics that continues to invite, perhaps in equal measure, inquiry and speculation. Arendt's is a thinking *for,* as much as *of* the political; but it is also a thinking that is inherently connected to vitality, theatricality, and publicness. For performance philosophy, the challenge remains to consider what constitutes an irreversible action, and what conditions frame a political event. What does spectatorship offer as a paradigm through which to understand the relation of the civic to the collective? What might vitality contribute to an anti-colonial and anti-racist political praxis? In what ways does Arendtian thought translate to questions of post and non-human political ethics, judgment, and thinking? If, in Arendtian terms, thinking itself is dangerous, then perhaps we need to continue to occupy the edges of thought, where it is not yet formed, and where action is just beginning to take shape—in other words, the conjunction of performance and philosophy, in all their entanglements.

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PERFORMANCE
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WHAT'S LEFT OF RIGHTS? ARENDT AND POLITICAL ONTOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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On the morning of March 14, 2017, the Whanganui River, a majestic waterway in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, became a person. It did not grow legs or arms, or evolve some crucial, but elusive, form of consciousness. It did not materially change (if, that is, we discount the constant, myriad changes that make up the river's daily life: the shifting of silt or sand, the births, deaths, meldings and cleavings of the life-forms that dwell in, on, and around it). What happened, at 12.18pm that day, was that the Whanganui River acquired rights. For a century and a half the *iwi* (the Māori kin collectives) that claim the river as their ancestor had protested the alienation of their riverbank lands, the pollution of industrial farming, gravel extraction and hydroelectric damming, destruction of their eel weirs and fisheries, and the desecration of their *wahi tapu*, or sacred sites. After generations of grief, anger and frustration, legal and political appeals, in 2017 Whanganui *iwi* celebrated the signing of a Bill settling their Treaty claim against the Crown. This settlement (amongst other reparations and recognitions) bestowed upon the river "the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person." Te Awa Tupua, as the river would now legally be known, would henceforth be represented by Te Pou Tupua ("a human face"), comprised of one *iwi* representative and one state appointee, assigned to determine and act in the interests of the river (New Zealand Legislation 2017, 14).

What is remarkable about the Whanganui settlement is the description it offers of this person: Te Awa Tupua is "an *indivisible and living whole* from the mountains to the sea, incorporating the Whanganui River and *all of its physical and metaphysical elements*." Further, the Bill recognizes in

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019): 8–24
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51275
ISSN 2057–7176

law the genealogy that that makes Whanganui *iwi* and river kin, and affirms a concept of well-being in which the spiritual and physical health of people and river are interdependent.[1] Admitting Indigenous ontology and cosmology into the domain of the state, the Bill has, in effect, created a new political actor: Te Awa Tupua, a collective entity comprised of "different elements and communities"—tributaries and estuary, algae, *taniwha* (water spirits), kindergarteners, pollutants, eel fishers, eels, the vast company of those dead but still present—which respects none of the hierarchies of nature and culture, human and non-human, living and dead, singular and plural that form the Enlightenment foundation of liberal law (New Zealand Legislation 2017, 15). And, in affording to this actor the recognition and protection of the state, the Bill instantiated something quite novel, something we might call non-human rights.[2]

There is much to be written about the Wanganui case—and the Urewera case that preceded it, or the Taranaki case that followed, each working in a similar legal framework, and establishing a forested district and a mountain, respectively, as legal persons. As radical as this innovation might seem by international standards, these NZ settlements owe much to neoliberal juridical precedent, for which the classification of corporations—non-living, non-human entities—as legal persons is a commonplace (Turkiewicz 2017). It is important also to note that what is being established here is neither citizenship status for the river (such that it would become a fully political subject entitled to representation and participation), nor does the bill present a specification and instantiation of new rights themselves (as in a "bill of rights"). Instead, it proposes first, a managerial arrangement that consolidates and represents the river assemblage with respect to other business, state, community, and individual actors; and second, the river's right to be named as a party to litigation.[3] However, the broader point stands: here a natural entity is being enlisted as a political one through resort to a discourse of rights. And in its very openness to future propositions and claims—its implicit encompassment of future, as yet unimagined, articulations of rights—the Whanganui bill suggests an expansive conception of exactly what might constitute those rights.

New Zealand is not a unique instance. Increasingly, in response to Indigenous activism for sovereignty, other states are enacting or considering similar legislative ventures: Uruguay, Bolivia, India (see Kwek and Seyfert 2018, de la Cadena 2015). These rulings also reflect a conceptual shift occasioned by our historic moment in which many crises of human rights are inextricable from the *non*human processes of the Anthropocene era. The influx of refugees into Europe, for instance, and the conflicts in Syria and central Africa that precipitated it, have many causes, but prominent among them is the destabilizing role of protracted droughts caused by climate change. In response, theorists of ecopolitics call for analytic and policy frameworks that account for the role of a multiplicity of actors—not just human, but also biological, meteorological, or geological agents—in political problems and solutions. On one level, this simply means attending in political discourse to systemic complexity, asking how vast assemblages of humans and non-humans acting on or impacting each other transform the conditions of their interdependency. On another level, it imagines a democratizing revolution, a profound shift in the premises and practices of the political. It calls for us, in Bruno Latour's language, to admit non-humans into politics, becoming spokespeople for their interests, perhaps even according them rights (Latour 2004). What Latour (1993) calls the Modern contract that cleaved nature from society, and what Elizabeth Povinelli

(2016) calls the geontological contract, that erects the bio-political edifice of extractive capitalism on the foundation of a binary distinction between life and non-life, have long been the necessary (and necessarily ideological) fictions anchoring political reality. Now, both authors argue, they are in crisis, no longer supportable (if they ever were) in the face of ecological catastrophe in which human history and geological, biological, and meteorological history exert destructive force on each other. Clearly, the proposition of according a political role to the non-living, speaking with and for the non-human, is not a solution in and of itself to climate change or any other problem (non-human interests will inevitably conflict with each other as well as with human ones). But it is a way of conceiving and acting on an ethics of mutual response-ability that may be crucial to planetary survival.

The Problem(s) with Rights

To what extent is the language of rights, with its very definitively Enlightenment legacy, adequate to this demand? Political theorists have, after all, been ringing human rights' death knell for two decades, declaring it a failed project, an ultimately moral vision premised on the abandonment of actual political contestation. Analyzing the rise to dominance of rights discourse in international relations in the 1970s, Samuel Moyn (2010, 2014) links it to the abandonment of revolutionary and decolonial projects, and the turn to global, technocratic neoliberal governance under the auspices of bodies such as the WTO, IMF, and so on. In the place of political change, the people of the Global South got structural readjustment, and the promise that the West would stand with them in defense of human rights, an ethical fig-leaf over the cumulative collateral damages of colonialism, extractive capitalism, and necropolitical governance, that always arrives too late, after the fact of violence. Other critics argue, more bluntly, that when enacted in humanitarian policy the language of human rights provides ideological cover for the expansion of Western interests (Mutua 2016). For Agamben (1998, 2005) (and Schmitt et al. before him), the language of rights is predicated on the logic of sovereignty, which constitutes the rule of law by designating states of exception—black sites, border zones, carceral spaces—where rights, and the humans to which they supposedly apply, have no standing at all.

Such asymmetry, critics claim, is inherent in the structure of rights discourse and practice. Human rights, Hannah Arendt famously argued, are a paradox—they are the possession of those who do not have them, a fact revealed painfully in the wake of WWII when arguments about human rights emerged to lend standing to the legions of stateless refugees, those whose *only* property was their humanity (Arendt 1958, especially "Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man," 267–302). Citizens of states, Arendt maintained, enjoying the protection of those states, had no need for human rights. From this perspective human rights names less a set of entitlements due to the human (liberty, property etc.) than a claim about *what kind of subject* is entitled to political participation and protection. And, as Arendt also argued, that determination rests on a flimsy philosophical foundation. Reaching back to critique two pivotal thinkers in the tradition of rights, Hobbes and Rousseau, she showed that both premised rights on sovereignty. For Hobbes, the inalienable natural rights of freedom, self-determination, and agency were synonymous with the

power of the autonomous, sovereign self-interest of the individual, vested in the sovereignty of the state (Arendt 1958). Rousseau likewise reduces rights to sovereign state power by theorizing the latter as the consolidation of a plurality of autonomous, subjective wills freely surrendered (Arendt 1998 [1958]). If rights cannot be imagined outside the sovereign state, *human* rights, then, are the rights of those who—by virtue of being stateless—do not have them. Far from being the inherent, ontological locus of dignity and freedom, the human of human rights is a nullity. To be human in the frame of human rights, is to be *merely* human.

A number of subsequent political theorists have agreed on this foundational aporia in the philosophical formation of human rights. The "universal foundation" for human rights in the classic liberal tradition, some have argued, appears to be little more than an "idolatry" of the human (Ignatieff 2001), an ultimately theological (Moyn 2010, 2014) or metaphysical (Rawls 1999) postulate. It is precisely this apolitical humanism, they argue, that masks the fact that human rights are simply political rights, without ontological foundation; we should, then, (the internationalists and liberals amongst them claim) proceed on that basis, and advocate politically for a common deliberative framework to adjudicate conflict and prosecute injustice. Their more radical colleagues counter that it is this mystification that can make human rights a vehicle for hegemonic interests represented by states, and which renders it hostage to liberalism's "cunning of recognition"—the logic that circumscribes the subjective, aesthetic, embodied conditions to which citizens must conform in order to be seen as politically legitimate by their compatriots and the apparatus of the state (Povinelli 2002). Human rights, in this reading, is nothing more than a set of normative pretexts and moral trump cards presented by the rights-entitled.

Arendt, Performance, and the Case for (Non-)Human Rights

For Arendt, the doctrine of human rights appeared as both a historical failure and a moral necessity. While her critique of rights from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—focusing on the plight of the refugee and the camp prisoner—is well known, and exhaustively discussed, the extent to which her subsequent philosophical project was impelled by the desire to provide rights the ontological, and thus philosophical and political, foundation they lacked, is less well understood. Over the course of several works, Arendt grounded the "right to have rights" in a series of nested concepts—freedom conceived as action, which is both equated with and predicated on appearance, in turn resting on and likened to natality, or initium—all formulated in strikingly performative terms.

My project in the remainder of this article is to make a perverse, post-human, and even queer return to Arendt's thinking on the ontological foundation of rights, to ask: What is *left* of rights? Could the challenge of encompassing and representing non-human entities re-energize the political pursuits that have hinged on rights thinking? Post-humanist proponents of critical race theory, Indigenous studies, disability and queer studies have thoroughly problematized the givenness of the liberal rights-bearing subject, and the attributes of sovereignty, autonomy, motility, reason, self-possession, intention, speech, and efficacy that have qualified it—qualifications that define the parameters of the human by disqualifying bodies (the woman, the slave, the refugee, the disabled) deemed different. But they have, largely, stopped short of

inquiring into a concept of rights that embraces a radically non-human subject, limiting themselves instead to arguing either for a continual expansion of the domain of the human beyond its foundational exclusions, or for an abandonment of rights altogether. But how might conceptualizing rights away from inherited presumptions about how a rights-bearing subject acts, manifests, or appears help us reclaim what was politically generative about the project of rights in the first place? Ultimately, do rights retain any validity if they do not also embrace the non-human? How might performance help us *imagine* non-human rights—help us figure, speak with and for, non-humans in the domain of the political? And what insight might we gain from revisiting Arendt in the light of post-humanist thought?

This is a problem of interest to performance scholars, as performance is—historically and in practice—the space in which the subject of rights is constituted. Human rights have long been embraced as a central concern of theatre. Thinkers and artists have seized on the stage as a site to expose violations, stage testimony, cry for redress, claim freedom of expression, or test the reach of state or religious power. Theatre, it has been suggested, is the ideal instrument of what philosopher Richard Rorty (1993) called the "sentimental education" essential to the culture of rights: the process of building empathy between the powerful and the powerless, of "humanizing" its subjects. But it is simplistic, as Paul Rae (2009) has argued, to suggest that theatre is inherently *for* human rights. The medium that can humanize can equally dehumanize; it can speak for power as easily as for the powerless. And it can gratify liberal audiences' self-regard through tailoring for their consumption stories about the misery—or savagery—of supposedly illiberal others. It can, that is, accentuate rather than bridge the gulf between the rights-less (the spoken-about) and those empowered to bestow rights (the speakers). Theatre's humanist universalism is in fact, its critics have argued, very particular—enshrining and campaigning for a Western, liberal, individualist, sovereign concept of the human, and the rights that are its rightful property.

By the same token, the canon of Performance Studies is essentially founded on a humanist, representational and ultimately liberal concept of performance as demotic technology, in which people exercise political agency by self-expressing, and forming publics, counter-publics, or communities in which they imagine political alternatives and bring pressure to bear on the mechanisms of state, or other, power. The work of scholars such as Jill Dolan, José Esteban Muñoz, Diana Taylor, or Dwight Conquergood fits such a description. In this conception, performance itself constitutes a human right—more or less commensurate with the freedom of expression—by means of which (human) subjects can lobby for other rights.

More critical approaches focus on performance's capacity to disturb the mechanisms of exclusion by which those subjects and publics are constituted, and constituted as possessing rights. For Rancière (1999), for instance, properly political performance is the scene of "dissensus", where the uncounted, the unrepresentable, the "part who have no part" disrupt the "common sense" or given-ness of political life. For Butler (2015), likewise, assembly and protest are spaces in which illegible or unthinkable subjects materialize, and come to matter in the scene of public life through the sheer performative force of collective presence. Drawing on Arendt, she attends to the ways in which the boundaries of appearance and thus of the public are policed to exclude the "specific

forms of agency and resistance" of the rightless. In performance studies, André Lepecki (2013a) pairs Rancière and Arendt to understand choreographies as aesthetic acts that are "configurations of experience" with the capacity to "redistribute the sensible" (Rancière 2004a). That is, they reorganize those divisions between what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible, the recognizable and the unrecognizable, public and private, artwork and political speech that secure the political order. In doing so, they imagine (rehearse, learn, nurture, and practice) "how to move politically", by which Lepecki means (following Arendt), "how to move freely."

Performance is, for these scholars, an embodied, vital, critical—and crucially open—answer to the question: "who is the subject of the Rights of Man?": to perform is to exercise and claim rights, to manifest the subjectivity that demands political representation and protection (Rancière 2004b). But surely considering the performance of a river strains this openness: in what way can a river be said to perform? Where does the threshold of political legibility ultimately lie? The most basic characteristics of what we commonly, humanistically understand as performance, political or artistic, do not pertain: a river cannot speak, it must be spoken for; it possesses no discrete body that it can bring to bear on other bodies in willed action; its constituent elements might be in constant motion, but it cannot (in Lepecki's sense) be said to move, or (in Butler's) assemble into a public; while it exerts palpable affect, can it be said to express desire, intent, or identity? Even the temporality in which a river might be said to act fails to align with that imagined by human politics: the Whanganui has experienced the impacts of European colonization over a century and a half, its response to Māori habitation and interaction evolved over perhaps a millennium, and the force it has exerted on the other constituents of the region's ecosystem must be measured in the grand span of (for Pākehā) geological or (for Māori) cosmological time. To the extent that we can refer to the Whanganui even as a living actor, that life is not defined by the clear and finite span between birth and death (the death from which, in conventional construals of rights, the subject must be protected); the river might be damaged, might lose the capacity to sustain itself in its current form, but it will not die *per se*. The river's *mauri* (life force) and *hau* (living breath) which is what this legislation aims to protect, are not (in Māori thought) fully contained either materially or temporally by a given body. And in what recognizable performances are the claims of *mauri* and *hau* exercised and manifest?[4] Clearly, to fully encompass a river as a subject of rights, the forms of performance through which that subject appears need to be thoroughly reimagined.

Arendt would seem an unlikely ally for this theoretical project. She is often dismissed for endorsing a normative, individualist, masculine definition of the political subject, and a rationalist (discursive-linguistic) definition of the political sphere. Arendt's oeuvre is full of "cuts," binaries and hierarchies that have prevented her uptake in a fully radical, especially feminist politics: between the public and the private, the biological and the political, necessity and freedom, the artwork and political speech, between action and work. But feminists and queers who remain committed to Arendtian thought have reclaimed her by seeing those "cuts" as symptomatic of the conditions of her writing rather than foundational to her ultimate project; they articulate precisely the normative contours of political life that must be troubled in order to imagine and practice politics otherwise. Rancière (2004b), for instance, has critiqued what he called her "archipolitical" stance (299). If human rights

traditionally construed are essentially civil rights, and the condition of the barely human (the camp prisoner or refugee) is a deprivation of those rights to civil, public life, Arendt's affirmation of the political as the realm of publicness amounts to a consent to the public/private divisions that relegate some to the condition of rightslessness in the first place. For Rancière, Arendt depicts rights as tautologically foreclosed rather than continually, dissensually contested. And yet, her formulation of the political has been enabling to those such as Butler or Lepecki, who attend, precisely, to dissensual contestation by analyzing non-normative modes of corporeally manifesting, assembling, moving, and aesthetically presencing that seize the promise of appearance to make claims on the public or demos.

In the remainder of this article, I want to cast yet another queer eye on Arendt's thought to suggest that her conceptualization of the ground of rights was already more queer than theorists have acknowledged. The ground of Arendtian rights is ontological, material, and phenomenological but not, I suggest, ultimately exclusive to the human. Moreover, her formulation of the right to have rights is generative and encompassing precisely because of its emphasis on ontology rather than expression; although saturated with references to and examples of conventionally humanist performance (speech, narration, display, virtuosity etc.), Arendt's attempt to reimagine the foundation of human rights offers an opportunity to reimagine performance as a non-human political capacity, and thus non-humans as rights-bearing actors.

The Ontology of Rights: initium, natality, and appearance

The ontological (rather than theological or metaphysical) ground for the subject of human rights and our common humanity—the two, for Arendt, are linked—hinges on natality as an explicitly performative event. This subject has no inherent or fixed nature, but is instead unpredictable, unexpected—a beginning. In explaining this concept of *initium*, Peg Birmingham (2006) notes Arendt's debt to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, in which he theorizes the animating affection or origin (*arche*) of action, a *principium* that operates as a moving principle, orienting action and mapping out directions, but never exhausting itself in any one realization, and manifesting "in the act as long as the activity endures, but no longer" (15).[5] Birmingham notes also Arendt's interest (in *Men in Dark Times*) in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and the temporal logic he discerns in the phenomenon of citability. Citability, in Arendt's reading of Benjamin, is the "force that destroys the complacency of the present by robbing from the past that which is foreign and unfamiliar" (Birmingham 2006, 20). It is not a repetition of the past as origin of action; instead, the citation is inaugurative rather than descriptive, it introduces a novel reality. But the new that it offers is not part of progressive discourse precisely because it belongs to the untransmitted and untransmittable elements of the past: that foreign and incommensurable element that cannot be either reduced to the known or same, and thus not be empathized with.

Both these formulations, derived from Montesquieu and from Benjamin, sound familiar from (subsequent) conversations about performativity and performance: the non-determinate purposiveness and ephemeral temporality of action, the productive force of performativity. Where Arendt diverges is to wrest the performative force that instantiates this subject from the domain

of the past, the determined, the known. In Arendt the *initium* of natality is an absolute newness, a singular and unprecedented beginning. Crucially, the subject that natality theorizes inhabits the domain of *zoe:* that of bare, unadorned life, of what Arendt called (in the context of her discussion of the rights of the refugee) unqualified existence. This *givenness*, Arendt argues, carries the demand of unconditional affirmation, the right to have rights, and forms the grounds of our common responsibility. Only a subject thus constituted, and a right conceived in this way, could form a bulwark against the foundational violence of Western philosophy and political life (detailed in her analysis of imperialism and the genocidal drives of fascism) that could not recognize the dignity of the alien, the other.

Natality, in much of Arendt's oeuvre, forms a dyad with appearance, echoing the Augustinian counterpoint of *zoe* with *bios politikos*, and anchoring many of the other distinctions that structure Arendtian political thought (public/private, action/work, freedom/necessity, and so on). In appearance, the subject emerges into the scene of publicness, to act and be witnessed. Appearance, as such, precedes the formal constitution of the public sphere, and predicates both the capacity for action and for political speech—without appearance, there can be none—creating "the essential condition of being recognized as a member of the community of [human] beings and the world, and being treated accordingly" (Han 2012). Appearance, the standard reading of Arendt tells us, is the defining characteristic of the human as a political being—not some ineffable, ill-defined quality of humanity or assumption of will. Thus, appearance establishes rights not on the ground of either individual or collective sovereignty, not on the ground of formal equality before the law (juridical rights), but on the ground of political participation: the right "to belong to an organized political space, with its inherent plurality of actors" (Birmingham 2006, 36). These are rights based not in the freedom of will but in the freedom of action, where action is understood primarily as presence and expression, being seen and being heard. Freedom, then, for Arendt is a positive rather than negative formulation: a freedom to, not a freedom from.

In the conventional reading of Arendt on rights, the reading she most explicitly invites, appearance is an event subsequent to natality. It is a linguistic second birth that separates human from biological life, *bios politikos* from *zoe*: "It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly" (Arendt [1963] 1990, 198–99). And yet, Arendt repeatedly and tellingly muddies this distinction. To wit, this peculiar and tantalizing passage from *The Life of the Mind* (1978) (where Arendt exhaustively theorized the concept of appearance), in which we find her drawing inspiration from Swiss botanist Adolf Portmann's study of expressivity in plants (27–30): "To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them" (21). Appearance and *vitality*, not humanity, in this view are mutually constituting: seeming, citing, presencing, displaying—forms of performance that exceed speech—are the grounds of political personhood. Everything that possesses this "innate impulse" towards self-presentation appears, entailing a "promise to the world, to those to whom I appear, to act in accordance with my pleasure" (36). Peculiarly ahead of her time, Arendt is in line with a number of contemporary biologists who have come to see this kind of aesthetic expressivity

in plants and animals not as a utilitarian adaptation to environment or reproductive advantage, but as decadent, superfluous, and without any purpose other than the urge toward beauty. Not only, they suggest, is human perception not equipped to comprehend the full aesthetic expressivity of non-human world, but that beauty might stand as evidence that "Animals are agents in their own evolution" (Fabr 2019). In this passage, Arendt confuses—indeed, fuses—appearance and natality: the plant and the political actor are both making an entrance, initiating the new.

I Want You To Be: Arendt the Ecologist

The moment points us to a construal of political agency and subjecthood that is grounded in vitality rather than humanity; even as she appears to differentiate human from other-than-human appearing, Arendt establishes their commensurability. To do so, she bypasses what Derrida called the "naturalist" conception of communication that underpins liberal representation (by which I mean representation as both delegation and speech): appearance, Arendt shows here, does not re-present and thus communicate something (an idea, a subject, a constituency) that pre-exists it.[6] It is a doing that instantiates a being. Such a conception of appearance as performativity wrenches our understanding of political action away from the communicational norms of sentience, intention, self-presence that bedevil attempts to imagine, say, a river as a political actor. In such a reading, that river need not be conscious, sentient, deliberate, rational, or even a singular unity to be capable of public appearance and thus deserving of rights.

Even as many of Arendt's explicit arguments for human rights reference a distinction between *zoe* and *bios politikos*, then, they also rest on a set of ontological claims about life and liveliness that are—I argue—fundamentally ecological rather than humanistic in character. In "What is Freedom" she describes the "automatic processes" of the earth, asserting that "we ourselves are driven by similar forces insofar as we too are a part of organic nature." The claim supports her assertions about the creativity of action, suggesting that initium—the capacity to begin—is a natural, indeed cosmological, process that provides for human existence and perpetuation: "It is in the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an 'infinite improbability,' and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. Our whole existence rests, after all, on a chain of miracles, as it were—the coming into being of the earth, the development of organic life on it, the evolution of mankind out of the animal species" (Arendt 1961,169). Appearance, she contends elsewhere, is "driven by the motor of biological life which man shares with other living things and which forever retains the cyclical movement of nature" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 97).

Initium thus conceived is radically different from human free will: it is an emergence rather than an actualization of pre-existing potential, an emergence conceived in startlingly biological terms. Reading Heidegger, Arendt proposes that "the Greeks, especially the pre-Socratics, often thought of being as *physis* (nature) whose original meaning is derived from *phyein* (to grow), that is, to come to light out of darkness. Anaximander, say Heidegger, thought of *genesis* [becoming] and *phthora* [passing away] in terms of *physis*, 'as ways of luminous rising and declining'" (Arendt 1978, 190). Natality, on this basis, names these continuous appearances and departures from a durable and

adaptable world—a world constantly innovating, becoming. Human rights can never be conceived independently of this capacity of *initium* that they and all natural entities share.

The formulation gets at something of the fragility, interdependence, but also the ongoingness of ecological life that contemporary thinkers such as Donna Haraway (2016) have theorized as a rejoinder to the anthropocentric fatalism of climate change catastrophizing. Human continuity, they argue, depends on an educated hope and ethics of common responsibility that entails "living with the trouble" begun by the human assault on non-human worlds, and affirming the (re)generative capacity of natural systems. This is, of course, nothing new for the Indigenous claimants of the Whanganui case, whose cosmologically grounded commitment to this common responsibility rests in a kin relationship between the river and its people which requires constant tending**.**

When Arendt is at her most anthropocentric, when she argues for the primacy of appearance over natality as the mark of "where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly," she always also trains our attention on the quality of "mere" life—the state of unqualified existence that forms the ontological ground for human rights (Arendt [1958] 1998, 198–99). The right to have rights, as she conceives it, is not just the right to appearance—to make one's entrance on a public stage—but the right derived from mere existence, which entails the intrinsic common responsibility to desire the other's presence in the world. In a passage concluding the famous discussion from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* about the (non)-rights of the refugee, Arendt elaborates *zoe* thus: "This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, "*Volo ut sis* (I want you to be)," without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation" (Arendt 1958, 301). "'*Amo: volo ut sis*,'" Arendt writes elsewhere, "'I love you: I want you to be'—and not 'I want to have you' or 'I want to rule over you'" (Arendt 1978, 136). This is the common responsibility at the root of the right to have rights: the unconditional affirmation of the singularity of other beings and, implicitly, other modes of being, in their unqualified existence. Arendt's efforts to make the human exceptional arrive, to a crucial degree, after she establishes this claim.

Revisiting the Archipolitical Arendt: making room for the non-human actor

Understanding the importance of "the given" helps us re-engage what has been most confounding about Arendt's political philosophy for contemporary commentators, namely her insistence (erected on the foundation of *bios politikos/zoe*) on the distinction between public and private, necessity and freedom, and her determination that embodied difference should have no part in the domain of equality that is political life. In *The Human Condition*—grappling with the calamity of European fascism and the generations of genocidal imperial racism from which it stemmed—Arendt reviles *zoe*, framing it as the domain of base, violent, necessity from which we must be liberated to achieve the freedom of political action. And yet, as Peg Birmingham (2006) has argued, "The very plurality that Arendt understands as the condition *sine qua non* of political life is infused

with an ineradicable difference or alienness that is inextricably part and parcel of the right to have rights" (71). This was the tension that her supposed archipolitics sought to overcome: *zoe*, "the disturbing miracle" of the given, must be included in *bios politikos*, at the same time as the politicization of embodiment (and in particular the specter of racialization, and of unrepresentable thus eliminable difference) must be avoided (Arendt 1958, 301). While Arendt's referents are resolutely human, she offers no insurmountable reason why this protection of difference might not extend to other miraculous existents, such as a river.

The post-humanist, ecopolitical Arendt is, of course, a willful, even eccentric, counter-reading. The effort to make the right to have rights encompass the non-human, seems doomed to run aground on the particular *style* of performance that dominates her oeuvre: theatrical, oratorical, virtuosic, the appearance of an actor that is, if nothing else, human, individualist, rational. This style could not be further from the quiet, collective, selfless presencing of a river. The quintessentially Arendtian political figure is (at least to her critics) a preening (Pitkin 1998), authoritarian (Rancière 2010), heroic Hellenophile who exalts in the refinements of speech, lauds the philosopher, and sneers at the earthy labors of those who dig his [sic.] potato plot or fetch his water. From this point of view, the proposition that the soil of the philosopher's plot or the river that is the source of his water are equally political actors seems patently absurd.

This figure is, however, a caricature. These criteria of political personhood—the human, the individual, the rational—are repeatedly made strange across the body of Arendt's writing. Her concept of political action, for instance, instantiates an agency that simply does not look like the agency of the liberal human subject: Arendtian action is non-instrumental, non-predictive, non-intentional, non-sovereign (Thiele 2009). Its context and antecedent are not deterministic; its outcomes can't be known in advance or limited by the will of the actor. Likewise, the Arendtian individual is singular but never autonomous: we exist in a web of relations that enable us to build a world together as well as destroy one another, a "world in common that is shareable yet diverse, communicable yet open to misunderstanding, and that appears as one yet is refracted through many different narratives and perspectives" (Benhabib 2011, 53). Arendtian action is not even necessarily linguistic: it is, she states, "the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, *not even as an object of cognition or imagination*" (1961, 151). Arendt's term is virtuosity, and her analogy is that of the performing arts, which requires an audience and a "publically organized space," and whose accomplishment "lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity" (153). What Arendt describes is surely performative in the Austinian sense (and scholars such as Lepecki have clearly made this point). But the exercise of freedom, for Arendt, cannot be reduced to a speech act: instead, it is a manifestation-in-relation, a becoming-with, a joyous presencing within the assemblage of political relevance that it is the work of rights to protect, nurture, and validate.[7]

Performing a River's Rights

The public concerns of the Whanganui River's parliamentary advocates were in many ways pragmatic and fell on the nether side of that most fundamental of Arendtian cuts, that between

political action and governmental work: how to manage conditions, mitigate risk, and regulate development to better foster the welfare of the River and its kin. And yet, they argued, to do so—properly and fully, without further violence to either the river or its human or non-human co-existents—required a fundamental affirmation of that river's originary alterity. In the legislation that affirmation went by the name of rights. For Whanganui *iwi*, the extension of the rights of personhood to a non-human existent required no justification: the river was always and already a member of their political and social collective, and due the same dignity and protection as every other one. But for the juridical apparatus of anthropocentric Western liberalism into which the river was admitted (and which was irrevocably changed by that admission), the legislative act demands a fundamental—long overdue—rethinking of the philosophical and ontological grounding of rights. It is this task, I have argued, to which Arendt's argument for the "right to have rights" might be turned.

For Arendt the right to have rights is derived from the ontological fact of natality, which demands an unqualified affirmation of the given, the unanticipated, the infinite difference of others, and not necessarily human others, born into the same web of relations. Her theory of appearance meanwhile posits performance as the freedom of political action that rights must protect: the right to take one's place in a political collective, to be politically legible, to *matter*. Crucially, however, I have suggested that this performative participation cannot be reduced to political speech or freedom of expression (with all it entails of rationality, individuality, etc.). Appearance, at base, proposes a capacious formulation of performance as the quality of *being vitally, and joyously present before a community of others*.

But how do we build a bridge between the ineffability of appearance, thus construed, and the realpolitik of government in order for rights to be translated into life-supporting practices that can extend to non-humans? We need to evolve or recover aesthetic practices of translation and witnessing, of co-presence and listening, of attuning ourselves to non-human performativities, and perhaps of co-performance with non-humans. For if speech, for human democracies, is understood as "the bodily and linguistic exercise of rights" (Butler 2015), how might we hear a river speak? How might we, the human we, talk *for*, as well as with and to non-human kin?

It is beyond the scope of this article to either analyze such non-human performativities, or lay out a methodology for politically engaging them. (Although I would note that this has been assayed by numerous scholars in the fields of political ontology and political ecology, from Eduardo Kohn, Marisol de la Cadena, Vivieros de Castro, or Amiria Salmond, to Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour—many of them drawing on the work of experimental artists, speculative fiction authors, and Indigenous collaborators to do so.) But, provoked by Arendt, I would like to conclude by returning to the Whanganui case, to argue that performance studies might pay a renewed, and deeply theoretical attention to Indigenous performance practices as inspiration and guide (but not, crucially, as a resource to be raided). The so-far slight body of work in our discipline on Indigenous performance has tended to engage it at the level of representational strategies rather than its underlying ontological assumptions, political praxis or poetics, and has tended to focus on the stage rather than performance's manifestation in Indigenous-state relations.[8] And yet, these

scenes of Indigenous-state engagement can—read carefully—provide a well-tested model for the performative articulation of non-human rights.

For the *iwi* of the Whanganui River who lobbied for Te Awa Tupua's status as a person, human rights and non-human ones depend on each other. And for them, as for most other Indigenous peoples in settler nations, the threat of annihilation by human-induced ecological catastrophe is nothing new: they have long recognized that what Alfred Crosby called "ecological imperialism" is part and parcel of the slow violence of settler colonialism's genocidal strategies of elimination (Crosby 2004, Nixon 2011, Wolfe 2006). To them the Enlightenment exclusion of non-humans from politics has always seemed a violation of sociality itself. It is primarily *this* that Whanganui *iwi* sought redress from in their settlement.

After the vote on the Wanganui River Bill, the speaker of the house deferred to the parliamentary gallery, where the river's kin—members of the Whanganui Māori delegation—called, chanted, spoke, danced and sang the river's rights into being with a full thirteen minutes of *karakia*, and *mihi*, *karanga, waiata*, and *haka*. This was not a colorful addendum to the real business of legislation: it was a profound performative. These more or less traditional forms of performance invoke the entities comprising *whakapapa*—often translated as genealogy, but more precisely understood as the generative and encompassing relational networks that sustain creation, including human kin, plants, animals, geographical entities, deities, meteorological forces (Salmond 2013, Roberts et al 2004). *Karakia* (prayers), *mihi* (greetings), *karanga* (chants/calls), *waiata* (songs), and *haka* (dance chants), presence non-human kin by naming them, acknowledging and honoring them. At the same time, the bodies of the performers themselves presence the absent entities by virtue of their ancestry: they are, in an absolute sense, co-substantial. In the words of the Whanganui *whakataukī* (saying) that prefaced the bill itself: "*Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au*," "I am the River, and the River is me."

In Māori cosmo-onto-epistemology (in *mātauranga Māori*—Māori knowledge systems—the three sectors of philosophy are inextricable from one another), the presence or force of an entity, human or non-human, living or non-living, is not confined to its material duration in time and space. Instead, *hau* (breath), *mana* (charisma, status, standing), and *mauri* (life force, present in all vital things, from healthy rivers to newborn children) can be transmitted from entity to entity, often through the agency of performance (Hēnare 2001). As explained by Charles Te Ahukaramu Royal, performance conducts and amplifies powerful affects, in the fully material, Deleuzian sense of the word: forces and intensities that traverse bodies. *Mauri, hau*, or *mana* are made manifest and sensible through the effects of performance, through *ihi, wehi,* and *wana*—the awe and power you feel as a witness to a magnificent performance, the chill on your scalp, the goosebumps on your spine (Royal 1998, Marsden 2003, Barlow 1991, Kruger 2004, Hokowhitu 2014, Mead 1997). Sensitivity to these affects, then, is a way of registering the *appearance* of the non-human through the performance of the human. MP Marama Fox, in a speech delivered at the third hearing of the Bill, invoked elders of the Whanganui *iwi* who had passed during the long campaign for the river's rights:

> Their waiata and whakataukī, and their karanga and karakia provide other means to understand te mana o te awa [the mana of the river]. They help describe the heart and soul from which to interpret te mana o te iwi… They told us: "Kauaka e kōrero mō Te Awa ēngari, kōrero ki Te Awa!" ["*Do not talk about the River but speak to it!*"] So, we too went to the River. (New Zealand Legislation 2017a, 9–10)

The tears of the *kaumātua* and *kuia* (elders) in the gallery and the MPs on the floor as these *waiata, karanga*, and *karakia* were performed, the power and fullness of their performance, were not a wholly human affair; they were a very complex form of spokespersonship, a speaking to and for, a listening and interpreting, a presencing and co-presencing, a braiding of human and non-human, by which the Whanganui made an appearance.

And so, a river ran through parliament. In appearing, in performing and being performed, it exercised its rights—not as a gift bestowed, but as a common responsibility acknowledged, a singular existence affirmed, a gratitude and pleasure taken in the animating bond of the 'we' (Birmingham 2006, 105). For thirteen joyous minutes, the river's right to have rights was audible, visible, sensible in a chorus saying—in many other words—what Arendt, after Augustine might have said: "I want you to be."

Notes

[1] "Te Awa Tupua is a spiritual and physical entity that supports and sustains both the life and natural resources within the Whanganui River and the health and wellbeing of the iwi, hapū and other communities of the River." (New Zealand Legislation 2017b, 14).

[2] Although philosophers such as Peter Singer have long argued for the rights of animal non-humans, only welfare protections (prevention of cruelty, duty of care, etc.) rather than positive rights have been recognized in law. It is notable also that arguments for animal rights largely rest on claims of similarity between animals and humans as living and mortal individuals (ex. sentience, the capacity to suffer, and so on). By these measures, the unqualified attribution of human-equivalent rights to an assemblage of living and (arguably) non-living existents such as a river is entirely novel.

[3] On the history of the Whanganui case, and a critique of the ways in which the river's rights have been legallly circumscribed, see Salmond (2017).

[4] For a discussion of the philosophical, ecological, and ontological dimensions of these concepts, resting on a now substantial Māori-authored literature on *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge systems), see Salmond (2017).

[5] I gratefully acknowledge Birmingham's influence on my understanding of Arendt's theory of natality.

[6] Cf. Karen Barad's materialist reconceptualization of performativity in Barad (2003).

[7] On the joyous, expressive quality of Arendtian action, see Lepecki (2013b).

[8] I would like to acknowledge recent work by Stephanie Noelani Teves, Jacqueline Shea Murphy, and Julie Burelle that is moving the field forward in this direction.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

HOPEFUL ACTS IN TROUBLED TIMES: THINKING AS INTERRUPTION AND THE POETICS OF NONCONFORMING CRITICISM

DIANA DAMIAN MARTIN THE ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

This paper begins with Hannah Arendt's claim that thinking *itself* is dangerous (1971, 176), and ends with an encounter with *Dance Curves: On the Dances of Palucca* (1926), Wassily Kandinsky's abstraction of a series of postures of German Expressionist choreographer Gret Palucca, from embodiment to photograph to line drawing. In my encounter with *Dance Curves*, I find a model of nonconforming criticism, where the relation between my critical engagement with Kandinsky's work, its ties to the photographs of Palucca, and their dialogue between body, movement, writing and drawing is made visible through an exposed thinking in process. Nonconforming criticsm is a process of deliberately mishandled translation, in this instance, where I intervene in an already shifting configuration of ideas. This model of nonconforming criticism unfolds through slippages of attention that move beside performance, folding outwards to the political nexus of its nowness.

To Arendt, thinking is interruptive, but it also leaves you dazzled, 'feeling unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt' (1971, 175). What does this grip of ambiguity offer to thinking in the context of criticism, when it exposes itself through peripherals: shifts of attention, adjacent events, fragmented translations? Might this dazzlement be hopeful, an interruption into troubled times that makes way for a nonconforming criticism? What are the implications of nonconforming criticism as a thinking *beside* performance, toying with the dangerousness of the fragmented, the exposed or the vulnerable? As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes, 'beside' offers 'some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives' (2003, 8). For Sedgwick, beside resists dualistic thinking, offering a spaciousness of

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):25–41
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51290
ISSN 2057–7176

relation, or, as I see it here, a productive ambiguity of relation between performance and criticism. I consider the textures of nonconforming criticism, understood here as a frame that renders legible forms of thinking in process, (*beside* performance,) that reject the category of criticism either implicitly or explicitly, or dismiss its utility. Instead of engaging with criticism's temporal relations to performance, I am interested in its phenomenology. Implicit in this exploration is an encounter with the politics of Arendt's work on thinking and appearance tethered to the now.

In this entwinement of unfinished configurations of meanings, gripped by experience and distracted by the plural futurities of now (the political moment), being dazzled might be a form of resistance to what Bojana Kunst calls 'the ready-made possibilities of discourse', that is, the 'pre-established models of criticality and reflexivity' to which art and artistic subjectivity often partake (2015, 13). Kunst's work considers the relation between subjectivity, neoliberalism and modes of work, making a case for a paradoxical relation: between work as an activity and process that pertains to the common, and one that concerns appearance precisely because of its potential coercion. I use work here to speak of the activity of criticism, as well as the process of undertaking that activity and its making visible. Similarly, criticism is constituted here in reference to what Roland Barthes foregrounds as an activity, rather than a body of judgments ([1966] 1987, 12), and Jennifer Doyle explores as residing in an affective density made possible by its eventness, that is, criticism as a 'deeper awareness of the space around artworks and expanding our sense of what it means to be present to art' (2013, 14). Nonconforming criticism is a lens through which to examine thinking in process that disturbs coercion through a queering of its utility.

My concern is with processes of recognition, rather than criticism as an object of study. Recognition is tied to assumptions of what constitutes an inherent good, which implicate this critical act in a particular politics. Recent Indigenous political scholarship, most notably the work of Glen Coulthard and Audra Simpson, points to the problematic nature of recognition when it claims transcendence from forms of structured dispossession without acknowledging its reliance on mutuality. Simpson argues that political recognition often results in a reiteration of colonial structures precisely because of its staging of relations of inclusion (2014, 17), whilst Coulthard proposes self-recognition as a vision of decolonisation that rejects dependency (2014, 42). Relations of power become reconfigured when recognition occurs by means of an alternative politics. It is here where *beside*, as Sedgwick argues, offers a productive spatial irreducibility that sets a different ecology of relations between thinking, affect, criticism and performance. The interruptiveness of thinking as it unfolds in encounters with attention constitutes a poetics of appearance that is vulnerable, searching for dissonance, rather than homogeneity.

Arendtian scholars disagree over the extent to which her later work on judgment and thinking constitutes a break with, or a continuation of, her investigation into politics (Beiner 1997, Disch 1994, Young 1997, Taylor 2002), yet share an articulation of Arendt's work as marked by a poetics of withdrawal and appearance. Here, I consider the inter-relation of Arendt's political examination of appearance and thinking through the prism of a model of nonconforming criticism that destabilises thinking as interruptive and withdrawn, and appearance as spectatorial and collective. Arendt argues that 'feelings, passions and emotions' which 'can no more become part and parcel

of the world of appearances than our inner organs' (1971, 31). At the same time, experience, emotion and reflection are inter-related: 'every *show* of anger, as distinct from the anger I feel, already contains a reflection on it' (1971, 31). This incomplete line of inquiry in Arendt's work between thinking and appearance opens up an encounter with entanglements rather than distinctions. Nonconforming criticism implicates emotions and passions with thinking and experience; in doing so, it destabilises discursive structures that conceal difference.

Thinking and action: tethers of presence

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt articulates the inter-relatedness of action, speech and togetherness: 'without the accompaniment of speech', she proposes, action would 'lose its subject, as it were' ([1958] 1998, 178). In Arendt's conception of the political, language is what enables an articulation of action: to speak is a form of action, when it takes place in a web of relations. What 'appears in the outside world', Arendt argues, is only what we make of somatic experience 'through the operation of thought' (1971, 32). Thinking's special predicaments, Arendt states in *The Life of the Mind*, 'may be ascribed to the radicalism of its withdrawal from the world' (1971, 22). In this radicalism, there is also already a process of translation that is tied to an idea of the commons. It is also a relating of body, matter and thinking. Arendt's life-long project of asking 'what we are doing' when we are thinking ([1958] 1998, 5) marks her as a writer deeply committed to the entanglement of thinking and politics, and concerned with what constitutes the matter of thinking. Whilst Arendt's position presupposes thinking as an interruptive and private activity, this is grounded in her relation to modernity as a moment of crisis, in which the realm of freedom becomes subsumed to the 'maintenance of life' (1998, 40). The danger, Arendt warns, is that 'the modern age [...] may end in the [...] most sterile passivity' (1998, 322). This is not surprising for Arendt, the reluctant philosopher, who displayed a commitment to thinking the political whilst sceptical of Western philosophy's resistance to the political freedom of action (Arendt in Hayden 2014, 14).

It is for this reason that Arendt foregrounds a poetics of appearance, in which morality is posited as the problem of distinguishing between good and evil, contextualised in relation to thinking on the nature of publicness, judgement and thought. Mental activities, which are to Arendt non-appearing, 'occur in a world of appearances and a being that partakes of these appearances through its receptive sense organs as well as through its own ability and urge to appear to others' ([1958] 1998, 75). In Arendt, I find thought at the edge of what appears, and what wants to make itself appear. The processes of visibility and withdrawal mark the articulation of thought. Arendt contemplates the intertwined nature of thinking, will, and judgement. In her opening to the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, dedicated to the activity of thinking, Arendt includes a quote from Plato that is telling of the theatricality of thought in her own conception:

> Every one of us is like a man who sees
> things in a dream and thinks that he
> knows them perfectly and then wakes
> up to find that he knows nothing. (Plato in Arendt 1971, xvii)

The quote is from Plato's *Statesman*, the Socratic dialogue about the relationship between power and knowledge. On the one side, the argument presents the statesman as ruler by virtue of his expert knowledge, and on the other, the statesman merely presents an appearance of that knowledge, without actually possessing it. This distinction between the appearance of knowledge, and thinking as a process distinct to that of obtaining knowledge, is important in Arendt's work. Prompted by her earlier work in *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues for a relation between thinking and action cautious to appearances of knowledge, but committed to examining what separates being in the common world from being private. To Arendt, this fuels a key question: 'where are we, when we are thinking?' (1971, 7). I am interested in the dimension of thinking in Arendt's work not as a matter of privacy, but as one that is necessarily tethered to plurality.

In Arendt, plurality of thought is interconnected with political plurality. This is best expressed in the interlinking of the terms *vita activa*, the life of action, tied to political plurality, and *vita contemplativa*, that of contemplation, tied to thinking, which for Arendt draw meaning for one another (1998, 17). To Arendt, action itself is connected to plurality as a human condition, and all thought arises out of experience: 'no experience yields any meaning or even coherence without undergoing the operations of imagining and thinking' (1971, 87). Plurality, to Arendt, is a means of being with 'difference' (1971, 184) that grounds the activity of thinking. At the same time, Arendt's ideal thinker is someone who 'knows only that he knows not' (1971, 173). An inquiry into thinking is, for Arendt, a 'means to bring out of hiding' (1971, 66). But what might be implicated in a queering of these sets of relations in Arendtian work, in favour of a porosity that disavows public and private binaries, refocusing on collectivity and dazzlement?

In *Affective Economies*, Sara Ahmed challenges the assumption that 'emotions are a private matter' in order to argue for their centrality in 'the surfacing of individuals and collective bodies' through their circulation (2004, 117). To Ahmed, emotions are not within, but they 'create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds' (ibid.). Similarly, Doyle, in her examination of the ethics of radical refusal, points to the ways in which emotions question 'who is being disposed of what, who is unravelled, how and why' (2013, xiv). And in *Touching Feeling,* Sedgwick inquires into the relation of phenomenology and affect, accounting for the intimate association between touch and affect (2003, 19), foregrounding the matter of thinking. Touching and feeling are ways of attending to experience; it is precisely in the vulnerable intimacy of presence that thinking emerges already in process, already in commons. Thinking holds a performative dimension, that already affects. If emotions are, as Ahmed reminds us, never within, but always in relation, so too does thinking make evident boundaries of bodies, or, as Arendt states (in the line quoted above), a bringing out of hiding.

Sedgwick's commitment to language itself as 'productive of reality' (2003, 5) is significant here, displacing JL Austin's performative 'from its localised dwelling' to 'a property of language' (2003, 6). Interestingly, Sedgwick's work in *Touching Feeling* is precisely oriented around the performativity of the non-linguistic, or rather, 'involved with this unsettling aberrance between performativity and theatricality' (2003, 7). For Sedgwick, the entanglement between touching and feeling, texture and affect, is constituted not by 'delicacy of scale', but by their being 'irreducibly phenomenological'

(2003, 21). This materiality is precisely what I want to bring to Arendt's conception of thinking: interruption is not what occludes thinking from appearing; rather, it is the precondition for its appearance, particularly in slips of language, in the affective economies and material embodiments of language.

There is, nevertheless, a tension implicit in Arendt's relating of social and political, public and private. Despite her philosophical education shaped by phenomenology and existentialism, as much as it was by migration and conversation, Arendt was a reluctant philosopher. This is most visible in the shifting tonalities of her work from the human condition to the activities of the mind. Committed to collective action, she was equally interested in what emerges in the public realm of appearances as she was in the withdrawal necessary for thinking to occur. Feminist engagements with Arendt's work (Benhabib 1993, Dietz 1991, Honig 1995, Pitkin 1998) have foregrounded the problematic use of the concepts of the social and the private in relation to political agency, whilst at the same time accounting for the potentials of collectivity, plurality, and difference in the work by means of a rejection of conformism, a searching for the agency of thought.

Contemporary readings of Arendt foreground the ways in which affect and resistance are an important part of her political thinking. For example, Kimberly Maslin proposes that what marks Arendt as such an intriguing figure is her commitment to reinforcing 'the impossibility of divorcing political form from the ontological aspects of human existence' (2012, 586). This marks her as a deeply political thinker whose concerns with activities of the mind are inherently connected to her interest in plurality and the public realm. More explicitly, Deborah Nelson explores the entanglement between affect and thought in Arendtian work, examining how thinking and suffering were intertwined for her, inherently connected to an acknowledgement of plurality and distress: the person who stands between the 'twin poles of totalitarian idealism—the solipsism of thoughtlessness and the boundarylessness of revolutionary sympathy—must tolerate, even embrace [...] distress' (2017, 71). This relationship emerges for example, in her essay *Truth and Politics*. Here Arendt speaks of modes of being alone—the 'solitude of the philosopher', the isolation of the scientist and the artist'—as having in common a lack of political commitment 'as long as one of them lasts' (1968, 255). However, when such modes of being are adopted as modes of life, they enter 'in conflict with the demands of the political' (255). This is, according to Arendt, of political relevance: 'conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change,' Arendt tell us, but its metaphorical value is as 'the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us' (259). Arendt's relating of modes of being to public and private life is connected to her interest in articulating the process that connects thinking and action. The mind's ability is to make 'present what is actually absent' (1968, 76). This coming into appearance is connected to what Arendt sees as the space of appearance in *The Human Condition*, as that which 'predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm' ([1958] 1998, 199), that is, political organisation itself. This is in dialogue with the dual conception of the public as standing in both for 'being seen and heard by everybody' (50) and 'the world itself, in so far as it is common to us all' (52). This dimension of witnessing anticipates our contemporary understanding of performativity as constitutive and affective; if thinking holds a performative dimension, then what relation does this hold with appearance?

Fundamental to Arendt's philosophy of appearance is the position that 'nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*' (1971, 19). The realm of appearance is constituted through spectated actions. It is, in other words, always witnessed. This conception, however, needn't imply a separation that deactivates the witness from participating. As Arendt argues, appearance is 'something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves' ([1958] 1998, 50). Our feeling for reality and, as such, our relationship to reality is governed by appearance, as that which provides a realm in which to see 'what is worthy of being seen or heard' ([1958] 1998, 51). Arendt therefore delineates a notion of appearance that is a fundamental characteristic of the public realm, itself a necessity of collective political engagement, but also establishes a relation between thinking and doing, collective bodies and sense-making processes, tied to the performative.

In *Performativity and Performance*, Sedgwick and Andrew Parker expand performativity to account for the act of witnessing, as opposed to an inherent citationality present in language. 'It's the aptitude of the explicit performative,' they conclude, 'for mobilizing and epitomizing such transformative effects on interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible [...] to associate it with theatrical performance' (1993, 13). This tether to action makes possible a relation between 'text and context' (15). It also, however, makes possible an understanding of the potential of thinking and its ties with action, particularly when its processes appear in and through language. Parker and Sedgwick's revisiting of performativity examines the constant shift between text and context, between saying as doing, and doing as saying.

Arendt's own choreographic move between the constitution of the public body and the interruptiveness of thinking enmeshes the affective into the political. Cecilia Sjöholm touches explicitly on Arendt as a thinker whose philosophical engagements with appearance are defined by 'what it means to act and think in a world that is defined through differentiation', as appearances can only be conceived 'in terms of variety, multiplicity and heterogeneity' (2015, 13). This engagement with variety and aesthetics is fundamental to Arendt's conception of appearance. In her interview with Günter Gaus, prompted by a question regarding her philosophical work, Arendt states that her profession, 'if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory' ([1964] 2013, 22). This position discloses Arendt's commitment to differentiating political thinking as something that triggers collective action, creating new spheres of freedom. For Arendt, language remains; but language also matters, and this mattering holds multiple implications. Might this 'matter' be surfaced, to return to Ahmed, through the circulation of affects? In what ways might criticism act as a productive frame through which such negotiations might take place between thinking and matter, publicness, and collectivity, shifting modalities of thinking about criticism from the transactional to the phenomenological?

'Letting something else through': productive tensions

Criticism constitutes, engages in, and often reproduces networks of power. These networks of power operate infrastructurally, by connecting the (performance) work, frames, and structures of its presentation, the social arrangements it invites or constitutes, and economic and cultural

politics that shape these. At play are both structural and cultural operations of power. I am interested in what I call nonconforming criticism as a reaction to these operations of power, their occlusions, and the predominant colonial structures that have shaped dominant critical practices in the cultural ecology. I understand nonconforming criticism not as an emergent phenomenon; instead, I see it as a frame that enables differentiation between structures that occlude alternative forms of criticism, and those that continue to reshape and confront them. To this end, nonconforming criticism explicitly rejects its usefulness to performance, instead thinking beside it. In my encounter with Arendt's examination of thinking through affect, I see emergent connective tissues of criticism: relation and poetics. These signal the tense relationship criticism has to questions of deliberation and representation, shaped by the dominance of rationalist traditions that have dominated performance criticism since the Enlightenment, tethered to notions of authority.

Feminist historians of the eighteenth century, such as Jean Elshtain (1981), Joan Landes (1988), Mary P. Ryan (1998), Dena Goodman (1992), Amanda Vickery (1998), and Nancy Fraser (1990, 2007), have argued that the formation of political and public rationality conceals more complex relations between different publics and gendered spheres of debate. Elshtain proposes that the problem was a politics of recognition that constituted a public/private binary: the politicisation of the public is part of an 'elaborate defence against the tug of the private, against the lure of the familial, against evocations of female power' (1981, 15–16). Goodman collapses this division to examine how women occupied spheres in which different forms of critique developed, 'constituted by salons, Masonic lodges, academies and the press' (1992, 4). Goodman argues that 'the very instability of conceptions of public and private spheres [...] helped to create volatile and shifting ground upon which both criticism and revolution were constructed' (1992, 2). Such accounts point to the ways in which criticism and its relation to gendered notions of rationality 'serve as a mask for domination' (Fraser 1998, 64), showing how 'political economy enforces structurally what culture accomplishes informally' (1998, 65). Fraser proposes that 'the meaning and boundaries of publicity depend at every point on who has the power to draw the line between public and private' (2007, 314). This inter-dependence of criticism, political power, and publicity makes evident the ways in which mastery is constituted around the conflation of authority with authorship, publicness with exclusion.

Similarly, in his examination of the intellectual politics of the Romantic period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, historian Alex Benchimol argues that 'two significant traditions of intellectual practice: one popular and radical, the other bourgeois and liberal' (2010, 11) characterised the emergence of early forms of criticism. This led to the development of a contested 'cultural modernity' (ibid.) that laid the groundwork for traditions of criticism situated within, and on the margins of, the press—from newspapers to periodicals, pamphlets, and salons. Benchimol refers to this ongoing cultural conflict as a process of differentiation and struggle 'over control of the very basis of intellectual conflict: the idea of an organised public' (2010, 4), at a time when new modes of 'intellectual sociability emerged' (2010, 5). Benchimol's analysis is an important reminder of the tie between politics and value in criticism and, notably, reviewing practices. Across scholarship of the eighteenth century, criticism's relation to authority is tied to cultural conflicts

that shaped it, and connected to a tension between artistic and economic value, publicness and rationality—colonial, gendered structures that fashioned particular sensibilities tied to whiteness, power, and visibility.

This relation to authority, authorship, and rationality is also made evident across contemporary scholarship on criticism (Butt 2005, Lijster and Gielen in Lijster et al. 2005, Elkins and Newman 2008, Felski 2015). For example, in her work *Critique and Postcritique*, Rita Felski reminds us of how the turn to affect in literary critique challenges its rationalism and 'its frequent neglect of emotion, mood and disposition' (2015, 11). Similarly, Felski mentions postcolonial and decolonial studies on criticism that make evident its 'indebtedness to linguistic models' and its privileging of interpretation at the omission of 'vectors of experience that resist or exceed such an explanatory frame' (2015, 14). Felski's engagement moves beyond a politics of positionality, revealing the potential of alternative modes of resistance and critical cultures that, to draw on Talal Asad's words, account for 'competing conceptions of meaning' (Asad in Felski 2015, 14). Critique is connected not only to modernity's colonial logic, but also to an Enlightenment conception of politics and rationality, in which the public voice is already embedded in a politics of exclusion. This tradition of criticism becomes an institution, shaping public discursive spaces rather than participating in them. There is a historically grounded relation between criticism, publics, and deliberative spaces, tied to the constitution of the nation-state and patriarchal notions of critique.

Political theorist Jodi Dean speaks explicitly to the contemporary dimensions of criticism's relation to the democratic, examining the ties between political critique, debate, and neoliberalism. I note in her study the foregrounding of how compliance, instrumentalisation, and occlusion dominate contemporary criticism, with severe implications for its potential for radicality. Dean's notion of communicative capitalism challenges 'the commonplace idea that the market, today, is the site of democratic aspirations' and, she adds, 'the mechanisms by which the will of the demos manifests' (2005, 55). This presupposes a relation between criticism and political rationality rooted in the eighteenth century, but whose resistance might lie in dwelling in and beyond language and thinking's vulnerabilities to dominance, as well as criticism's relation to mastery.

As an ideology and practice of contemporary government, neoliberalism has global reach as well as local specificity, and has been most widely examined (Brown 2015, Harvie 2005, Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005) as rooted in the stimulation of competition with limited state regulation. Neoliberalism is a political rationality that alters discourses on value, and it is here we identify the co-option of some forms of criticism in the interests of monetisation. This ecology places pressure on cultural work's productivity at an economic and civic level, whilst also appropriating its affective structures to an increasingly growing and cross-profession private sector. It enmeshes subjectivity and collective work in difficult tensions between public and private, political and personal. In order to make visible how affective relations unravel political questions of meaning, presence, and commons, I think we need to account for the bodied experience of criticism, and foster alternative modes for its decolonisation. I see nonconforming criticism as a way of making appear that which refutes categorisation as criticism, accounting for the bodied experience of thinking beside performance—a different form of vulnerability, a thinking beside.

In *Unthinking Mastery,* Julieta Singh's examination of the relation of mastery to power and forms of violence, the author cites Hélène Cixous' search for 'letting something else through'. To Singh, this is a becoming differently by means of vulnerability—that is, an awareness of relations of dependency (2018, 23). Singh's work connects mastery to the political realm, situating it beyond the realm of political governance by means of a border. To Singh, mastery involves 'the subordination of what is on one side of a border to the power of what is on the other' (13). Singh foregrounds the importance of vital dependency as a means to find new 'ethico-political possibilities' (24), arguing that mastery emerges as 'splitting of the object that is mastered from itself' (10). I see criticism as distinctly implicated in mastery as a border of power. In this entanglement, I note a relation between mastery and binaries that have shaped dominant conceptions of criticism, such as rationality and publicness. I note Singh's work as paying attention to materiality and the ways in which it 'affects discourse' (21): a reminder of the material relations that exceed language.

This entanglement between language, affect, and rationality is related to questions of public/private, social/political at the heart of some of Arendt's work. As I have argued here and elsewhere (Damian Martin 2015), Arendt enmeshes the affective into the political in her examination of thinking and appearance. I therefore understand nonconforming criticism precisely as a refusal of legibility, and in this way as an interplay between materiality and affect, thinking and its appearance. Criticism's relations of power (that they often occlude) also seek to govern a performance's meaning or value as a forceful, violent act—what Susan Sontag referred to as the excavation of interpretation ([1964] 2009).

Susan Sontag's argument in *Against Interpretation* is based on the proposition that art is a process of appearance and that criticism, in its relationship to it, can obscure that becoming visible as much as it can contribute to its coming into being. This is most evident in the quote by artist Willem De Kooning that starts her essay, which speaks of content as 'an encounter like a flash' (quoted in Sontag [1964] 2009, 9). The 'flash' which De Kooning speaks of is graspable but incomplete, by nature temporary and fragmented. Sontag is a key modernist thinker in a lineage of critics interested in an open dialogue between art and criticism, calling for a type of criticism that enables 'experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself' ([1964] 2009, 10). Sontag proposes a criticism that foregrounds the work of art through thinking, reorienting interpretation away from excavation of meaning, and towards presence. Sontag shapes criticism as tethering thinking and appearance. Criticism is conceived as a critical document of a time-bound encounter with performance. This is not dissimilar to subsequent ontological explorations of performance documentation and modes of relating performance, writing, embodiment, and duration (e.g. Phelan 1993, Schneider 2011).

What marks both the work of Sontag and that of Arendt is a shared interest in art's appearance. For Sontag, this takes the form of a rejection of explication as emphasised by her title, 'Against Interpretation', whereas for Arendt, it is an investment in art's 'capacity for thought' ([1958] 1998, 168). Arendt's own exploration of art distils its capacity for traces, though she severs art from political practice per se: 'the men of speech and action […] need the artist, the poet and the historian […] because without them the only product of their activity […] would not survive a

moment' ([1958] 1998, 173). I am interested in how Arendt attributes thinking processes to the work of art itself, as well as the permanence of its trace. I see this attribution as marking a shared concern with Sontag's rejection of the excavation of meaning. Both search for ways of capturing the multiple threads of meaning (and its traces) left by the work of art. Sontag's claim of interpretation as liberating a work of art when resisting explanation offers us a mode of locating a contemporary politics to the event of criticism. Arendt draws a link between appearance as a means of political engagement and recognition, and the notion of plurality. In this way, Sontag's resistance to interpretation is phenomenological. Returning to questions of temporality, thinking, and affect, I see a politics of nonconforming criticism that rests on a relation of mutuality between performance and criticism—what Singh proposes as 'being differently', and what I suggest as thinking beside performance. This implicates a different relation to the work of art, in which criticism is not subordinated, but adjacent to it.

Sontag was a voracious diarist, and amidst the volumes of fragmented reflections she produced between 1964 and 1980, published under the title *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks*, I find a proposition worth dwelling on: that writing is a series of transformations. 'The function of writing is to explode one's subject—transform it into something else,' she proposes (11/5/76). I am interested in what is held in tension within this statement: the explosion of the subject of writing in turn requires a transformation on behalf of the subject who is writing. What might be made visible in further considering the politics of this self-reflective encounter in a wider phenomenology of criticism? What if we shift Sontag's argument about appearance away from luminousness, that is, criticism as making a work itself appear, to a different relation: beside Thinking beside performance, rather than away or towards, creates potential for a new critical phenomenology. If thinking itself is performative, beside performance reveals a discursive relation not only between subject and performance work, but also between processes of thinking and their affective matter.

The hopeful possibility of nonconforming criticism as a frame for being beside performance lies in thinking's appearance, like de Kooning's flash in Sontag's essay: emergent in language's affective economies, the noise of parallel encounters, inattention to performance's phenomenology for a dwelling in the present that is only possible, because of its exposure of thinking: a mishandled disclosure of sorts. I recall Peggy Phelan's assertion in *The Ends of Performance*: 'the challenge for us is to love the thing we've lost without assimilating it so thoroughly that it becomes us rather than remaining itself' (1998, 11). I propose that nonconforming criticism operates through its own formative, phenomenological processes of appearance. It also stages a process of appearance of meaning that has a different mode of relation to the modernist logic of interpretation: one that exposes thinking, and makes visible autonomous meaning-making processes made to appear within its fabric.

I see the distinctness of nonconforming criticism as residing in thinking's performative witnessing. Arendt proposes that thinking is a mode of being in public: disclosure without closure. Thinking is a site of politicisation. Therefore, we might see how thinking acts as a connective tissue with the encounter with performance and its time. What is revealed by the peripheral fragments—

memories, collisions of events both within and outside performance, shifts in attention, disclosures of subjectivity—when these are unresolved, yet understood as the fabric of criticism itself?

In attending to these slippages of attention and engagements often illegible as criticism, I search for thinking that is processual, fragmented, and multiple, but also an action—perhaps, to borrow from Arendt herself, thinking that is dangerous. In tension with Arendt's conviction that thinking is necessarily an act of withdrawal, I ask, what value might be found in thinking that is exposed? Similarly, what porousness might exist between thinking and affect, criticism and performance? How might we develop new ways of paying attention to thinking in its multiple human and non-human interactions, a letting of something else through?

In lieu of an ending, an opening: troubled encounters

In lieu of an ending, I ask if a phenomenological engagement with nonconforming criticism might bring forth potential openings that tend to our encounter with the present; how thinking beside performance might refuse criticism's utility and coercion. In my dwelling with Arendt, I sought a resistant poetics rooted in thinking, politics, affect, and their entanglement. In line with Kunst's elaboration of work as a dual performance, I am interested in how thinking emerges in nonconforming criticism, its dissonant appearance and politics of use. This relation of beside performance is not distinct to performance criticism. In her work *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, Jane Rendell proposes that criticism is tied to spatial sites of engagement 'which are material, emotional, political and conceptual' (2010, 1), which can be examined as distinct modes of critical writing. Rendell foregrounds a spatial politics of criticism that favours multiple modes of attention which account for how sites interlock with artwork. Art writer and theorist Mieke Bal also speaks of her encounter with an artwork in similar terms. In *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing*, Bal engages in procedural thinking that follows the outlines contained in a number of works by the artist Louise Bourgeois. Bal deploys narrative as a way of making architecture *mean* within the artwork. Such an encounter is relevant here for the ways in which it is constituted by and through the text, reflecting on the spectatorial implications of two simultaneous events: that of writing, and that of the encounter with the work. This spatial politicisations of criticism's encounter with performance work share an interest in foregrounding the poetics of criticism's phenomenology, and resistant relations to its use.

I am interested in nonconforming criticism as a constitutive of a poetics both hopeful and troubled. Speaking of trouble, Donna Haraway aligns it as much with a contemporary diagnosis as with an action: 'We [...] live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times,' she proposes. 'Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places' (2016, 1). Troubled, then, is a multiple state of destabilisation and hope. In this phenomenological poetics, nonconforming criticism is constitutive of thinking that is tethered to affect, whilst also accounts for the politics of witnessing. In other words, criticism is a matter of thinking in process. I turn to four analytical drawings that Wassily Kandinsky developed for the essay *Dance Curves: On the Dances of Palucca* (1926) as a mode of thinking beside, as an emergent process within the multiple threads of the work, and as one

shaping an encounter with that work, now. I am less concerned here with the work itself, but how its extensions and attentions disturb modes of recognition of criticism, both as engagement and as form.

Kandinsky's *Dance Curves* concerns itself with four photographs by Charlotte Rudolph that depict Gret Palucca in four distinct poses—bent knees and lifted arms, head titled up, body suspended on one leg, arm reaching out. Kandinsky's drawings are presented beside the photographs of Palucca, delineated by sharp lines extending in multiple directions, unfinished curves that wrap into each other. This relation to bodily abstraction is not devoid of the modernist logic that seeks to displace affect, but it is also, I propose, distinctly affective, fragmentary, and incomplete. Nonconforming criticism appears here through a dissonant poetics tied to, but also in conflict with, the abstraction of the Bauhaus modernism, performing line as movement, movement as interruption, and interruption as appearance. There is an anthropocentrism residing in this abstraction, implicated with modernism's problematic logics of capture, yet open to an ecology where mastery might equally be troubled, perhaps more so because it marks itself so visibly into the relations of beside presented by the work. If mastery is constituted around authority and authorship, what relations of disavowal might be possible? What loosening lies beyond a slip of attention, and away from the critical fictions contained within this dialogue, in shifting relation between source and object, at the borders of language?

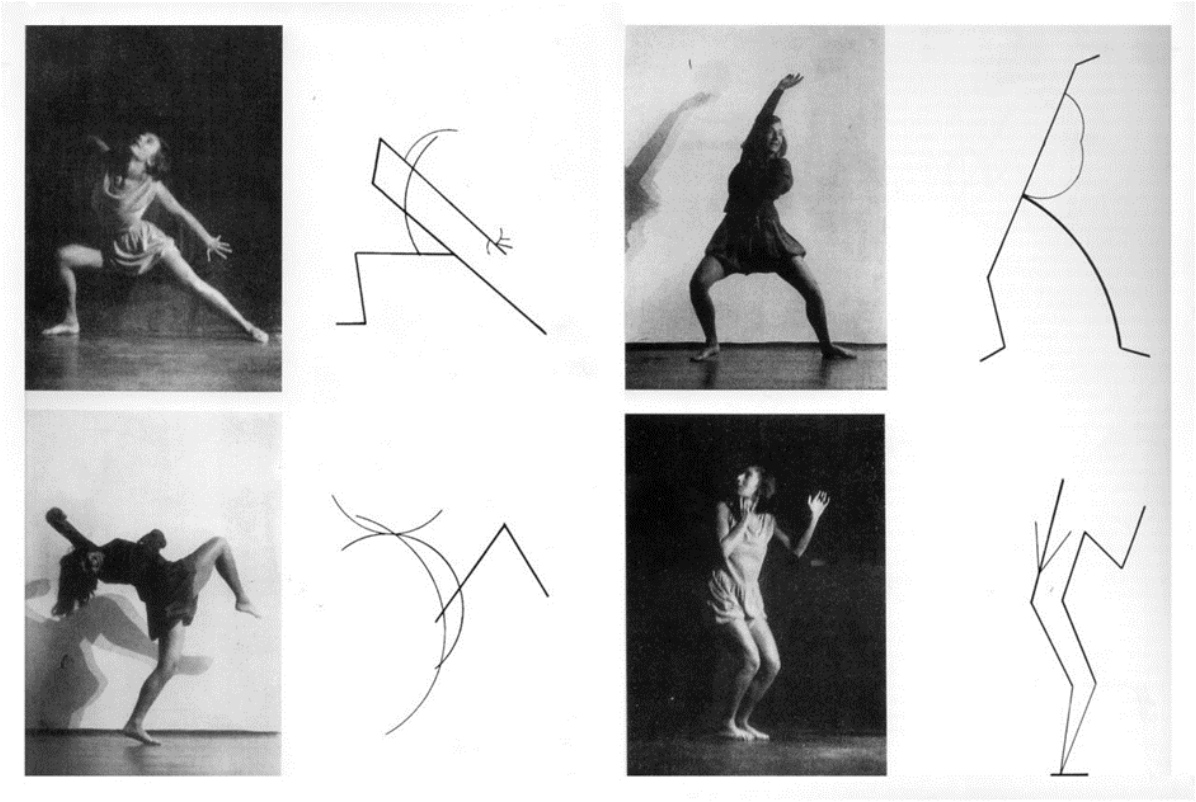

Image 1: Wassily Kandinsky, Dance Curves: On the Dances of Gret Palucca *(1926) Berlin, Bauhaus-Archiv.*

It is not that *Dance Curves* is itself nonconforming; it is the processes of my encounter with it and its multiple threads of meaning, in which I follow this mishandled translation, from a body, to a photograph, to a drawing, to an encounter. I am not interested in this translation as a problem of regimes of encounter, but as a sustaining of concurrent, intersecting and divergent expressions which my own witnessing configures. The difficulty in delineating what precisely is nonconforming about this encounter, is also precisely what makes this criticism nonconforming. It is, to return to Arendt, a dazzlement, in which the materiality of the works sustained within and adjacent to *Dance Curves* takes shape, and in which embodiment opens up as an avenue for adjacent meaning. In this affective ecology, thinking is interruptive and dazzling.

By way of their encounter as analytical drawings, these images did not render a body to a document, or movement to stillness, but quite the contrary—despite their relation to the source, they lost utility. This accidental displacement frees them from the conventions of early modernist abstraction, enables a different choreographic taxonomy to take shape by way of relation: arching lines, sharp lines, intersecting lines, tandem lines, suspended lines: politicised lines. My encounter pays attention precisely to the gap between the drawings and the body, where the photographer's presence (the third author) also makes itself visible—a document of a thought process, a movement with attention: a performance of authorial relation, entangled with the contemporaneity of my moment of encounter. This tending to the slippage between Kandinsky, Rudolph, and Palucca does not discount their historical entanglements, yet follows the threads of thinking as it is made manifest, or made to appear: precisely because of its precarious fragmentation.

In his *Point and Line to Plan*e, Kandinsky expounds on curves in relation to dance as tethered to points, 'brief states of immobility' that suspend both active and passive point formation (1926, 42). Hinged in this positionality, *Dance Curves* takes shape, to me, precisely in the gaps, the in-between of line and body. Accounts of *Dance Curves* tend to omit Rudolph's authorial presence, marking a distinct relation between drawing and movement, Kandinsky and Palucca. However, Rudolph's photographic authorship complicates the temporal relation and authorial autonomy of the work itself, as well as the borders of the work. In that way, I see my own encounter as searching for the ambiguity and fiction of the initial proposal of the drawings beside Palucca's poses. This slip of my gaze is a search for something beyond the 'hegemonic human of modernity' (2018, 101), even when its authorial commitment relied precisely on an attempt to bind a moving subject.

In this abstraction, another politics is revealed. In examinations of Kandinsky's essay, Susan Laikin Funkenstein foregrounds the ways in which the drawings, presented in relation to the four photographs of Palucca, foreground fluidity between dance and visual art, rather than stern distinctions that shaped modernist art history. In Funkenstein's words, 'seeming antitheses in physical culture and women's culture' reveal a contestation of binaries of 'high art/popular culture, masculine/feminine, and mind/body' (2007, 390). Funkenstein provides a reminder that abstraction is not neutral, but 'infused with complex debates about [...] gender identity' (391), with which Kandinsky and Palucca's compositional dialogue engages. As Cornelia Butler further argues, Kandinsky's conception of the line itself as 'the imprint of energy—the visible trace of the invisible'

(2010, 154) is influential to Rudolf Laban's own conception of the gesture as 'trace form' (155), for example. This critical relation within dance and modernism reveals the porousness of compositional borders as well as unmasks a more diverse relation to gender, abstraction, and body politics—albeit further woven into an already imbalanced power relation shaped by a desire to outline, where body becomes document, becomes drawing.

My encounter with Kandinsky's *Dance Curves* is shaped by my attending to a particular poetics of attention. In the pixelated black and white of digital archival material, I feel constantly distracted by the movements of the drawings. I think beside these drawings precisely because of their false performative, their relation to mediation occluded by the appearance of Palucca's body. I come back to 'beside' as an ungrounded mode of relation, but one which continues to take up space here. This beside resides in the realm of a spacious agnosticism. To return to Sedgwick: beside comprises a range of relations, amongst them 'desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting' (2002, 8). Beside is as much intuiting a relation between 'texture and emotion' (2008, 17) as it is a 'seeing differently', to borrow from Amelia Jones (2012). Thinking beside the drawings implies a stinted attention, a distraction perhaps, towards the periphery, but it also already bound in a literal beside—one in which Kandinsky's drawings are placed next to the Rudolph's photographs of Palucca, suspended in air. In this beside, I see the attraction of a fiction that is nevertheless bound. In this encounter with nonconforming criticism, beside makes possible a thinking that is already in relation, tethered between my encounter and that staged by Kandinsky.

I see nonconforming as a frame that brings into productive collision Kandinsky's *Dance Curves*, as a model, and my encounter with it, as a collusion. On the one hand, Kandinsky's *Dance Curves* reveals itself to be a thinking in process, engaged in abstractions of photographed movements of a body. On the other, my encounter with *Dance Curves* renders material an experience of a performance document, a deliberately mishandled translation that is made to appear. I see its fictionality as a complex affective relation to compositional politics, and to modernism's tension with the now. My own tuning to slips of attention between photograph and drawing is a dazzlement: a confluence of meanings distracted by temporalities. Interruption is a precondition for thinking's appearance, says Arendt, yet here, I see it in relation to bodies, boundaries, and affects—entanglements that already shaped politics of criticism, but that might also configure a form of appearance for thinking itself.

In this way, my focus on the space beside the drawings and photographs searches for the peripheries of attention in *Dance Curves*. In the digital archival material, I slipped in between these drawings, drawn to the digital noise of their reproduction ninety-three years later, between the resonances of Bauhaus and the politics of abstracted lines, the imposition of bordered spaces and the poetics of translating movement. I followed those shifts in attention in being beside the drawings. It is on the one hand, that thinking already makes itself known in Kandinsky's curves and Rudolph's photographs of Palucca's movements, embroiled in mediation that also makes process matter. On the other, it is my slip of attention that makes visible an unfinished thought, an interruption that is searching.

In coming to a new set of relations, filtered through the thickness of my own troubled encounter, I bring the baggage of now to an early modernist study, coming to what Ahmed calls a queer use, that is, to an inversion: 'a temporal discordance between past and present' which is manifest 'as a discordance between form and function' because in an institutional sense, use 'becomes a question of fit' (2018). It is this (my) mis-use, or this problematising of the question of criticism as use-full to the work, which I am probing in articulating a relation to distracted thinking. At the same time, this reveals the politics of relation that shaped Kandinsky's own critical use, and its enmeshment in Bauhaus's commitment to abstraction, as well as dialogue with shifting formal and gendered concerns of modernist dance.

As Ahmed proposes, 'without use, a path can disappear, becoming overgrown, bumpy, unusable' (2018). I understand, in this case, a shift in noticing is then a bump; it quickly disappears, and its traces are hard to value in the discursive economies of communicative abundance. Nonconforming criticism, as it emerges in my encounter with *Dance Curves*, and in the work itself, is tethered to this mis-use, to a critical engagement that is dissonant, bumpy. How might my attention shift, stage an encounter with a thicker present, a difficult present, without depoliticising the relation with Kandinsky, Rudolph, and Palucca? I propose that a different poetics of use is a hopeful dazzlement, interruptive and affective.

In Arendt, I articulated a relation between thinking's interruption and the entanglement with affect. This queering of thinking as in process, as shaping a mis-use beside performance, pays attention to affective economies and relations that shape the critical encounter. In this way, I see nonconforming criticism as a frame for learning other ways of letting something else through, in order to resist not only the already constituted discursive ecologies and thinking's coercion, but also the reproduction of paradigms of mastery that fix performance and criticism, affect and matter. A hopeful act, then, is one that searches for the matter of thinking in slips that disturb these relations

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

SITUATING ARENDT'S DISCOURSE ETHICS: SPECULATIVE PERFORMANCES BY A THINKTANK OF PASSIONATE "NON-PROFESSIONAL THINKERS"

ESTHER NEFF PANOPLY PERFORMANCE LABORATORY

Trigger Warning: there is a discussion of suicide in the final section of this text. The beginning of the section is marked and a reader may choose to conclude their reading with the previous paragraph.

Actors Thinking

The very first question is ceremoniously drawn out of a brown bowler hat. Scrawled in blue pen on a scrap of notebook paper by thinktank participant Eleanor/Dave Koenig, [1] this question inaugurates a year-long "thinktanking" performance (PPL 2017). The question is read aloud: *what is the difference between thinking and doing?*

I am one of eight or nine individuals gathered in a garage in Brooklyn, sitting in a circle on the dirty painted-plywood floor. The heat isn't working. Through chattering teeth, Hannah Arendt's chapter "thinking and doing: the spectator" from *The Life of the Mind* is brought to bear. Here, Arendt talks about withdrawal from action, how the "thinker" removes themselves in order to become a spectator who can view a bigger picture. The "withdrawn" thinker or "philosopher" can see the "harmonious ordered whole" of the *kosmos,* while "actors" go on operating within a world they can't see or comprehend (Arendt 1978, 92–98).

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):42–61
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51253
ISSN 2057–7176

At first, it may seem that Arendt is reifying what we now might call the Western imperial/colonial "overseer mentality;" the idea mere players don't know what's best for our/themselves whereas those who are perched outside the dust and gore are better able to think, will, and judge. Writes Arendt, "the spectator, not the actor, holds the clue to the meaning of human affairs" (96). But Arendt is talking about how the *individual philosophers* distantiate themselves, not about how and which thinkers are *authorized* as overseers, authors, or builders of worlds, via political mechanisms. Arendt understands that schemas placing some persons "higher" are authoritarian; she discusses differences between the spectatorships of "pariahs" and "ordinary men" versus those of the "authorized" spectator (Arendt 1944, 1956, 1978). Her own perception of herself as (at least partially) a pariah or outsider informs some of her core arguments: first, that *all* persons are capable of withdrawing themselves from active participation in order to operate as reasoning, thinking, moral agents (Arendt 1954). Second, that thinkers must participate in discourse with a plurality of "other" thinkers, thereby "enlarging" their mentalities. Finally, she argues that reason must involve enlargement of mentalities through social discourse, even while the place that thinkers go when they withdraw from the world in order to think may be "within themselves," a contemplative site of reflection-upon. The thinker is a spectator who, from their removed position, becomes an arbiter able to deduce justice, morality, and meaning *for themselves*.

Arendt identifies "thinkers who are not professionals," as those "individuals who have "unified two apparently contradictory passions, for thinking and acting" (1978, 167). Perhaps this "unification" is what makes it difficult for us to consider ourselves *spectators*, even of the philosopher-as-pariah variety.[2] In the first place, we rarely have the time to sit back in armchairs and think and are certainly not paid to do so. In the second place, many of us do not desire to "withdraw" from what Moten and Harney (2013) name *parousia* (so much Greek), our haptic touching presences, mass embodiment, our ecstatic inter-play. Third and relatedly, we may like the idea of being part of an "undercommons" (Moten and Harney 2013), reifying our own ways of being-thinking but from fugitive, maroon, outcast, queer positions (and in "our own" ways), as persons forever engaged in a struggle to be recognized (and to reify ourselves) as intellectuals instead of instrumentals. Through confronting Arendt, however, we begin to feel these dichotomies and academic mappings of withdrawn builder-thinker-spectators vs. situated player-bricklike-actors, between the centralized, authorized "mainstream" and the delegitimized, meat-mass "undercommons" as each, in some ways, reproductive themselves of the conceptual origins of totalitarianism, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and ecocide. We want to be *doing* something that overthrows this whole *Theatrum Mundi* "centralized staging" paradigm. Dave/Eleanor re-phrases their initial question: what "good" does it do to *merely* think?

This inquiry is the very definition of a layperson's philosophical problem. Most formally and presumptuously, I declare at the outset of the thinktank,[3] we are attempting to theatrically practice a "domain of interaction" that may "mediate between the macropolitical institutions of a democratic polity and the private sphere" (Benhabib 1992, 12). More honestly and practically, we are trying to cope emotionally with political disenfranchisement and Trump-era despair (more on defense mechanisms soon).

Does it matter if we've read Arendt, Benhabib, or Moten and Harney? Does it matter if we've read these texts of our own volition or as assigned during a college class? Our thinktank will return to what I (a reader of Arendt in my leisure time) identify as "Arendtian" problematics again and again, through what we term "the scale-of-agency problem:" roughly, the cluster of problematics involving agentic scales and senses of being "inside" or "outside" the world-stage (*Theatrum Mundi*) and the "agency" (or lack thereof) of an individual or marginalized group to effectively construct (centralized or other-wise) "world(s)." We debate how—through use of this "holistic"[4] *Theatrum Mundi* worldview at large—we reproduce dichotomies between thinking and acting, between within the world (onstage), and outside of it (backstage, spectators in the audience). Even though some of us have not read much philosophy at all, we do seem to agree that discourse is essential to the emergence of a "political conscience" (Arendt 1958, Benhabib 1992) that can be used to inform our actions as we attempt to build a "common livable world" that "must be composed, bit by bit, or not at all" (Haraway 2016, 40).

I feel like, one thinktanker says, we're players of a D&D game relieved of an overseeing dungeon master, about to confront fabulous, vicious creatures of epistemic lore who insist that acts of knowledge production are political and public, whereas acts of thinking and feeling are personal and private. Or what about, another thinktanker adds, that paralyzing monster who, bolstered by misinterpretation of scientific studies, insists that human beings are "totally conditioned," our behaviors and beliefs pre-determined and our "agentic ideation" illusory? What teeth such dichotomies and insistences have, what powers.

In-situ, we are indeed assembled like players, if not in a game with rules (more on situational rules soon), then at least like the players in some devised-theater-making, compositional ensemble. The feeling is familiar to many of us, that first rehearsal "withdrawal" from the day-to-day when the task of deciding how to intentionally proceed as a de-hierarchized group seems insurmountable. Attempts to tackle and parse relationships between so-called "thinking" and so-called "doing" are multi-dimensional, opening up mise-en-abymic halls of angled mirrors that seem to split and project discourse endlessly in every direction. How will we get an "idea-thing" up "on its feet"?

How, concretely how, can dialogue situations be performed which move beyond the Kantian rupture between "the private virtue of goodness" and "impersonal justice," towards *performable* articulation of Arendt's demand for guaranteed rights to opinion and action in political discourse, what we might call *the right to think*? Through, alongside, and sometimes against Arendt's assumptions and propositions, an initial ontological question about differences between thinking and doing is re-written, socially broken down and broken through, becoming something like *how can this/a (p)articular assembly intentionally perform thinking actions that do something?*

Autonomy of an Idea(tion)

Our energies are primed by what Richard Turner (1973) calls "the 'methodological' principle, which makes certainty begin with reflection". As questions about "the scale-of-agency problem" pile up atop Eleanor/Dave's initial question about differences between thinking and doing, we choose to

adopt a (p)articular belief: all persons, we agree to believe in alliance with Arendt, *are able* to perform withdrawal from their own ongoing performativity in order to speculate. This (self and social) authorization to think *is* our definition of hum*nization.[5]

Further, we will borrow the term *reasoning* to discuss how we—as individuals and as an intentionally-in-formed embodiment—are thinking about something (*topoi*) in particular. For us, the term *reasoning* differentiates between thinking (passive ideation) describing compulsory, uncontrollable thoughts and mental-bodily phenomena, and the doing-of-thinking (active ideation) describing concrete plans, heuristic reasoning processes, tactics, and actionable schemes. Using the concept and terminologies of "reason(ing)s," we posit, configures us semantically and conceptually to discuss thinking as *agentic performativity,* potentially even as intentionalized forms of "performance as/of art(ifice)" that could be called "theater," "dance," "performance art" "composition," or "dialectics," that is, praxical weaving of an intangible yet material web that is constructed to appear by and between (p)articular persons through their performed speech and action (Arendt 1958).

Arendt suggests that inability to reason is related—if not synonymous—with moral failing. At the very least, an inability to perform *active* ideation can be seen as a cause of immoral action. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) Arendt identifies the embodiment of immoral behavior as caused by a lack of a faculty to reason, to think, to judge. She wonders, is this the fault of a person, or that person's socio-political conditioning, and who should (in either case) incur blame when this lack of reasoning causes great suffering? Is the inability to reason a form of inherent mental disability (nature), a product of social conditioning (nurture), or does inability to reason owe its cause not to personal responsibility but rather to "technologic" techniques and apparati that treat all as instruments within objective, abstract orders (Heidegger 1977) designed by totalitarian political vehicles driving utilitarian mass activity? In our small group, we are concerned with how we can practice the performative "ability" to reason and reach some political "agency" to ideate. Like Heidegger and Arendt, we are concerned about being controlled by, complicit in, unable to see "the machine."

Three general propositional motivations for our thinktank become visible. These may be correlated with more specific "why, how, who, and what" inquiries:

A. Through an initial ideative and ethical frame, we (thinking, rational, hum*nized individuals) intend and desire to proliferate and reflexively authorize our own and each other's radically different (and dissident) ways of thinking, communicating, composing, and acting.

B. From and through a second ideative location, we (a thinktank driven by some shared ethics) want to develop ways of thinking and communicating *together,* constructing communication tactics for practicing ethical discourse and guiding each other out of and away from the internalized fascisms of our own shared and located state(s).

C. From a third ideative location, we want our discourse to materialize political considerations, histories, and activations of ethical considerations, including us (individuals, agents, our identity groups) as contributors to an emergent political conscience.

We get out a roll of paper and try to draw a diagram of these three interacting frames, locations, desires-to-think-and-know as they are becoming active reasoning practices (figure 1). We want to get away from *Theatrum Mundi*'s "scales," and onstage/offstage boundaries and develop some ways of *methodologically* doing discourse as thinker-actors. This diagram may be judged arbitrary. It is arbitrary, in the sense that all must be *arbitrated* through use, spectatorship, judgment, and discourse, as must justice, reason, and law.

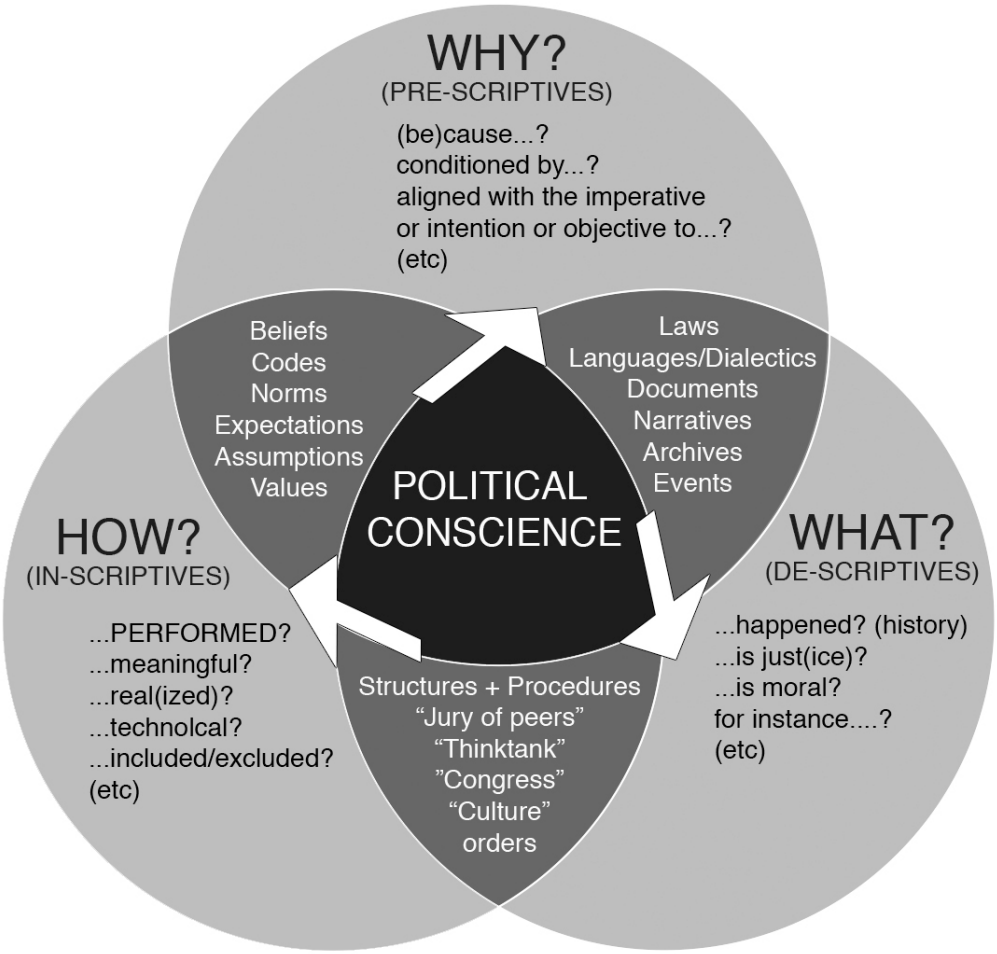

Figure 1

Arbitration of HOW? (In-scriptives and webs)

Is this fun?

Sometimes—and for some people—it doesn't feel good to think or speak together. Sometimes—and for many people—it is very hard to focus on "the big questions," especially from within concrete struggles to survive. It's been a long day. The drive, the willingness, the responsibility to think—and moreover the desire, agency, or ability to "reason" in ways wildly resistant to dominant conceptualizations—magnetize both our forms of performative discourse and the subject matters discussed.

We identify the situation in which discourse occurs as that which transforms individuals into "reasonable" thinker-actors. We do not, we declare, depend on wealth, academic degrees, public recognitions, or elections to authorize us or confirm our membership in the *polis* as sharers of words and deeds (Arendt 1958, 216). Yet, in congruence with the paradoxa of spectatorship and public spheres, we are not sure we *are* able to be *seen* as reasonable. As we convene our thinktank, Fred Moten—an oft-cited idol amongst us—has been newly appointed faculty at NYU, and this is somewhat confusing, While we share with him the picture of the University as "the site of the social reproduction of conquest denial" (Moten and Harney 2013, 41), few of us follow his poetic arguments for "sneak(ing) into the university and steal(ing) what one can" (26). We simply can't afford it (in all senses of "affordances"). Only one of our thinktank members has had the opportunity to study with Moten and the bitterness and sorrows of exclusion remain with some of the rest of us, even as admirations run deep. We struggle with our attachments and affiliations, seeking to understand how our appearances can be neither entirely self-dependent on the private mirror's "vanity" nor "tyrannically ruled" but rather holding their own strength, "empowered," in the way that "Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate *raison d'etre*" (Arendt1958, 222). This *reason* (to be) and its dependence on empowered construction of "the human artifice" seems to us a *good* reason to build discourse situations for one another, and describe how they must themselves involve processes of *intentional* co-hum*nization entailing mutual empowerment. We are given the intellectual tools to conceive of ourselves some sort of "subaltern counterpublic" (Fraser, 1990), say, yet our discourse remains private, "impotent," and largely non-participant…until the publication of this text, perhaps.[6]

Arendt does not deal with the specifics of how "the web" of human affairs is engendered in-situ other than that it emerges from speech and action (*HOW?*). She does not provide many practical considerations with regards to situating "the space of appearance." Arendt does, however, provide some *ethical heuristics* for how situational and performative decisions might be made that empower the public realm's inhabitation by actual/acting hum*ns. For example, it is both a stretch and a necessity to apply the ethical heuristic "plurality" to such considerations.

If we hold plurality as a principal value, that is, we assume that participation by differently abled, gendered, racialized, needs-holding, culturally-located individuals is desirable and ethical, we are

able to begin discourse events with forms of meta-discourse that establish flexible conditions for caretaking of particular and perspectives and bodily needs. Encouraging persons to come and go at will, de-hierarchizing speakers/performers and audience members, providing free food and drinks, de-regulating the appropriateness of silence and noise, are a few of the tactics suggested with regards to situating "inclusive" public dialogues. Time of day, access to bathrooms, quality of light, air temperature, can all become transparent considerations when it comes to the situation or event through which a "scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them" is staged.

Forms of dialogue can also be staged using core ethical considerations such as "pluralization." If we intend to authorize diverse participants and substantiate different perspectives and sensibilities, self-governance tactics may need to be implemented that assure equity, safety, and self-determination (positive liberations) and prevent abuses, hierarcharizations, violences (negative liberations).[7] We discuss how, for example, a panel discussion is not a form of dialogue that we feel embodies our discourse ethics because it establishes hierarchies between speakers and listeners, divides "experts" from "non-experts," and further positions bodies within one-to-the-many mediation and information-dissemination schemas.[8] Further, a "traditional" play, through which assigned actors play out a scripted series of scenes in front of a spectating audience is inadequate (and potentially unethical) as a mode of discourse.[9]

Here in the *HOW?* location, where we are first each assumed by each other to be rational thinking individuals who also care about the comfort of each other's body-minds, we can begin our thinktanking performance with a discussion about whether or not we want to implement "behavioral rules," or positive and negative liberations. On our diagram, this *HOW?* appears as "in-scriptions," as scripts and scores for our bodies. These inscriptions should be aligned with our ethics and vice versa. For example, what are the ethics of applying (and enforcing) universal rules for behavior at all? Will we raise our hands to speak? (*Is it more important to ensure that no one is interrupted or is it more important that no one person mediate the conversation in any given moment?*) Will anyone take notes? (*Is it more valuable to document our discourse or to ensure that no note-taker process the dialogue through their singular perspective in any given moment?*) Will we take formal breaks or come and go as need-be? *(Is it more ethical to keep everyone present together or more ethical to allow for different bladder capacities?*) We decide that we must each take responsibility for our own (dis)comfort and for the courage to bring our needs to the group. There will be no hand-raising. Anyone can take notes for their own use but no central document will be kept. Persons should come and go at any time for any reason. Through these decisions, we both attempt embodiment of an ethical emphasis on self-determination and "open process" and assign ethical responsibility more strongly to individuals, trusting abilities to recognize and communicate at least our own pleasures, desires, (dis)comforts, and needs. We feel that elements of the discourse situation (if not always "fun" and "comfortable" than at least "not horrible") must be considered if embodied persons are to construct their own (non-universal) affairs of intellect. Perhaps other forms of appearance may emerge via (plurally universal*izable*) pleasure-orientations and happiness-pursuits.[10]

Another group of unique persons, in another time and place, would and should make entirely different decisions regarding situational elements, ethical correlations with intentional performativities, and desirable forms of dialogue. *HOW* our thinktank is performed is designed by the assumptions, values, expectations, and presentations of unique persons. Honey Jernquist, Dave/Eleanor Koenig, Leili Huzaibah, Kaia Gilje, Marielle Pelissero, Edward G. Sharp, Joaquin Croaxetta, Mohammad Grout and myself each come to some—most to most—of the weekly meetings. All of these persons are able to sit on the floor. This group has been formed through an open invitation,[11] drawing thinkers from overlapping "communities" of persons living in New York City. Money is not involved. We do not all know each other, but some of us know each other very well. We are performance-makers, poets, and artists, food-service workers, educators, students, software coders, babysitters. Half of us have played "Dungeons & Dragons" and two of us have never heard of it.

The practical structure of our thinktanking performance is simple and decided in minutes at the very beginning of our first gathering; each participant writes questions as they occur in their own minds and puts them into a central hat (the brown bowler). When the conversation feels stuck, anyone can suggest drawing out a new question. The questions score the directions of our inquiry. As we proceed, questions written usually relate to previous questions, but sometimes send us off in entirely other directions. Each time a new question is drawn, we tend to begin address it by discussing the semantic terms and assumptions upon which it seems to be written. We begin by pretending that the writer of the question can remain anonymous but quickly learn that it is easier (and more fun) to task the identified writer of the question with some further explication and allow the writer of the question to somewhat lead the ensuing conversation.

Our conversation is performed in what *seems to us* a "natural" way. The shared language(s) we speak, our social intimacies and familiarities, cultural and behavioral expectations, and differing yet "contemporaneous" conceptual groundings operate effectively as conditioning and encoding elements. We socially reward non-competitive speech acts, encouraging "yes, and"-type communication and sometimes calling out speech acts that individuals judge to be overly toxic ("attacking," "condescending," "mansplaining") and this calling-out is usually well-taken. The group's members agree that racialization and gender paradigms should contribute to an individual's decision about when, about what, and how frequently to speak up ("stay in your lane," "don't assume that you share beliefs," and so on). However, just because our behaviors seem (to us) to follow "natural" norms, values, and rules, does not mean that reflexivity is impossible. We are not "blind" actor-doers, unable to narrate or tell stories about ourselves (Arendt 1978, 133); we also intentionally devise critical, narrative resistances to our own normative cultural behaviors.

For example, it was (and still is, as of 2019) dominant practice within artistic communities in Brooklyn to advise persons in dialogue to speak *only* from "within" experience, often to the *exclusion* of philosophical or meta-analytic propositions and statements. We discuss this norm in particular. Are these practices a symptom of our own internalized judgment of ourselves as "non-experts," or unauthorized "non-thinkers," or are these advisements developed in alignment with ethical assignment of value to the somatic, haptic, internal localities of members of an

undercommons (once again)? We decide that we *will* allow and authorize ourselves and each other to make wild claims, to theatrically assume temporarily "transcendent" positions, perform theorization, and to include opinions we do not share, paraphrase citations from texts, and submit examples from "outside" our individual lives; we authorize ourselves and each other to *speculate*.

We perform this authorization based on the semi-private nature of the thinktanking performance and a desire to develop an "agonistic" form of debate that assumes respect for the reasonability of dialectical "opponents" and assures the ability to disagree with ideas without discounting the experiences of persons (Mouffe 2013). Additionally, we decide, we are not to become a reading group (no texts were formally shared), a performance ensemble (no culminating performance outside the thinktank meetings themselves was devised), or a group-therapy session; rather, we would pursue lines of inquiry as clearly as possible, performing philosophical reasoning through a form of "collectively withdrawn" ideation.

This lattermost decision (to include, and also to value "withdrawn" or "speculative" ideation, even to the potential exclusion of "speaking from within experience") proves the most entangled with conceptual subject matters themselves. When one thinktanker puts a question into the hat about whether or not *they in particular* "should or should not" apply for graduate school, the other members of the group at first turn their bodies towards the asker of the question, voices changing and modes of speech shifting. As we veer into a more colloquial, casual conversation, another thinktanker interrupts, suggesting that we transform this inquiry into a more general and objective form, replacing the question with another, such as "what considerations would *one* use to determine whether or not they 'should' (deontically) do something or not." The writer of the personal question is upset, not wanting the moment of group attention, affection, and emotional support to become something else.

The interrupting thinktanker suggests we must consider the techniques of this discourse, not just assume that any and all conversation deepens a political conscience or leads to "enlarged" mentalities. Earlier, we had discussed how we liked the assumption that every statement is *inevitably* issuant from the uttering body. This assumption, we theorized, was perhaps a crucial aspect of "agonistic" philosophical discourse: let us proceed from the assumption that the only thing that everyone knows is that we are each "just" (theatrically) speculating. Further, the interrupting thinktanker proposes, because our subjectivity is assumed, we don't need to use ourselves as *examples*; we can "enlarge" our discourse to apply to and include a deeper or more collectively-pertinent inquiry. "Ideas" should be autonomized from persons, put into the middle of the circle.

The thinktank is ethically split on this issue: either all conversation should be "general" and "objectively-oriented" in order to maintain the inclusion and intellectual participation of more individuals, *or* this generality marginalizes and diminishes embodied, affective participation and respect for personal differences and experiences.

In *The Human Condition* Arendt emphasizes the inevitability of the "disclosure of the subject" through action and speech:

> Action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them, and they retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively "objective," concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. [...] But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality. To be sure, this web is no less bound to the objective world of things than speech is to the existence of a living body, but the relationship is not like that of a facade or, in Marxian terminology, of an essentially superfluous superstructure affixed to the useful structure of the building itself. (Arendt 1958, 182–183)

Arendt helps us consider relationships between participants in a situated dialogue. When, through speech and action, a "web" of "inter-ests" becomes visible, this web becomes real—though "intangible"—and emerges as a sort of structural material. Arendt sees this "web" as the material substance of enlarged mentality, an element of the shared world "itself." Hereby, speech (dialogue) enables social forms of withdrawal which both potentiate "new beginnings" or social change (Arendt, 1958) and substantiates individual abilities to moralize, to reason, and to understand ourselves as political agents, makers or builders of worlds: our ideas are both aspects of our internal lives and elements of shared mentalities. Arendt's semantic trickery involving *inter-ests* (those motivations which drive thinking-speaking-doing actions between persons) and "best interests" (those material elements of life which make it well-lived for persons) reveals a critical way of seeing discourse as that which materially transforms subjective meaningfulness into (re)new(ed) social well-being.

But is there a difference, and/or a difference in value, between a group discussing the private concerns of one particular individual (matters of *idion*, say [Arendt 1958, 42]), and a group "concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests"?

We are sticking against fragile silk lines between speech taking place amongst friends, family members, and lovers who care deeply about the well-being of one another and dialogues taking place between "civic" or "community" participants who might be charged (or charge ourselves) with determining some collective good for "all." *HOW* are dialogic inquiries performed differently when, say, buddies are drinking beer and talking about whether one of them should go to grad school than when, say, a jury is assembled to arbitrate a case? Further, how are differences in attitudes, behaviors, and agendas correlated with the "reasonability" of ethical, moral, and political judgments and subjectivities materialized, networked, woven? An attempt to bring Judith Butler into this discussion of "reasons for assembly" is met with loud groans.

WHY? (pre-scriptions and theater)

Dialogic (speaking-acting) procedures and formalizations emerge from *why* the discourse is being performed. In the case of drinking buddies, inter-ests may be guided by affections and somatic impulse; in our thinktank, we do tend to go where the conversation takes us based on affective responses to *topoi* (talking about ghosts is especially exciting), whereas in the case of a jury, inter-ests are oriented around a shared objective, for example, to reach a verdict and very abstract and differently-interpreted concerns such as "justice." The above debate about objective or autonomous idea(tion)s forces us to consider *reasons* for the discourse and the different *orientation* options correlated with reasons (*WHY?*). We could use the "seeming interestedness" of the largest number of participants to determine the direction of a dialogue, for example, or we could (as the interrupting thinktanker suggested) regulate the syntax of our speech to keep it "objective" or "general" for theoretical reasons. Here, Arendt's way of semantically flipping can be applied to *reason*: reasons for the speech actions materialize modes of reasoning and vice versa.

For example, if we are a co-operative council gathered for the *reason* of making decisions about what food to buy, we may want to use some of *Robert's Rules of Order* (1876) for the *reason that* these procedural rules lower the affective agitation of speakers and increase the efficiency (value judgments) of discourse towards making a list of foods that can be democratically (an ethos) approved by a parliamentary-style assembly of equals (a way of decision-making for a group that is deemed by that group to be morally right). If we are a pair of lovers coming together for the *reason* that we desire sex with one another yet we find ourselves arguing about whose memory of a conversation is accurate, we may find ourselves without any formal mode of *reasoning* correlated with the *reason* for either our co-presence or the argument and thereby unable to reconcile or continue acting together; we thus may break apart, break up.

An intentional performance like a thinktank or inter-play, devoid of a clear procedural materialization process (such as the objective to reach a verdict), can also focus on correlating *reasons* and *reasoning* procedures with ethical and moral heuristics. These correlations and considerations can be frequently be re-addressed, reflected upon, and changed to level out power dynamics and otherwise enable shifting inter-ests of individuals involved.

Personally, I had reasons why I wanted to initiate a "thinktanking" performance. I have beliefs about what is good, valuable, and beneficial about small-group discourse. Other participants doubtless had and have different reasons and beliefs. My own reasons involve the view that testing our own opinions, reasoning processes, values, and beliefs against those of others leads to more informed and more ethical decision-making. Arendt writes "what we usually call 'consciousness,' the fact that I am aware of myself and therefore in a sense can appear to myself, would never suffice to guarantee reality" (Arendt 1971, 19). Rather Arendt believes "the stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to individual specimen" (21). "Moral precepts" then, must arise "directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes" (Arendt 1958, 264).

Amateur philosophers such as myself sometimes act like stoners, connecting everything to everything else. Is it our "withdrawal" from legitimate discourse that constructs big claims, or the "removed" perspective of pariahs? The idea that dialectical discourse (and other proper, pub[l]ic ways of distributing ideation) constructs better moral decisions and establishes egalitarian society is a basic Marxist view and a basic (neoliberal) argument for "education." This view or argument also relies on *Theatrum Mundi,* Habermasian notions of a single dominant public sphere, and/or the assumption that we all share a "common stage" of external, material reality, a stage that benefits from "diversity" and assimilation of as many perspective as possible, perhaps, but still a singularity, a "state's encyclopedia" (Moten and Harney 2013, 366). I, a theater artist, see *Theatrum Mundi* as a core thrust throughout Western discourse, a long arm of the sensible reaching out through everything, establishing, for example, Hamlet's hubris, in that he *knows not "seems;"* Hamlet's tragedy is caused by a failure to comprehend or include "reasonable" (central, encircling, rational) perspectives outside his own and refusal to test his beliefs socially or in public. If Hamlet only read Horatio's books, perhaps he wouldn't act so stupidly, he would understand his (insensible, insane really) reality as *merely subjective*.

It is not just an ability to educate oneself and see one's own self as subjective and subjected that is at stake regarding the advisement to involve and engage with the perspectives, beliefs, and judgments of others, but also an ability to generate *entirely other* ways of thinking, to construct "new" ways of thinking and feeling. This latter act is perhaps more possible when what is thought about is *seen* as staged (autonomized, fabricated, artificial). For example, this volume and this essay provide spectatorship to the thought of Hannah Arendt, an author who fabricated written texts that we can each read. Although our interpretations are undoubtedly quite different, we readers of Arendt are meeting at a location "withdrawn" from any of our individual bodies, a place issuant from "within" Arendt's mind, yet staged as a "third" location between us, delineated and actualized by her textual communication. Such third locations (neither within your body nor within mine) provide us with additional "seemings," generating factorially-increasing ways of seeing, potentially-potentiating ways of seeing which carry us out and away from ways of seeing that may be seen (from without) to be causing oppressions, mechanistic totalitarianisms, and so on.

Arendt's "thinker" can be interpreted as highly agentic and perpetually in motion, able to move themselves outside of the mainstream, in and out of discourse situations, to pull themselves out of the world and put themselves back into it. For Arendt, the withdrawal of thinking can be seen as agentic beyond consent to participate in existing modes of appearance; "we," she writes "*are of the world and not merely in it;* we too, are appearances by virtue of arriving and departing, of appearing and disappearing; and while we come from a nowhere, we arrive well equipped to deal with whatever appears to us and to take part in the play of the world" (Arendt 1978, 22, original emphasis). Arendt leaves open, however, questions about how we each might decide when, where, and how to "take part" in the play of "the world," which, for Arendt, remains a singular *Theatrum Mundi*. Bent around this vision of a true and essential external world, Arendt is unable to explore how forms of reason(ing)s themselves might stage forms of dialogue correlated with that which we ourselves (differently) find reasonable.

Historically and epistemically well past fundemantal universivalism, our thinktank becomes concerned with whether or not an individual may determine *who* will be involved in dialogue. Here we return to defense mechanisms and negative liberations (protections). The de-scriptions of a dialogic group may either protect the "otherness" of individuals involved *and/or* operate as collective bids or participations for/within political sovereignties. Which and why *certain* persons, groups of persons, and "webs" of ideas are used as a reflection of one's personal morality comes to involve the identifications of those persons and the sources of their ideas from within their historic, cultural, identified, and socio-political contexts. We may each intellectualize internally in order to remove ourselves from painful emotions and traumas (in the pathological Freudian sense) or in order to reflect more peacefully (in the Aristotelian sense), but we also intellectualize in groups to reify our emotions and experiences (including traumas) as valid and real. Thus, the thinkers with whom we share discourse must recognize us in particular ways, providing spectatorships that confirm our individual appearances.

It may be dangerous to test one's own ideas, reasons, and thoughts within and before a group that does not read sense, morality, or reasonability in ways "close" to one's own or have the same reasons to gather, just as it may be dangerous to *only* test one's own ideas, reasons, and thoughts within and before a homogenous (self-similar) group. The members of our particular thinktank debate whether or not one should rely on others who are *most like oneself* as readers of the morality or reasonability of one's actions and thoughts, or if one should use those who are most *different*. Is it possible to assemble one's own spectators across a spectrum between similarity and difference? Should some individuals trust themselves and others "like" them more than others should? If one is benefitting from an unethical, iniquitous paradigm—white supremacy, say—should that person trust themselves less, and particularly seek out the reflections of those "outside" their own identity group? (Our thinktank says yes, but also be careful not to demand intellectual labor, spectatorships and attentions, from others).

There is also an affective side to *reasons* for materialization of webs, shared reasonings, ensembles, and ideas as such, a "why" that ties together heartstrings and cuts shared meaningfulness from the "vast cloth;" we rely on one another not just to tell us if we are right or wrong, but also to affirm that we are valuable, that we ourselves matter. We must, in some ways, attach ourselves to existence through bonding procedures less akin to "political inclusions" or some utopian, universalizable "species being" than to semi-private, intra-social secure attachments between lovers, friends, and family members. *Why* we gather for collective thinking is not just a fulfillment of theoretical justifications but also a cause or motivation that must *move* us emotionally, spiritually, meaningfully, making us each a more "whole" and self-recognizing, self-determining thinker-actor.

WHAT? (de-scriptions: Not Everyone Will Be A Professional)

> The activity of knowing is no less a world-building activity than the building of houses. (Arendt 1971, 421)

For Arendt as for Kant, *reasonable* and *moral* thinking requires a certain transcendence of subjection; the ideating agent must be able to see past and outside of their own context and conditioning, to a point. A *totally-subjective* (withdrawn *and* inwardly-turned) form of reasoning can't appear as reasonable. Only when pre-scribed by a particular problem, a need, a conflict, or question does reasoning appear, de-scribable as the "reason" for discourse. Thus, the discourse that is being performed materializes history, judgment, justice, in a way that is seen as such by those performing.

The apparent intentionality, theatricality, or artifice of "a thought," "a moral," or "an idea" must also be perceived, both by the thinking-actor from within (and as withdrawn from) their own body, and also from within (and potentially without) social embodiments. A social embodiment makes ideation processes material by objectifying "an inquiry" into written or spoken words (a "sentencing" if you will) or other conceptual expression (including "a performance") that can itself appear as such, as bounded and materialized by socio-politically-encompassing conditions and codifications. When we combine the locations of thinkers and doers, that is, spectators and actors, (making, let's say, an entirely processual performance such as a thinktank), we find ourselves seeking distanciation and autonomization of "an" inquiry or "an" ideative procedure through and around which we can perform. For example, our thinktank used the written questions put into the central bowler hat.

It is possible, we propose, to construct a theater—a situation for sight—through which *(p)articular* reasoning procedures may be deliberated and determined to be reasonable by the same group using them. We identify this proposition as a dominant belief within the performance practices of our communities, which tend to value de-hierarchization, collaboration, transparency, temporality, and *process/presence*-oriented action rather than *product*-oriented action.

It is practically impossible, however, (we believe[d], speaking from experience) to make some-thing, a play, a dance, a ruling, a decision, without *any* built "knowledge" or ontological agreement about what (*WHAT?*) is being done. We must at least agree that *we are playing*, or that *this is a thinktank.* Through our unique userships of these (in)form(ation)s, such as "play" or "thinktank," we may devise some procedures for con-sensually per-forming reason via correlated modes of reasoning.

We propose that dialogic assemblies may construct collective thinking situations through which *reasoning processes* (e.g. how ideations are judged reasonable) are correlated with both *reasons* (to hold the dialogue, matters of attention, questions or problems to address) and ethical and moral heuristics used to design (materialize, actualize) the structure or situational elements of the dialogue itself. [12]

By the end of the year of thinktanking, we found our preliminary layperson's philosophy problem about agency, scales of effectivity, and self-determination vs. conditioning transformed first, into a more particular question (which I put in italics earlier: *how can this/a (p)articular assembly intentionally perform thinking actions that do something?*)

Then, as we learned through doing *how* we were doing "something," our inquiries began to drive harder and deeper into our own personal responsibilities and senses of self. As we concluded the thinktank, performances split and re-opened to "the public" as an array of nine new thinktanks (becoming a project called *9 PROPOSITIONS,* PPL 2018) as well as informal friendships.

Trigger Warning: the following conclusion to this essay involves a discussion of suicide. As a reader of this text, please respect your own needs and determine whether or not some emotional distress is "worth it" in this context and at this moment.

Since the thinktank about which I am writing here concluded, Eleanor/Dave chose to end their own life. It is difficult to complete this essay without mentioning this, since the first paragraph and the thinktank here discussed are both initiated by their handwritten question, *what is the difference between thinking and doing?*

> In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world. If we strip moral imperatives of their religious connotations and origins, we are left with the Socratic proposition: "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong" and its strange substantiation "for it is better for me to be at odds with the whole world than, being one, to be at odds with myself." However, we may interpret this invocation of the axiom of contradiction in moral matters, as though the one and the same imperative, "Thou shalt not contradict yourself," is axiomatic for logic and ethics (which incidentally is still Kant's chief argument for the categorical imperative), one thing seems clear: the presupposition is that I live together not only with others but also with my self, and that this togetherness, as it were, has precedence over all others. The political answer to the Socratic proposition would be "What is important in the world is that there be no wrong; suffering wrong and doing wrong are equally bad." Never mind who suffers it; your duty is to prevent it. (Arendt 1968, 153)

To our own selves, we endeavor to be true (so says Polonius to Hamlet,) but we also endeavor to perform reason, to move somehow to the side of, or in front of, or over (*para*), an array of "seems" that are not all our own, rescuing us from our unmentionable, amaurotic essentialities (*doxa*).

In the end, suicide becomes a particularly difficult and relevant case study. It is an action that fulfills what we presume to be "unreasonable" reasons, staged from within the internal silence of an unlivable mind. Do we judge, as the friends and community members surrounding and respecting Eleanor/Dave, that their actions held true to their own moral compass and therefore must be deemed morally reasonable? Or do we value any hum*n life to the extent that we discount their private-intersubjective reasoning process to declare that murder—even murder of oneself—is unethical? Does it matter what anyone thinks? Does it matter how their action made others feel?

In the nation-state where this thinktank took place, the United States of America, suicide is illegal, seeming to provide a political answer to this inquiry and insisting that indeed, killing oneself is immoral. This judgment has no disciplinary consequence when a suicide is successful. Yet, moral reconciliations with the actions of another are of great emotional and social significance.

Since this suicide action, some members of this thinktank have used our vocabulary, discourse methods, and reasoning habits to process our feelings. Some of us feel guilty, thinking that perhaps if we had continued the thinktank (and the 2018 thinktanking performances in which Eleanor/Dave also participated) we could have reasoned or socialized them out of their decision. Most disturbingly, one thinktanker proposed that perhaps this thinktank partially contributed to Eleanor/Dave's actions in that our methods were *too* focused on "respect for different, private reasoning processes" and that our fealty to the imperative of correlating internal reasoning processes with actions can be deadly if "essential reasons" (ethics, values, morals seen as universalizable) *themselves* are left undiscussed. Do we want ideation processes to be formalized to enable actualization if the ideations themselves reason an individual or group towards death? Do we need, as Seyla Benhabib and Kwame Appiah have argued, to return to universalizable ethics, embedded moral heuristics, social prohibition of certain reasoning-processes? Writes Arendt:

> the modern shift of emphasis from the "what" to the "how," from the thing itself to its fabrication process, was by no means an unmixed blessing. It deprived man as maker and builder of those fixed and permanent standards and measurements which, prior to the modern age, have always served him as guides for his doing and criteria for his judgment. It is not only and perhaps not even primarily the development of commercial society that, with the triumphal victory of exchange value over use value, first introduced the principle of interchangeability, then the relativization, and finally the devaluation, of all values. (Arendt 1958, 325)

Both *The Life of the Mind* and *The Human Condition* encourage a self's withdrawal from "appearances" into an internal space of the self, as well as a retreat of "actors" from sheer process to a place from which they can change course, form "new beginnings." This site from which a re-orientation can occur is not always felt as "peaceful" (*scholē*), it is often felt as the meat of existential chaos, the very wet of the hum*n wound, the ashes (*katabasis*). Our movements away from dominant political sensibilities can be seen as righteous resistance but they can also be experienced as pure pain.

In my own community, there is a strong pull away from the regulated choreographies and directives of technique/technicality, institutionality, and capitalist mentalities towards and into haptic and "by us for us" self-authorization. Individual artists are moving from theater and dance disciplines into "performance art" (where the knife is "real" and the blood is "real" according to Marina Abramović). It seems, however, that we must be careful where and how we position the mouth of Plato's cave, the split between the wandering of the noble hermit philosopher from their delusional comrades, the difference between romantic eternalities/internalities of the individual hero (who is, "himself" a "rebel") and the deemed insensible, illegible, ugly, wrong, different, dis-identifiable (Muñoz 1999, Butler 1993, and basically any queer theory text written since 1989).

Moreover, *what if* (a layperson's speculative crudeness), through some theatrical staging of dialogue, more than one body-mind *could* trespass an exit from the cave *ensemble*? What if Arendt's sense that the philosopher, "having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect "singularity," as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others" (Arendt 1958, 38) can be transformed through *forms* of contemplation (*theōria*) which are neither solely work, labor, nor action, but rather a "thinking-doing"?[13]

Way out of my lane and off philosophical trend, I want to try something. I want to try and say what I think as clearly (and rhetorically, sophistically) as I can, to perform as a moralizing agent:

The *ways* we think about ourselves, our social configurations, our historical contexts, our actions have affective and political consequences. We do not "know" anything about how anyone or anything "really is," but we do choose how to perform our own thinking and, to a certain extent, how to perform our own feeling, at least via intentional performances of naming and conceptualizing and speaking-together. Our ways of thinking and emoting must themselves be oriented around ethics discussed socially, designed and in-formed by moral considerations between individuals that are trusted to have each other's and their own (personal, intrasocial, political) "well being" at heart.

Certain faiths and beliefs, for example, that "hum*n beings are basically altruistic" or that "there will be a future for hum*nkind," that we *know* to be "merely" ways of thinking and feeling (theoretical/theatrical stagings/compositions) can be selected and used as *good ideas* based not solely on either "objectivized" reason or on how they make us feel (another false dichotomy) but also on what sorts of behaviors and actions they en-courage and empower. I believe that the implications of our conceptualizations for action should be given primacy.

Arendt's thought mobilizes this great optimism, that perhaps we can prevent suffering before it is caused by following reasoning-processes back and forth between internal reasons (feelings, thoughts) and their socio-political implications (stagings, discourses). This back-and-forth must be performed intentionally, theatrically, oriented around and co-constructive with reason(ing)s themselves. I am not sure about these "reason(ing)s themselves," though I taste a change in my own internal weather, regarding whether or not I believe that *particular ethics, values, morals* should be embedded in personal and political methodologies if "we" (hum*n beings and other life-forms inhabiting planet Earth) are to survive. Perhaps our next thinktank *should* be oriented around a (theatricalized, speculative) objective to produce moral propositions that we believe *should* be adopted by a larger political body. Deontology is appearing to me. This objective would require an entirely different mode of practical discourse. Via discourse with trusted (and "other") persons, the moralizing hum*n could perhaps then be seen/see themselves straddling a chasm between thinking and doing, drawing these spheres together, making a (under)stand-able location from which the meaningfulness of their/our existences could be provided "their own" forms of dialogic distanciation, safety to "withdraw," and forms of substantiating spectatorship. If we are unable or unwilling to do this, perhaps moralizing tasks default to authorized "professional" thinkers who cannot be trusted to involve anyone but themselves in their considerations. If we do not do this,

moreover, perhaps individuals who matter to us become unable to carry any sense of their own "rightness" "agency" or "goodness" in and for themselves, and therefore become unable to maintain their own wills to live.

Notes

[1] As a gender non-binary trans person, Eleanor/Dave went by both of these names.

[2] Or are some persons always "merely" spectators? One thinktank participant points out that even though all of us are women/femmes, poor, queer, trans*, people of color, immigrants, Jews and Muslims (every single one of us fulfills more than one of these identifications, most three or more of them), those of us who are citizens of wealthy countries, for example, are removed from physical participation in the wars fought by our states, our lives are relatively stable, "globally Northern," and our rights (debatably, relatively, quite differently between us) securable. None of us like to think about ourselves as spectators in this way (rather most of us prefer to see ourselves as "oppressed," and argue about for whom and in what ways oppressions are more or less "authentic") but her point is well-taken.

[3] My role as the initiator of this thinktank, as part of the School of the Apocalypse's semester of working groups, should be noted. Throughout the process, I do (because of my personality, because we are gathered in my space and home, and because of my personal passion for philosophy) perform as a moderator who sometimes summarizes, synthesizes, and suggests directions, terminological engagements, and frameworks for the group to consider. My role is several times affectionately/sarcastically referenced through thinktank members calling me (and gendering me) "mom." My role in writing this text also demands reflexivity. Outside of "professional" academic spheres, it doesn't matter as much whose ideas are whose, yet acts of ideation here are both plural and personal. Are the ideas I "report upon" here my own, is my incessant use of the collective "we" as in *we come to believe* really honest? Am I just talking about/as myself, and using a collective process as a form of self-substantiation because I feel insecure? Am I performing unpaid intellectual labor in-kind, or am I appropriating the ideas of others or of a group as my own intellectual "property"? The politics and ethics of this text are surely themselves debatable.

[4] "(w)holism" is of special interest to us during this thinktank and operates in relationship with a concurrent performance project entitled *Embarrassed of the Whole (EotW),* which was/is based on conceptual correlations between "holistic" Western theories such as those of South African eugenicist Jan Smuts (1926) and the enaction of genocides, apartheids, and fascistic states.

[5] I am using an asterisk to remove the gendered "man." This is an emergent tactic amongst gender non-binary and trans* thinkers. Here, as with other words denoted by the asterisk, it implies "so on and so forth" as well as a perpetual state of flux. I am leaving Arendt's use of "man" and "mankind" alone, due to respect for her historic situation and a personal choice to avoid revisionist citations.

[6] We do "present" or "publicize" the existence of our processes through the School of the Apocalypse's website, Panoply Performance Laboratory's website, and report on the thinktank as a sort of format without content during a culminating meeting of SotA working groups,

[7] Protecting the rights of persons to self-determine while ensuring protections of those who are oppressed or injured by the self-determinations of majority or empowered groups is a very practical problem as well as a core problematic for liberal Democracy. Further, Isaiah Berlin's discussions (1958) of how even self-determining collectives remain oppressed minorities within so-called "free states" (which may become authoritarian in the name of freedom) can be brought to bear. With members of this group hailing from Indonesia, France, Brazil, the USA and elsewhere, our debates about forms of governance and "libertarian" vs. "liberal" vs. "socialist" policies warrant an entirely different essay. Practically, we agree that we share a responsibility to balance positive "freedom of self-expression" with negative limitations on those expressions, when and where they become injurious to others (as expressed by those others). This debate swings between colloquial discussion of "safe space" and grand political theory. We also had a brief argument about uses of Berlin, noting his contributions to Israel as an apartheid state; should we use/read Berlin, or Heidegger (who was a Nazi sympathizer) and other "European cis

white male" theorists, or no?

[8] Ethics of mediation, data collection and distribution, and information-as-design are of much interest to several members of this thinktank who work as software coders and makers of digital composition and we spend a lot of time talking about modeling and composing issues from these practical perspectives.

[9] Members of this thinktank hold different "anti-theatrical" views, not only for classical reasons distinguishing "authentic" acts from "artificial" ones but also because of the social modes of production commonly used to stage mimetic event-objects via hierarchized, representational, methods within theater industries. Art history and criticism also hold a negative view of "theatricality." Michael Fried (1988), for example, uses theatricality to describe leading, moralizing, "messaging" artworks that prevent "absorption". From my own background in theater, especially in dialectical theater and the works and ideas of Bertolt Brecht and others, I do not see (counter-)propagandistic capacities as negative, but rather as the strengths of theater and as reasons for using theatrical modes; we use theatricality when we have something to say, when we are intending to provide space for critical reflection (upon), and when we are intentionally composing and devising media(tions) and worlds.

[10] Here, I grit my teeth and resist veering off into a whole other area and new citations of Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) and Sara Ahmed (2010). Professionalism in philosophical writing requires discipline and focus: try to keep the cans of worms on the shelves!

[11] Over email and public announcement sent by the School of the Apocalypse and Panoply Performance Laboratory as well as a strangely private-feeling gathering in the educational department at the Brooklyn Museum

[12] This view is sometimes called "pragmatic feminism" (see Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1998), or "practical feminism," see María Puig de la Bellacasa's discussions of "thinking with care" (2012).

[13] Of course, I am not the first to conceptualize in this direction, but I have already exceeded word count for this particular piece of writing....

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Biography

Esther Neff is the founder of PPL (Panoply Performance Laboratory), a discursive organizational entity and flexible performance-making collective. Their work across fields and spheres performs embodied research into how intuitions, desires, and mentalities materialize (intra)action.

PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

ANXIETY AFFECT ALIENS AND OTHER NON-PARANOID PERFORMANCES AGAINST CAPITALISM

CORY TAMLER THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

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

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

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):62–75
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51254
ISSN 2057–7176

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

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

The Performativity of Knowledge: Arendt and Sedgwick

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

~~Precarity~~ Anxiety Consciousness-Raising

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An Audience of Affect Aliens

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond Speech, Beyond Paranoia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

I BREATHE, YOU BREATHE, WE BREATHE: HOW A DAILY HABITUAL MOVEMENT APPEARS AS AN ACTION AND GROWS INTO A GESTURE THROUGH LISTENING

LEONIE PERSYN GHENT UNIVERSITY

> A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground [...].
>
> Arendt [1958] 1998, 71

> For as Baudelaire said, in a palace 'there is no place for intimacy'.
>
> Bachelard [1958] 2014, 50

Introduction

When I can't fall asleep, I listen to my loved one breathing next to me. As I begin to listen, I think of breathing as one of the most natural movements, because if there is one thing I don't think about, it's respiration. On the contrary, I undergo the continual and physiological process of breathing. After each inhalation I expect and await exhalation. But when, while listening, a long pause emerges between inhalation and exhalation, panic takes over. Do I underestimate the force that keeps our bodies running? And why is that moment of non-breath so exciting? In this article I examine what might appear between inhalation and exhalation, the space of non-breath. What are the implications and consequences of this state of non-breath for what appears?

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):76–89
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51260
ISSN 2057–7176

This is a question I recently posed to the Polish-Belgian choreographer Kinga Jaczewska. As I asked the question, I quoted dance philosopher Laurence Louppe ([1997] 2010, 62): 'Time within a non-breath becomes a line of tension as fine as it is continuous.' In her reply, Jaczewska described how she used breath and respiration in her choreography *Grey* (2017), her first full-length choreography, in order to create 'suspension'. In this 45-minute choreography, Jaczewska uses continuous movement to create the (im)possibility of stillness and to rule out surprises (Jaczewska 2017a). As I describe in more detail below, her choreography extrapolates the movement of breath by letting the dancers dance their breathing. We might say that the dance foregrounds the tension between inhalation and exhalation.

In the first part of this article, I want to think about this non-breath in relation to Hannah Arendt's idea of 'spaces of appearance'. Can a daily and habitual movement like breathing provide the space to appear? Can the non-breath be considered a place of human plurality and the emergence of the self? Can our breathing act? And if so, do we speak (up) through our breathing? In the second part of this article, I argue that in Jaczewska's choreography, breathing functions as an action which not only reveals the non-breath as a space of appearance, but as a place of proximity. I characterise this as a place where I hesitate, but without disengaging. In the third part of this article, I consider this question of proximity in relation to the work of Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman and her films *Rendez-Vous D'Anna* (1972*)* and *Toute une nuit* (1983)*.* Both films reveal a constant struggle of the characters to balance the public and the private, as they constantly negotiate and re-ally the border between the I and the other in order to act and appear. I read this renegotiation in relation to the work of Lauren Berlant on the affective components of belonging and the practice of intimacy. I conclude that a re-ally-sation between the public and the private no longer restricts itself to an appearing from private into public, as Arendt would claim, but that it reveals an unknown intimacy because 'it poses questions of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective' (Berlant 1998, 286). I explain how these re-ally-sations of the private and the public stimulate motions generated by breathing as an action through listening.

Hannah Arendt and the non-breath as a space of appearance

What is (a space of) appearance?

Arendt introduces the notion of a space of appearance in *The Human Condition* (1958), and builds further on that notion in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). At the root of her thinking in *The Human Condition* she states that 'the space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action' (Arendt [1958] 1998, 199). This means that in order to talk about a space of appearance, multiple people need to be present and engaged with each other; if they disengage the space of appearance dissolves (Arendt [1958] 2015, 183) and only doubt remains (208). Because of this need for engagement, the Dutch translation of a space of appearance reads as *de plaats van ontmoeting*, 'the place of encounter' (Arendt [1958] 2015, 183).[1] It doesn't suffice that people gather or stay around to keep a space of appearance in existence. As soon as their activities lack engagement—if they don't speak anymore—the space of appearance dissolves.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt continues her thinking on appearance, pointing out that 'appearance and disappearance are the primordial events' because they 'mark out time': that is, the time between life and death marks out a space of appearance (Arendt 1978, 20). Here, it becomes clear how the space of appearance closely relates to natality, another key idea for Arendt's thinking. As Margaret Canovan observes in her introduction to *The Human Condition*, it is due to natality, the continually coming into the world of new people and their ability to start new initiatives (Arendt [1958] 1998, xvii), that 'the web of human affairs' (204) and the space of appearance can be reconfirmed over and over again.

To Arendt, each individual life can only exist in relation to another, because 'Being and Appearing coincide' (Arendt 1978, 19). Each individual depends on the web of human affairs to appear, because '[n]othing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*' (9, original emphasis). Appearance needs that audience who witnesses the coming into being in order to fully accomplish itself. This only happens when appearance conceals the ground of being and reveals the surface of the individual (37), or, in other words, when it combines its ontological characteristics with its phenomenal ones of the seen, the touched, the felt, the heard.

The non-breath as a space of appearance

When listening the breathing of my loved one, the non-breath is a moment where I fully engage with my loved one as other. It defines the moment where I, as listener, await an inhalation or an exhalation and activates my senses of sight, touch, and hearing. The non-breath combines anticipation and expectation. Because of these expectations, the moment between inhalation and exhalation is one where tension is at play. The marked time in that moment is the time between life and death (Arendt 1978, 20). If we consider each breath as natality in miniature, then we can define the non-breath between inhalation and exhalation, or between exhalation and inhalation, as a space of appearance, the junction between our ontological being and our phenomenal selves.

For Arendt, appearance is constituted and recognized in three phases: an upward movement, a period of standstill, and a downward movement (22). She adds that the moment of standstill houses the 'bloom or epiphany' of the appearance. On a physiological level the non-breath marks a change of direction situated in the diaphragm. It is a minuscule moment of standstill where our ribcage rests between the alignment and arching of the spine. At a microscopic level the non-breath defines the moment where oxygen and carbon dioxide molecules change places in the alveolus-chambers (designmate 2015). During the non-breath between inhalation and exhalation, oxygen enters our veins while carbon dioxide exits, or the other way around between exhalation and inhalation.

In this physiological description of the non-breath, I discover a clear resonance between breathing and the three phases of appearing Arendt distinguished. First, inhalation: in an upward movement, my spine aligns my torso rises upwards. Second, non-breath: a miniscule moment of rest in the movement, the 'bloom' of my respiratory system, where oxygen and carbon dioxide swap places and a change of direction occurs in the movement of my diaphragm. Third, exhalation: my ribcage inflates and lowers in a downward movement. I ground my body. The cycle begins again with a non-breath, a miniscule moment of rest, a change of direction.

Translating this change of direction into Arendt's context of the space of appearance, I suggest that the non-breath is a change of direction toward appearance or disappearance. In such a change of direction inhalation announces appearance, while exhalation announces disappearance. The change of direction underlines the non-breath of a space of appearance, in which tension rises while time expands. This is most clear for the non-breath following an exhalation, because the lack of a new inhalation would result in (total) disappearance—that is, death. Taking this thinking further, a non-breath after an *inhalation* would imply that the stretch of time would lead not to disappearance, but to its opposite, something like 'over-appearance'. In Arendt's terms, this would be becoming all too public (Arendt [1958] 2015, 51): a becoming which loses all nuance and elaboration and remains the mere surface of certainties (Arendt [1958] 2015, 52). In the case of over-appearance, the element of semblance, which is present in all appearances, takes the lead; as Arendt would say, 'Semblance is the price we pay for the wonders of appearance' (Arendt 1978, 38).

In both previous cases—total disappearance and over-appearance—time in the non-breath is stretched to its limits, but when the respiratory tempo and rhythm are continuous, the non-breath houses a change of direction that sets in motion a process of appearance and disappearance. This characterization of the non-breath closely relates to Arendt's explanation on action, as I will explain in the next section.

What is action?

Arendt defines action as a boundless and unpredictable praxis, which she situates in the context of the polis and the space of appearance in between humans (Arendt [1958] 2015, 175–179). To Arendt, to act covers a range of meanings: to begin, to lead, to rule, and to set in motion (Arendt [1958] 1998, 177). She intimately connects action to natality, because for her to begin means to begin as *somebody*, to come into being, to appear in the web of human affairs (Arendt [1958] 1998, 184; Arendt [1958] 2015, 162–163).

Just as she divides the phases of appearance into an upward movement, a moment of stillness and a downward movement, she also divides action into two phases. Firstly, its beginning, and secondly, that which is started is carried further (Arendt [1958] 1998, 189). The core of the action is situated in the beginning, in the actual initiative (Arendt [1958] 2015, 162), but only fully flourishes when set in motion. Connecting Arendt's two sequences, I suggest that action is housed exactly at the point where appearance flourishes: in the moment of standstill. Action blooms in the change of direction. In relation to breath, this would mean that action flourishes in the non-breath.

Our first breath, our first action?

If action is related to natality, as Arendt argues, then a special significance must be given to our very first respiration cycle. At the moment a mother gives birth, everyone in the delivery room awaits the first scream of the newborn before fully acknowledging the birth. But what happens exactly? The scream of an infant, although awaited, remains unpredictable. It indicates the moment when the newborn completes the transfer from the private nest of the womb to the great wide open of the public world. The non-breath preceding the scream underlines how this moment is

laden with tension. It reveals the uncertainty about whether the beginning is successful. The scream from the top of our lungs marks our first initiative as an individual in this world. The non-breath following this scream is the moment where a newborn sets in motion a bodily praxis of developing autonomy, without knowing where it will take them. It is exactly at this moment they carry the beginning further and start the earthly life, a long-lasting process of inhalation and exhalation as a constant movement. Simultaneously the others present ask themselves, 'Who is this?' (Arendt [1958] 2015, 163), and expect a first reaction with the next breath. With this question the others acknowledge the uniqueness of the newborn and confirm the earthly law of plurality (Arendt 1978, 19). Through the first respiration cycle the newborn appears in between humans, the newborn acts, because their scream makes the breath sensible as a mechanism for beginning and becoming (Arendt 201, 175–179). From the second inhalation onwards, breathing evolves into mere unconscious labour, an activity to cope with the necessities prescribed by the biological process as a living organism (Arendt 1958, 98). The breathing does not immediately speak, but it keeps labouring in respiratory cycles, always the same (Arendt 1958, 98). The labouring respiratory cycles insure the newborn's living condition before enabling them to act again.

When is an action able to act again? To speak?

According to Arendt, an action only flourishes when it speaks, when it sets something in motion (Arendt [1958] 2015, 17). My discussion of the respiratory cycles of a newborn traces a relationship between movement and motion. In her *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Laurence Louppe defines motion as 'consciousness of movement: consciousness of the path, of all the paths [...] through the body' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 73). So, it follows that breathing can only function as an action when one is conscious of the movement of breathing, and of the pathway that carbon dioxide and oxygen take through the body.

Following Louppe, becoming conscious about the movement of breath means becoming conscious of weight, as according to her, 'All movement is defined by a transfer of weight' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 64). In the case of the infant, this would mean that with their first scream the newborn feels the weight of their body for the first time. The scream makes audible the infant's dialogue with their own body, matter, and 'inner fibre' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 69).

To return to the physiology of breathing, the transfer of weight happens between inhalation and exhalation at the moment of non-breath, at the change of direction, and therefore it is situated in the diaphragm. Or, to combine these insights with Arendt: breathing starts to speak from the diaphragm, which enables one to act again. In relation to Louppe this is a very plausible statement, as for her the diaphragm defines the birthplace of phrasing (Louppe [1997] 2010, 103). The non-breath becomes the speaking silence in-between two phrases, where the possibility of breathing as a speaking action can be felt.

With these thoughts on the non-breath as a space of appearance and breathing as an action, let us take a closer look at the choreography *Grey* (2017) by Kinga Jackzewska, who deliberately uses breathing to set her audience in motion and to create an experience of suspension.

Jackzewska's *Grey* (2017): Can breathing as a habitual movement stimulate motion?

The choreography

Grey is a choreography for three dancers taking place on a grey dance floor. Jaczewska tries to avoid symmetry, so the position of this floor slightly differs from the axis of the scene. A white grid of squares (1x1m) is taped on top of the grey floor. The three dancers inhabit the scene for forty-five minutes, stepping in and out of the grey-floored zone. None of them leaves the scene during this period of time. They are all dressed in shades of grey and green, and my eye is caught by the fluffy green jumpers worn by one of the female dancers. Grey has never been so green. At first, we hear the blowing of the air-conditioning system; somewhere in the beginning of the first section the system turns down and silence is more audible than before. In the choreography, Jaczewska builds the movement pattern from alternating between aligning and arching of the spine. Her movement vocabulary is situated between rising upwards and moving towards the ground, between inhalation and exhalation.

Each dancer's body reveals the subtlety of the breathing movement in and of the torso. The three bodies breathe slowly, alone and next to each other. One by one the dancers engage their bodies more profoundly in the choreography. I can see how they look at each other's respiration in order to tune in to the same rhythm. Once their bodies attune to the breathing of the others, they test different constellations:

- In the first, three breathing bodies stand on their own and show three different perspectives of shoulder movement. I get a front, back and side view at the same time.
- The second constellation shows one non-active seated body, one upright breathing body and one active seated body, where breath moves through the belly.
- The last constellation reveals the full palette of breathing bodies in one stage view. It gathers the same standing body breathing in the chest, a new active seated body that breathes from the diaphragm, and a third breathing body that lies itself down. When lying down the breathing moves around the body from the lungs to the toes. The belly slowly goes up and down. These different directions wave the softness of the body.

From here on the performers start to play with their breath, balance, and stability. They rise on their feet slightly from the ground, searching for balance. Balance demands their full attention. They focus on their own body. The breathing movement diminishes. Two of the three bodies softly touch each other. From there the soft touch grows into a force, pulling the body out of balance, without falling. Both bodies lean in, away, and towards each other. The tension expands, followed by a short acceleration. A rapid release brings us back to the breathing bodies and new constellations. But there is one difference: I remember how the playing bodies were breathing before.

Once more the performers reveal subtle breathing movements, exploring different directions. Jaczewska extrapolates these directions, as if the performers dance their own breathing. One of the performers calmly rises to the top of her toes until she reaches the highest point possible. Even

though she holds this position for only a split second, she looks light and almost floating. Immediately after she redirects the movement towards the floor. She holds the posture in a determined fight with gravity. Only in the force of gravity does the functioning of the floor become visible. The grey surface no longer constrains to being a 'surface of rebound' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 66), but shows itself as a surface that carries us. It 'reinscribes in us the experience of being held, when our gravitational architecture did not yet exist, when our supple and fluid spine flowed with the maternal support' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 66). In this position the transfer and holding of weight becomes *sensible*. Or as Odile Rouquet would say, 'The ground functions as her best ally against gravity' (Rouquet 1991, 79).

As an audience member, I clearly experience the transfer of weight from the top of the toe to the arms. With the extrapolation of these directions, Jaczewska magnifies the space between inhalation and exhalation, and the trajectory between the two actions. I experience the rise to the toes as inhalation. Air presses against the lungs, stretching them to their limits. Exhalation manifests itself in the movement towards the ground, a short release, which quickly becomes a struggle for oxygen. The trembling of the dancer's muscles visualises the awaiting of a new inhalation.

The relation between balance, breathing, and weight is not new in dance. Jaczewska's choreography draws on Doris Humphrey's observation that breathing is an essential dancing experience that relates to the transfer of weight, the effect of gravity, and the play between balance and imbalance (Utrecht 1998, 179). Humphrey states, 'To fall is to yield; to recover is to re-affirm one's power over gravity and one-self. Falling and recovering is the very stuff of movement, the constant flux which is going on in every living body all the time' (Humphrey in Main 2012, 17). In *Grey*, the performers' dancing of their breathing makes me conscious of my own breathing movement, revealing to me how with each exhalation I surrender my body to gravity. I reduce and minimize the inner spaces of my body. I tighten. When I inhale, on the other hand, I let the inner space of my body stretch and grow. My body rises and feels light because my vertebrae take distance from each other, and oxygen enters my blood circulation while carbon dioxide exits. Fresh air. New possibilities.

By the end of the performance, the dancers have taken the movements back into their chests. They speed up their breathing pace. As they accelerate, the volume of their exhalations rises. The energetic force of breath becomes audible:

Inhale …… Exhale …… Inhale …… Exhale …… Inhale …… Exhale …… Inhale …… Exhale

Align …… Arch …… Align …… Arch …… Align …… Arch …… Align …… Arch

The movement spreads out through their bodies: knees bend; arms follow the arching of the spine and shoulders, hands open and close. I witness the repetition of movement and acceleration. I long for the process to keep going. The breathing accelerates towards mere answer to the biological demand of a dancing body. I see and hear the fight of the body. Arendt tells us that the body is fighting the forces of its world (Arendt [1958] 2015, 9), and this fight appears in this encounter with

the dancing body. Their bodies become dedicated to sustaining themselves within the ruthlessness of repetition.

With this phrase of accelerating breath, Jaczewska reveals breathing as habit. Gaston Bachelard notes that when we return to an old house we used to live in, we may be surprised 'to find that the most delicate gestures, the earliest gestures suddenly come alive'. He writes, 'The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house' (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 36). But what about that even earlier house, the house of our body? A change of direction, and the intimate movements that go with it, suddenly and immediately come alive when returning to that oldest house, the house of the non-breath. The change of direction in the non-breath is one of 'the most delicate gestures' because it makes the silence in between inhalation and exhalation speak. Jaczewska, for her part, declares, 'Home is where you can listen to yourself because you don't understand the talks inside of the public transport'; it's 'an equal amount of departures and arrivals' (Jaczewska 2017b). Jaczewska seems to suggest that a closer listening to each other's breathing sets in motion a habitual movement, which in turn allows people to feel 'at home' because of its inherent change of direction.

The delicacy of gestures: *Grey* in the light of Arendt and Louppe

According to Louppe a gesture consists of 'the visible emanation of an invisible corporal genesis' (Louppe [1997] 2010, 73). By letting the dancers dance their breathing, Jaczewska visibly exposes the invisible corporeality of inhalation and exhalation, which carries the full intensity of a body. The (danced) breathing movements in *Grey* are thus no longer mere movements, but gestures. During this fragment in the choreography, the breathing praxis engages the whole body. Due to the enlargement and extrapolation of the breathing movement, it seems as if the breathing slows down. The slowness functions as a magnifying glass and engages my breathing body in a corporeal awareness (Louppe [1997] 2010, 74). It triggers a sense of attentiveness to weight, to what is happening in the bodies of the dancers and how that relates to my own body.

When the dancers dance their own breathing, I recognize: an upward movement (rising to the toes on an inhalation); a standstill (holding the raised position during the non-breath); a downward moment (bringing the body to a parallel position with the floor on an exhalation); and another standstill (fighting gravity while holding the body's breath as long as possible). From this observation a striking resemblance occurs between this phrase in the choreography and Arendt's phasing of appearance.

What appears is the body as a breathing agent and, in particular, my own body as a breathing agent. For Arendt, the revelation of the agent is an inherent characteristic of an action (in her specific use of this term). Through the action the agent appears in the public domain and to the others. Action creates the condition for remembrance (Arendt [1958] 1998, 8). As a spectator I suddenly remember how breathing carries the possibility of being an action in itself. It is as if, by witnessing the non-breath of the dancers, I remember my first breath, through which I first appeared to others in public. As if I return home. The breathing crosses the boundary between dancers and audience. Only now am I fully able to engage with the choreography, because I tune

in to the breathing and overcome the distance between my own body and that of the dancers. I make myself at home in their dancing, their breathing. I allow the public in my private discovery of breathing as an action, as praxis.

Arendt claims that an action can only remain an action so long as it speaks (Arendt [1958] 2015, 163). Because this tuning of the breath is rooted in the risen consciousness of the breathing movement and the paths oxygen takes through my body—its organs, muscles, and veins—I can now state that if breathing speaks as an action does, it speaks without words and in gestures.

Thomas Kasulis call this communication with gestures 'intimation': 'The need to be explicit, the effort to explain, the urge to fill in the silence—all become muted in ever deepening levels of intimation where the slightest gesture or facial expression may express more than enough' (Kasulis 2002, 28). In the context of breathing, this leaves room to reveal dynamics of underlying intensities and tensions. The silence of the moving bodies becomes a polygot (Jaczewska, 2019), revealing how the breathing body allows the most private self and the public body to co-exist in proximity. The non-breath reveals itself as a gestural sphere: a place of proximity (Louppe [1997] 2010, 43) where I allow myself to hesitate which direction to take next without being overwhelmed or paralyzed by doubt.

The non-breath as place of proximity closely relates to what Jaczewska describes as a home: 'an equal amount of departures and arrivals, given that "away from" and "back to" refer to the same walls' (Jaczewska 2017b). Only by the choice to leave and to go back to a certain place can you make it your home. This means that in order to make the world their home, humans have to choose directions. The necessity of hesitation for a place of proximity and the threat of doubt underlines the delicate character of this gesture.

In *Grey,* direction is chosen through an accentuated inhalation. This is most obvious when a performer on the top of her toes suddenly inhales and positions her body parallel to the floor. With each exhalation the bodies of the performers thus prepare for a change of direction. Because of its inherent non-breath, breathing generates several possibilities to change direction. When breathing together, I am confronted with the others (the dancers) and I try to get a grip on my hesitation and the possible paths and lines in the web of human affairs. While breathing, we (the dancers and I) explore the space between us humans, the space of appearance. I reconcile myself with the reality of my own breathing and try to understand the web of human affairs.

Within the relation between audience and dancers in *Grey*, breathing functions as the trigger to remember the non-breath as a house. But to make it a home everyone constantly needs to choose direction, whether they continue together and remain engaged, or their paths split and become disengaged. If no one chooses a direction the non-breath remains a house and 'the warm substance of intimacy resumes its form' (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 48). But if one is able to hesitate, and afterwards choose direction, one will rediscover intimacy.

Because of the delicacy embedded in the change of direction, the non-breath is when I start to take care of my own breathing and tune in to breathing as an action. In this simultaneity of appearance

and tenderness towards the self, intimacy will start to change its form due to the co-existence of public and private. Exactly because of the co-existence of public and private, which is needed to hesitate about which direction to take, the renewed intimacy differs strongly from what Arendt defined as intimacy, namely a withdrawal from the public into private self-absorption (Arendt [1958] 1998, 45). For Arendt there was no co-existence between public and private, but she already anticipated a tension when she warned against the absorption of the private by the public. However, such an absorption has? occurred and intimacy indeed no longer means a withdrawal from the public, but a key to publicity, something it longs for (Berlant 1998, 282).

The renewed intimacy, which appears in the co-existence of the public and private, once again hides from view (Bachelard [1958] 2014, 88) but embeds a public quality and becomes highly sensitive in the non-breath. The rediscovered intimacy is what the non-breath 'speaks' about. But what do I sense?

In my experience of *Grey* the experience of being with others in public does not deny or usurp my most private feeling of 'home'. On the contrary, while breathing I allow both at the same time. The limits and borders dividing my body and the breathing bodies of the dancers become tangible. Due to the boundary-crossing characteristic of breathing as an action I experience a corporeal awareness of the border between private and public, and its functioning and its importance, but without re-installing it. With this reading of *Grey* I suggest that the drive behind action is no longer Arendt's question of how to appear in public, but how to rediscover intimacy and how to allow the 'delicate gesture' of the other.

(Re)discovering intimacy with Chantal Akerman: the re-ally-sation between the public and private

In order to get a better idea of the rediscovery of intimacy, I take a closer look at the work of filmmaker Chantal Akerman, and in particular the way she uses the action of breathing to manifest a tension between private and public and existence. The 2012 survey of her work in MHKA (Antwerp) was entitled *Too Far, Too Close*, referring to how Akerman addresses the ambiguous relation between the self and the other (Roelstraete 2012, 7). The title of the exhibition seems to formulate the tensions embedded in a place of proximity due to the co-existence of public and private. In almost all of her works Akerman plays with the (dis)appearance of the self in relation to the other at moments of transgression or separation (ibid., 1); in these moments of crisis, it feels as if her characters try to get back in touch with themselves. In her book *To Be Born,* Luce Irigaray labels such a re-connection with the self as 'self-affection', and ascribes it to a realisation of one's limits (Irigaray 2017, 17). Where does the 'I' stop and the other begin, and where is the border between public and private situated?

In *Toute une nuit* (1982), Akerman shows us a dozen of characters in the daily recurring timespan between evening and morning. The film spends time with each of the characters, and as spectators we only encounter most of the characters once during the whole film. The film depicts different people dealing with the struggle to fall asleep or negotiating the urge to go outside, to flee into the

direction of the night, away from the other. Listening to *Toute une nuit*, I constantly hear changes of directions in the omnipresent sound of footsteps. To recall Jaczewska's description of home, the characters constantly walk 'away from' and 'back to' the 'same walls' in a feverish attempt to make the city, or the night, their home. If home is a place where you can listen to yourself (Jaczewska 2017b), making yourself at home in the world demands a change in direction. I re-watch one scene from *Tout une nuit*, where the change of direction is obviously manifested:

A man and a woman sit next to each other on a couch. Through the camera movement I enter their living room just as the man falls asleep. He loudly inhales and exhales. I hear his breathing only once. From then on, I see his chest move slowly up and down. Suddenly I hear his wife shuffle next to him, and my gaze switches towards her. Because of the previous deep sigh of her husband, I immediately notice the breathing movement of her chest. With each inhalation the movement becomes bigger. Several times between inhalation and exhalation she moves her upper body forward. The leather of the sofa is crushed. She hesitates. She deeply exhales, and with her last visible inhalation she stands up and leaves the house. The inhalation ending her hesitation actualises her choice of direction. She stands up, an action which wakes her husband, who says, 'Allons en ville? Allez danser?' ('Are we going to town? Are we going for a dance?' Akerman 1989, 00:19:48). With the accentuated inhalation they flee into the city and move towards the other.

But while wriggling on the sofa, the woman hesitates. The hesitation reminds me of the contradiction captured in Arendt's sentence, 'I can flee appearance only in appearance' (Arendt 1978, 23). The woman wants to flee from the walls of the house and from the habit of staying at home watching television. When going outside with her husband to dance, they allow their intimate lives into the public. Their change of direction combines both comfort and disruption. Exactly due to this combination I feel the tension and co-existence of the private and the public. With their change of direction, they pursue an action to make themselves at home in the world.

In another Akerman film, *Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978), the character of Anna is in between cities, searching to make herself at home in the world, and struggling with comfort and disruption. This struggle is shown during a scene in which Anna enters her hotel room, sits down on her bed, and makes herself comfortable. She undresses and lays herself down on her back. I watch the breathing of her naked body. After several breathing cycles she convinces herself to move towards the window. She opens the curtain. Silence. She stands still with her back towards the camera. She breathes. She hesitates. And then with a sudden inhalation she opens the window. I hear trains. They arrive and leave. At that very moment Anna allows the public into the private. Both co-exist.

The scene triggers a sudden realisation: Akerman frequently combines the image of breathing with sounds from the exterior. Often her characters visually underline this combination by opening or closing a window or a curtain. In the combination of a private image and a public sound, the private and the public become allied. Each time I notice the character's breath, they seem to reconsider the border between exterior and interior. They realise where they come from, where they are, and where they want to go. But this realisation only happens if they listen, if they enable themselves to re-ally self and other, private and public.

In contrast to the word *hearing*, which Arendt always seems to use in the context of a space of appearance, *listening* isn't a purely receptive mode. On the contrary, it demands attention and effort. Sound artist and philosopher Salomé Voegelin describes the relation between hearing and listening as follows: 'listening discovers and generates the heard'; it is 'a method of exploration' (Voegelin 2010, 4). Through listening I do not appear in the world, as is the case with hearing, but I enable myself and the other to appear from, through, and around that world. This is possible because listening reveals an intimation, a communication through gestures (such as breathing, opening windows, and walking) with the self, the other, and the world about their interrelation. Through listening I acknowledge the question of scale posed by intimacy that, as Lauren Berlant puts it, 'links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective' (Berlant 1998, 283). Due to its embodied re-ally-sation of public and private, listening transforms a space of appearance into a place of proximity. More than 'a place of encounter', this place of proximity can be defined as the realisation of a somewhere in order to go elsewhere.

Epilogue

When watching scenes from the films of Akerman I witness how the characters re-ally the border between public and private in order to realise where they come from and where they go. I acknowledge their re-discovery of intimacy and their struggle to find balance between comfort and disruption. I am one of the witnesses through which they appear, but as an audience member, whatever desire I may have to be heard remains simply a desire. I remain the non-appeared audience.

In my experience of *Grey*, however, I am the one re-allying and realising where I come from, the 'unforgettable house' of non-breath. Through the danced extrapolation of the movement of breathing, I become aware of my own breathing movements and the paths of air through my body and life. I remember how my first breath gave me life and was responsible for my appearance into the world. The visual emanation of breathing as an action on stage enables me to set myself in motion, to re-ally. Through the breathing of the performers I make myself at home in their dancing. I describe the non-breath as a space of appearance, realised in a change of direction. This allowed the public into my private discovery of breathing as an action, a praxis (Arendt [1958] 2015, 175–179). For Arendt 'action' has a key function in the bringing into being of a space of appearance (Arendt 1958, 199). However, she argues, the action of creating a space of appearance isn't enough; the actions of the ones gathered need to *speak*.

But what about the need to listen? In this article, listening is revealed as the rediscovery of the intimacy that the non-breath speaks about. Listening becomes a process of intuiting and imagining intimacy as a re-ally-sation of the border between public and private, when both co-exist. It transforms the space of appearance into a place of proximity, where it is permitted—even necessary—to hesitate, without this hesitation meaning that one is paralyzed by doubt. By listening to *Grey*, I accept the invitation offered by breathing as an action towards contemplation.

Notes

[1] The Dutch translation of a space of appearance into 'een plaats van ontmoeting' or a place of encounter incorporates movement and a limited temporality. Following the British anthropologist Tim Ingold it is exactly by movement that place delineates from space. The delineation follows the gestures performed by those who will / want to inhabit the space, without being stuck at it. The place of encounter isn't the space where inhabitants live in, instead it is a place where they knot their lifelines together, before heading towards the next place. The place of encounter in contrast to the space of appearance, is not the place inside which people appear, but a place through, around, to and from which they appear. (Ingold 2011, 148) It is the somewhere on their way to elsewhere.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

CHOREOGRAPHIES OF DISSENT AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC SPACE IN STATE-OF-EMERGENCY TURKEY[1]

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Over the last decade, the consolidation of an authoritarian political system in Turkey, accompanied by neoliberal socio-cultural and economic programs, has set a stage for political unrest in the country. Since 2007, large-scale public assemblies opposing these government policies were gradually repressed through legal, constitutional, and coercive measures. A state of emergency declared following an attempted coup d'état in 2016 restricted even more profoundly the rights of political public gatherings. During this period, the city of Istanbul, the cultural and financial capital of the country, had been the center of a major struggle between urban activists from a variety of grassroots organizations and governing bodies in the city such as the governor, the police, and the state authorities. Activists defending cultural, social, and environmental rights as well as gender equality organized major campaigns and disseminated their political statements among the urban public while reclaiming the right to use public spaces of Istanbul. This article aims to contribute to the documentation and analysis of the dissenting struggle against the increased level of political difficulties since 2016, as well as to show how dissenters innovatively choreograph the urban space and create ephemeral, mobile, and minor scale political assemblies as a mode of resistance which I conceptualize as "tactics of dispersal."

By way of introduction, the 2016 LGBTQI+ Pride Parade was a crucial moment in changing spatial politics of dissent in urban Turkey, encapsulating the contest between the state and protesters and foreshadowing the shifting landscape of grassroots activism. Pride had been celebrated in Istanbul since 2003, yet the twelfth annual march in 2015 was suddenly banned because it coincided with Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for Muslims, both falling in the month of June. Despite

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):90–108
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51269
ISSN 2057–7176

Governor Vasip Şahin's clampdown, participants gathered on the appointed date in Istanbul's Taksim Square, the symbolic center of left-leaning and other dissenting movements in Turkey, and were violently attacked and dispersed by the police. Citing concerns about security and public order, the Governor declared the 2016 Pride Parade also illegal, which meant, once again, police violence, custody, and torture for the demonstrators. In response, the Istanbul LGBTQI+ Pride Committee released a press statement inviting protesters to "obey the call of the police" and "disperse to every single corner of İstiklal Avenue." The statement reads:

> We are announcing, with sadness, that we will not be able to hold the 14th Pride March. But our confidence in ourselves, our horizon, and our dreams are much bigger than a march, İstiklal Avenue, this city, and this country. Our fight for existence goes beyond yesterday, today, and the future because we were here, we are here, and we will be here. [...]
>
> Police forces have told the people attempting to read a press statement during Trans Pride March to voice their legal and political demands: "Please disperse and allow life to go back to its normal course." We are obeying this call: On Sunday, 26 June we will disperse to every single corner of İstiklal Avenue, we are reuniting with each other on every street and avenue in Beyoğlu. Instead of living a life that is imposed on, a life that normalizes violence, oppression, and denial; we are living the life we chose, the life in which we exist with pride and honor and we are "Letting life go back to its 'normal' course" by:
>
> DISPERSING, DISPERSING, DISPERSING.
>
> (LGBTI News Turkey, 2016)

As 2016 Pride demonstrators dispersed in Taksim along İstiklal Avenue and its side streets, they moved from one place to another, searching out opportunities for interaction, momentary encounters, and rapid departures from police violence. As they had not been able to constitute a central assembly, the queer, trans, and feminist activists performed "dispersal" as an innovative form of assembly-making and a counter-movement against the maneuvers of the police. When they met briefly at a street corner, they read the above statement in public, recorded their action to disseminate on social media, and dispersed once again in the back streets of the main avenue. Since folk dancing has long been a popular form of protest in Turkey, demonstrators also formed folk dance groups during the moments in which they were able to gather in the street.[2]

In the following months, the police continued to regulate activists' bodies through forcefully dividing, segregating, enclosing, and inhibiting their movements. In response to the elevated oppression, dissenting groups further developed alternative ways of dispersing themselves in the city to defy police violence and find new locations to perform and promote political practice. Through their acts of dispersal, dissenters have expanded the space of political action by departing from the greater assembly in order to make smaller scale and moving assemblies at the peripheries of the primary space of activism.

While body politics of public assembly has been widely discussed in relation to recent social movements (Butler 2015; Foellmer 2016; Kedhar 2014; Ruiz 2017) many of these studies shared an

approach of political gatherings as massive "choreographic arrangements" that "shape and re-shape the social, the aesthetic, and the political" (Gerecke and Levin 2018, 5). My focus on dispersal complements and expands on these discussions of assembly by demonstrating how bodies act to maintain the possibility of political interaction even when they depart from the mass choreography of protest and thus continue "constructing physical interference" in the public space (Foster 2003, 412). Dispersal as a choreography is deployed both by the state forces and the activists in Turkey: on the one hand, the police violently block, prevent, scatter, disjoint, clear, and even "disappear" (detain, torture, and kill) dissenting individuals; and on the other hand, dispersal, as a survival tactic, reveals political and kinetic resilience of dissenters who continue moving, circulating, interacting, conjoining, and performing through their temporary and immediate encounters in the urban space. I suggest that this flexibility, and also ambiguity, of dispersal provides potentials for collective political agency.

In this article, I apply Hannah Arendt's analysis of the mobilization of violence, used by totalitarian states to individualize and atomize their citizens and prevent them from coming together in public assemblies, to the present situation in Turkey and discuss the framework that I call "tactics of dispersal," a set of choreographic practices of dissenters to enable political action at moments of extreme coercion. Scholars inspired by Arendtian political theory, such as Judith Butler and André Lepecki, have focused on the possibilities of assembly as a form of embodied agency to undertake progressive politics. Here, I will discuss what happens when bodies are not able to assemble in the public sphere due to police terror. I am interested in the "choreopolitics" of dispersal (Lepecki 2013): persistent choreographies which mobilize the public for social change against the hegemonic means of bodily control and political order. My theory of dispersal contributes to the emergent body of work on choreographies of assembly as it updates and nuances the idea of what assembly is and can be and how it works choreographically under current social and political developments consolidating authoritarian governments in Turkey and beyond.

I present a conceptual framework of tactics of dispersal on the basis of my fieldwork, which draws on numerous interviews I conducted with participants of protests in Istanbul between November 2016 and October 2017, such as those who joined feminist and LGBTQI+ demonstrations, anti-emergency decree protests, environmental movements, and urban grassroots activist efforts. These interviews were mainly conducted with dissenters who self-identify as women from various political, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Despite their different, and often conflicting, political agendas, they all oppose the authoritarian state regime and its establishment with legal and forcible implementations. With these examples, I discuss the dispersal choreography of the police that sought to "isolate" and individualize dissenters and the ways that activists disperse in the city in order to carve out the public space for their political aims. I analyze various iterations of dispersal and argue that demonstrators tactically use and subvert the police strategy of dispersal to mobilize peripheral urban spaces and create ephemeral gatherings in times of political crisis.

In the following pages, I will introduce the concept of dispersal by looking at its multiple modes and manifestations in the city. First, I will explore recent re-configurations of the public space under authoritarian policies, and explore how dissenting citizens were exiled from the principle public

square of left-wing activism in Istanbul with brutal applications of dispersal. Then, I will investigate how dispersal becomes a potentially transformative mode of political engagement through counter-maneuvers of dissenters who scatter throughout the city. Finally, I will examine protesters' folk dance gatherings to discuss how they claim the public space through the transience of dance. Building on Arendtian political theory, my analyses will show that tactical deployments of dispersal (in both urban and bodily scales) enable demonstrators to convert the police choreography into political action during which they experiment with the ideas of plurality, inclusivity, and perseverance.

Exile from Taksim Square, the Iconic Center of Political Activism

A brief historical discussion about the urban space politics of the grassroots movements in Turkey is significant to understand how dissenters have been exiled from the main square of political activism in Istanbul and dispersed in the city. The Ottoman Empire, preceding the Turkish Republic inaugurated in 1923, invested in constituting its capital city of Istanbul as the model of the empire's social and political values. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, today's Taksim area, formerly named *Pera*, has been the center of overtly secular and "modern" lifestyles with its public parks, street lights, and tramways as well as theaters and other entertainment venues. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, this area continued to be an important social and financial center for the city. Pietro Canonica, a prominent Italian artist, crafted the Republic Monument in 1928 to provide Taksim Square with its "national" characteristics. The monument depicts Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the republic, as a soldier on one façade and as a teacher in modern clothes on the other, signaling the core values of the emergent Turkish nation after the first World War.

The monument marked the square as the center of public national ceremonies in the early twentieth century. In the 1930s, state officials initiated a popular ceremony where denizens of Istanbul would pay tribute to the Republic Monument with a wreath (Batuman 2015, 10). In the 1940s and 50s, civil demonstrators with nationalist sentiments also chose Taksim to stage their protests against non-Muslim minorities living in this area, mainly Christian Greek and Armenian citizens of Turkey. Demonstrations that began at the Republic Monument usually moved down along İstiklal Street, which has continued to be the major trajectory for protests until today. In the 1960s, left-wing grassroots groups and students' movements became more visible than right-wing agitation in Taksim Square. Students' demonstrations often started in Beyazıt Square in the historical peninsula, a location close to the Istanbul University, and continued with more participation as they marched to Taksim Square (10–11).

A significant incident that made the square an iconic space of left-leaning dissenting activism took place on May Day of 1977. On that day, large groups of protesters, including students' organizations, workers' unions, and political parties, converged on Taksim from different directions and gathered around the monument. Gunfire from an unknown source suddenly dispersed the crowd, and as a result, thirty-four people died and hundreds were injured. Two years later, May Day celebration was banned from Taksim, and it remained forbidden for the next three decades.

Protesters persistently challenged the ban in the following years by trying to reach the square despite the accelerating police compulsion. Representing a power contestation between the police and protesters, Taksim Square has become the symbolic center of left-leaning activism in Turkey.

In 2013, another crucial shift in the urban political history of dissent occurred in Taksim Square. A small group of demonstrators occupied Taksim-Gezi Park, a recreational area adjacent to the square, to stop bulldozers from razing the green area. The occupation began in opposition to the government's commercial transformation plans targeting historical sites and public parks.[3] The demolition was part of a government redevelopment initiation that included construction of a shopping mall and a luxury residence through re-constructing the Ottoman Artillery Barracks, demolished in 1931. Protesters decried the lack of transparency about plans for the area's redevelopment. Riot police forcefully dispersed those gathered in the park, which brought more people to defend the place and converted the environmental resistance into a nationwide political mobilization for social justice in Turkey.[4]

The 2013 Taksim-Gezi Park movement ended when the police stormed the park and evacuated it. Since then, the Republic Monument has been usually closed off to activist gatherings and isolated by police barricades. Any attempt at political demonstration in the square and the adjacent İstiklal Street has been banned and met with serious police attack. In addition to spatial enclosure of Taksim, a series of ISIS attacks and the state's insufficient effort to prevent fatalities (2015–2016) rendered mass demonstrations and political gatherings nearly impossible in Istanbul. Following an attempted coup d'état in July 2016, the right to public assembly for anti-government demonstrations was officially prohibited by the declaration of a state of emergency, which was extended in regular intervals for two years until July 2018. During this time, many state-of-emergency decrees were instituted not only targeting perpetrators of the coup, but also causing over 100,000 anti-government and dissenting teachers, academics, and public service employees to be dismissed from their jobs or to suffer false accusations (Human Rights Watch 2018; Hürriyet Daily News 2018b; Pişkin 2018). The decrees legalized arbitrary dismissals, arrests, and killings of the associates of all oppositional groups, including scholars, students, journalists, human rights defenders, and members of parliament—notably MPs of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). By mobilizing nationalist and pro-state mass movements within a polarized society, creating the conditions for exile and deportation of dissenters, and imprisoning members of civil society, state authorities created an atmosphere of permanent danger and instability.

This process of normalization and legalization of violence and fatalities under the conditions of Turkey's state of emergency exemplifies Giorgio Agamben's concept of a state of exception, "a space without law" or "a zone of anomie" (2005, 50–51) that Agamben defines as a "temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger" (96). While the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics refers to the management and distribution of life as a fundamental technology of power of liberal states (Foucault 2007), Agamben sees the basis of power in a politics of death, what he calls "thanatopolitics." He argues that the sovereign state enters into intimate fields of life through its institutional experts such as the doctor, the priest, and the scientist, who altogether serve to convert biopolitics into thanatopolitics in which the sovereign establishes authoritative

social and political order by giving death (1998, 72). This form of power produces "bare life," located at the margins of the political order, and a body that is therefore killable since it is deprived of political rights and the protection of law (Agamben 1998, 52). When the state of exception expands without limits and becomes the rule itself, "bare life" coincides with the political realm, and any form of state violence is considered legitimate.

Building on the state's self-attained right to kill individuals in Agamben's theory, Achille Mbembe (2003) elucidates how modern states operate through spatial segregation and mass killings of populations. His notions of "necropower" and "necropolitics" question how some populations are considered "killable" because of their race or ethnicity, construed as an essential biological or cultural difference. Mbembe's concept of power resonates with Judith Butler's theory of "grievability" (2009), investigating how some bodies are produced in the era of the war-on-terror as "disposable" when their lives are not counted as mournable and grievable. Butler argues that violence operates through certain bodies iteratively, and in each iteration, it increasingly becomes the normative condition for marginalized bodies, whose lives do not register as having value, and are therefore at risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and exposure to arbitrary state violence (26). These theories speak to the hegemonic performance of dispersal through which the Turkish state enacts politics of terror and a vulgar exhibition of its power. A predominant choreography of dispersal manifests the way the state commands centralizing authority and can drive out its opponents, showing them to be on the run, in fear, cowering, always as potential detainees and murder targets. It aids in the creation of an atmosphere of repression through the display of pure authority and occupation of public space by state agencies like the police or the military.

An oppressive environment can be maintained largely through the reproduction of abiding fear—a strategy which Hannah Arendt analyzes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* ([1958] 1966), where she argues that the creation of despair is a requirement for totalitarian regimes. A totalitarian rule is supported by the mobilization of terror by governing forces, arbitrary arrests, a secret police presence, and control of everyday life. Arendt analyzes the ways in which ruling powers use police coercion to destabilize all other institutions in society and spread the condition of mass atomization and isolation upon which the totalitarian movement thrives (323). Arendt defines isolation as "a loss of stable social relationships, loss of common sense. It is the desperately disorienting one of losing the company of even one's own solidarity thoughts" (474). Since they are forcibly disconnected, individuals under totalitarian rule lose the potential for political engagement and efficacy.

For Arendt, atomized individuals would be powerless because they cannot move and interact to create the necessary conditions for political action. Similarly in Turkey, the new legal prohibitions of the state-of-emergency decrees, as well as terror attacks and police violence, dispersed activists whenever they attempted to gather in order to form central public assemblies. But conversely, in their efforts to themselves deploy dispersal as a tactical response, demonstrators show the possibility of transforming oppressive conditions of isolation into emancipating forms of political action. As I will discuss, such a tactical approach to mobility is inherent in the acts of dispersal that

enable activists to perform their agency and convert potential violence into a relational practice of politics.

My interviews with activists were conducted during the state of emergency in Turkey, and thus they reflect dissenters' resilience and creativity under the difficult conditions of this period. Such uncertainties in the protest space and a constant struggle between the possibility and impossibility of performing demonstration made improvisation a necessary tool for both the street activists and myself as a researcher, and I usually met my interlocutors randomly at protest sites. When I talked to protesters, some of them suggested to meet later to enable us to have longer conversations; others wanted to talk on the spot, and we went to a nearby teahouse from where we could see the demonstration area and go back there when needed; some activists invited me to other political meetings before or after giving an interview so that I could be involved in grassroots politics in other spheres as well. All these different performances meant that the research practice was dynamically engaged with the conditions of the street and open for immediate changes and surprises.

On the day of a planned political meeting in Taksim Square, I went to meet Ayla,[5] an environmental and urban justice activist. The tensions were already high in İstiklal Avenue as many armed police vehicles were waiting in the area with their engines on, ready for action. Police barricades closed each street along the two-mile long avenue. During the 2013 Taksim Gezi-Park resistance, the backstreets of İstiklal had become home to many activists, who had carefully studied its blind corners, narrow openings through nineteenth-century European passages, and tricky culs-de-sac, and sussed out both friendly and hostile merchants. When I met Ayla, she was angry:

> It feels meaningless to demonstrate or march along İstiklal Avenue, because we are trapped here. They trapped us here, leaving no room to escape. You are all surrounded, and they are here to kill you. So why do you go out and walk on this street like a cage? I don't think there is a point unless you want to be killed. I don't feel excited anymore to march along İstiklal. (Istanbul, 26 April 2017)

The square and the main street were completely closed off, leaving no room for any attempt at political gathering in the area. In other instances, a central square may be permitted yet enclosed and isolated from the rest of the urban inhabitants by police barricades, which signify potential danger and emergency. In one interview, Zerrin, a social justice activist, mentioned the rally run by the pro-Kurdish HDP before the presidential referendum in April 2017. The referendum was about a constitutional change from parliamentarian to presidential system in Turkey. The rally called "El Ele" ("Hand in Hand") was located in the large Barbaros Square, next to a busy pier in the Beşiktaş neighborhood where boats run between the Asian and European sides of the city. The area was spatially isolated with the installation of police equipment. Zerrin went to the meeting, but instead of going inside the square, she watched it from outside the cordoned-off area:

> I walked all around [the barricaded square]; there was one gate and ten police officers [at the gate]. I did not enter; it was like a cage. I was not afraid, but I felt truly sad. It was painful; I did not want to be there. (Istanbul, 19 April 2017)

An enclosed, divided, and controlled space resembled a "cage" for both Ayla and Zerrin. The increased militarization of everyday life and the strong visibility of the police in Istanbul have contributed further to the precariousness of activists in public spaces: armed police vehicles called *akrep* ("scorpion") rolling through the city; soldiers wearing balaclava snow masks and carrying rifles as they walk in İstiklal Avenue; and check-points in frequently changing locations, where the police ask passersby for their identity documents for a background check, known as *GBT-kontrol* (control for "general knowledge gathering") indicated multiple forms of hegemonic choreographies of control. In addition, ongoing urban gentrification projects in Taksim dramatically increased property prices in the area. Regulations against the proliferation of cultural centers, entertainment venues, restaurants, and bars changed the social and demographic structure of Taksim. As a result of these developments, many dissenting groups, particularly feminist and LGBTQI+ communities, who had experienced severe political, cultural, and economic limitations, were exiled from the iconic Taksim Square and found alternative locations to continue their activities.

As activists find ways of struggling under changing political and spatial circumstances, authorities also study protesters' movements and look for new routes, intersections, and streets to block, enclose, and evacuate. As an example, the Istanbul Municipality has designated certain locations for the performance of dissenting political demonstrations. This serves almost to quarantine dissenting groups from the larger public, so that they would not "contaminate" the public sphere with their political ideas. In 2015, the Istanbul Governor's Office allowed the May Day celebration only in an outdoor parking lot in Beylikdüzü, two hours away from Taksim Square by public transportation (Diken 2015). In 2018, the Governor's Office issued a list of nine sites eligible for grassroots political rallies, which once again did not include Taksim Square (Hürriyet Daily News 2018a). These approved areas of protest were not only located far from the city center, but also mostly constructed through projects of land reclamation and urban gentrification, causing the dislocation and impoverishment of ethnically, racially, and economically marginalized communities in those areas. Designating these "remote" areas as sites of demonstration was paramount to inviting anti-government protesters to act as accomplices of the plans of dispossession. Dissenters have responded to these efforts of enclosure and segregation by claiming peripheral urban areas attuned to daily life and exploring other locations to maintain their political intervention.

Tactics of Dispersal: Resistive Choreographies of Dissent

How can we explore political agency in a scattered public space where bodies are unable to gather and cannot freely manifest their democratic rights in means of action? How do we contextualize collective political agency when assembling is almost impossible in an environment of compulsion and violence? How do activists negotiate dispersal, as an oppressive and totalizing maneuver of the state, through their bodily interaction? How do they expand the space of the political beyond iconic streets and squares of activism? In response to the autocratic form of dispersal practiced by the state, I want to focus on two tactical forms of dispersal: dispersing in the city to politicize its relatively peripheral areas located off the main square, and dispersing through the ephemerality

of folk dance. In both cases, activists disperse in order to maintain the potential for making political assemblies.

In her study on theatricality and resistance in the cities of Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Toronto during and after the Balkan wars in the 1990s, Silvija Jestrović demonstrates that spatial exclusion and marginalization create exilic spaces in different urban contexts. The consequence of living in a state of war nourished by an oppressive and violent nationalist regime resulted in the establishment of "inner exilic spaces—their city-within-the-city—to preserve and protect a form of urban life that had been threatened" (2013, 191). Jestrović's framework is relevant here as Istanbul has become an "exilic city" for its dissenting inhabitants in the years following the 2013 Taksim-Gezi Park resistance. Urban dissenters created "inner exilic spaces" by moving from Taksim to other neighborhoods, such as Kadıköy, Beşiktaş, and Bakırköy, which are governed by the liberal municipalities of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the main opposition of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Activists politicized inner exilic spaces within these relatively peripheral neighborhoods by persevering in the performance of sit-ins, vigils, press declarations, marching protests, and folk dance to show their opposition to the authoritarian rules and policies. They also revealed hidden histories in these new locations, layered like a palimpsest, by drawing attention to the erasure of diverse urban landscapes.

For example, Betül Celep protested her dismissal from her job as a result of a recent state-of-emergency decree by performing a vigil in one of the busiest pedestrian intersections of Kadıköy neighborhood, located in the Asian side of Istanbul. She left home every morning as if she was going to work as usual and performed a sit-in protest until late hours. Her vigil in Kalkhedon Square continued for 66 days between January 23 and March 29, 2017, during which Betül converted an everyday marketplace into a space of resistance and made her unjust discharge visible to others (*KHKadınname* 2017). Instead of the well-known Taksim Square, she picked this small pedestrian intersection, which was unknown to me until her action. In fact, I could not find any square by this name in city maps. Finally, a black-and-white photograph from the early 1900s proved that this was a market square of the Greek Orthodox Church Aya Efemiya. Through Betül's action, the old church square, which is otherwise unnoticed, is included in the social memory of dissent, as other progressive movements have also begun to utilize the square. For example, dissenting women from several grassroots organizations joined a campaign that promoted a "no" vote in the referendum on the establishment of a presidential system. Their campaign entitled "Hayır Diyen Kadınlar" ("Women Who Say No") held a demonstration in February 2017. Women met in a central street in front of the Süreyya Opera House in Kadıköy and marched along pedestrian streets where bars, cafes, and restaurants were located. When they arrived at Kalkhedon Square, they performed a press declaration and a small group of women folk-danced next to the police. Although dissenters dispersed in the city, they hence continued inspiring each other and building alternative public spaces of grassroots politics by interacting and engaging with past and present social movements that used in those spaces.

Protesters and the police continuously act to decipher and challenge each other's movements to use "dispersal" more effectively: while the police explore ways to deactivate and defuse, activists

seek to evade police violence through scattering in the public space, enabling further action. I suggest that these kinesthetic negotiations between state forces and activists participate in Hannah Arendt's notions of "isolation" and "politics." As I mentioned earlier, in Arendt's formulation, totalitarian power aims to disconnect people through the use of violence, yet the activists in Istanbul maintain the conditions of their interaction by performing a nuanced choreography of departure, which inventively keeps bodies connected in the public sphere. They thus enact what Arendt defines as the "productive potentials of isolation" ([1958] 1966, 478) through unrevealing the relational nature of dispersal movement which is also its political capacity.

In *The Human Condition* ([1958] 1998), Arendt explores the conditions of possibility for political experience and conceptualizes a "politics" that is based on "action," the act of *beginnings* (177), occurring between individuals who "live on the earth and inhabit the world" (7). To "act" is to set something in motion and start something new which cannot have been experienced before. This unexpectedness and genuine novelty are unique qualities of human action as a worldly practice. For Arendt, through our intercourse with others we communicate diverse political experiences and develop ever-changing possibilities of interaction. Since "each human can act and start something new" (viii), each interaction must be different. Such unanticipated contingency and distinctiveness of human action corresponds to "plurality" as the primary condition of (political) life. Arendt defines plurality as "living as a distinct and unique being among equals" (178). In a plural society, each member equally tries to persuade others through speech and action (26). So that plurality is realized through interpersonal exchange, coexistence, and association of a multiplicity of diverse political practices in the public realm.

Therefore, while Arendt's notion of isolation is a fertile ground for totalitarianism and also its ultimate result, the power of plurality is activated through grassroots politics valuing intersubjective action. Referring to political theorist Edmund Burke, Arendt conceptualizes power as the interaction of those who are "acting in concert" ([1958] 1966, 474). She suggests that totalitarian states aim to abolish freedom of movement and inhibit people from initiating new networks, yet individuals continue interacting in alternative and creative ways to resist the isolating power and to establish plurality. Arendt highlights the necessity of praxis, of collective action, against the devastating impacts of those dividing, isolating, and encapsulating power of hegemony. Moreover, because politics is not given or inscribed into bodies but a product of specific histories and of historically changing conditions, collective political action is relentlessly re-learned, mentored, practiced, and rehearsed through interpersonal exchange and experience.

The social and political potential of the Arendtian notions of politics and action have been a concern of not only political scientists but also performance and dance studies scholars. Among those include Judith Butler, who highlights the goal of concerted actions and unpredictable alliances of bodies in public spaces as she explores agency in relation to the idea of public assembly. In her conversations with Athena Athanasiou, Butler builds on the Arendtian concept of action as human existence and experience, and argues that through moving together and performing assemblies, dissenters claim recognition by "being there," or appearing in public space. Butler suggests that their presence and amalgamation mean "we are *still* here," or, "we haven't yet

been disposed of. We haven't slipped quietly into the shadows of public life" (Athanasiou and Butler 2013, 196). When people are assembled in the street, Butler sees them claiming a bodily existence as a statement of plural, interdependent, and relational politics. Judith Butler offers a performative theory of assembly through which one can examine the resilience of precarious bodies when they act together in interdependent ways. Precariousness paves the way for mutual dependency; it is an act of reciprocity that establishes a sense of "we" for sustained and sustainable political relations (Butler 2009, 14). Interdependency delineates a constellation of individuals who are profoundly responsive to each other; it is a "social network of hands that seeks to minimize the unlivability of lives" (Butler 2015, 67).

Dance theorist André Lepecki (2013) also offers a look at the Arendtian notion of politics in relation to human movement and shows the possibilities of exploring these concepts fruitfully in dance studies. Applying Arendt's ideas of intersubjective relationality and moving together as a way to create novel forms of political action, Lepecki examines the relationship between the political and the kinetic. He argues that dancing bodies move together in a search for alternative configurations against the controlling mechanisms of power. Choreography creates particular trajectories for bodies through the experience and practice of movement as freedom, which he calls "choreopolitics." These choreographies are resistive because they invent, activate, seek, and experiment with action to exercise emancipating possibilities (2013, 20). In contrast, Lepecki's concept of "choreopolicing" refers to the restrictive and oppressive force of the state and police control in two ways: As a theoretical concept, the police "choreographs" (19) by determining "the space of circulation for protesters" (16), which demobilizes political action because it does not allow activists to initiate their own movement. As agents of control, cops secure such circulation by imposing blockades, channeling demonstrators, dispersing crowds, and lifting up and dragging bodies around, and thereby exercise choreographic command of the protesters' bodies (15–16).

Lepecki theorizes choreopolitics and choreopolicing as binary categories in which restrictive and controlling acts are found in opposition to emancipatory performances of those who always find ways of moving. As an overarching concept, choreopolicing is about preventing activists from moving together through commanding a forceful and continuous circulation in space. In Turkey under current political developments, however, choreopolicing refers to a thanatopolitical strategy of power that operates through not only circulation but also, and specifically, exclusion and elimination. Nevertheless, similar to other stagings of power, it is far from being monolithic and immutable. As dissenters in Istanbul alter the police choreography by tactically dispersing themselves, they gather together in smaller assemblies with ever-changing combinations of bodies. In this vein, dispersal in recent political protests appears as a relational as well as subversive choreography through which the protesters interact with the police, even as they interact with each other, to transform hegemonic violence into political potentials for resistance. Although dispersal mobilizes fear and serves the isolating violence enacted by the state and its police technologies, a tactical repurposing of the choreography manifests an aim for collective action derived from activists' distinct political practices and efforts for relationality, highlighting the valence of the Arendtian notion of "politics."

When urban activists from left-wing, feminist, LGBTQI+, environmentalist, and other dissenting groups deploy dispersal, they make use of the transformative capacity of choreography and tactically resist the strategic maneuvers of the state apparatus. Here I am drawing on Michel de Certeau's (1984) distinction of the "tactics" of ordinary people from governing "strategies" that often take the forms of totalizing discourses and meta-narratives. De Certeau argues that strategies are architectural, based on place, and thus related to the oversight of property; but tactics are articulated in the details of everyday conduct; they are resistive, quotidian, temporary practices of the body, a system of "microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structures and deflecting their functioning" (30). Tactics are related to uses of time more than space since "the space of a tactic is the space of the other" (37). Hence, tactics are transient and necessitate mobility; unlike strategies, a tactical space "cannot keep what it wins" (37), in which sense it can never possess property; but it will always be "poaching on the property of others" (xii). De Certeau conceptualizes a tactic as an "art of the weak" (37); it is also a bricolage through which the artist bravely juxtaposes diverse elements at hand in order to provide a known phenomenon with a fresh perspective. Therefore, fixing bodies in space may enable their identification and subsequent targeting, but constantly circulating, unfixed bodies escape the state's radar and defy it. Dispersal, as a tactical move, an aesthetic political intervention of dissent, requires a constant occupation of the space of the other. It renders bodies relational at the moment of their departure from the collective body, and makes possible ad hoc and hit-and-run types of assembly under the precarious conditions of the street.

Folk Dance and Choreopolitics of Dispersal

Shifting from the scale of the city to that of individual bodies, another tactical use of dispersal is deployed through the activist appropriation of forms of folk dance. From the 1930s to the 1970s, Turkish state institutions collected, codified, and regulated folk dances. The state elites repurposed non-Muslim and non-Turkish minority dances as part of a corpus of traditions echoing a Turkish culture and history. When regional folk dances were nationalized, all existing or perceived non-Turkish elements in their repertoires (non-Turkish names, narratives, costumes, and props) were replaced with their "Turkish" counterparts. "Turkification" in language resulted in the change of non-Turkish dance names into Turkish ones, although their corresponded meanings were not necessarily preserved. These nationalist endeavors resulted in the standardization of particular folk dance choreographies as representatives of their respective genres. While some choreographies became part of the state repertoire and taught at institutions, such as public universities and folk dance associations, others have been peripheralized or excluded from the repertoire.

Since the 1990s, demonstrators have employed these suppressed dances, such as styles of *halay* and *horon*, as a form of opposition to the disciplining and controlling implementations of the nation-state. In contemporary protests, both genres are popularly used by groups of people in different sizes: *halay* is a Turkish genre name of Kurdish circle dances, which is typically called *govend* (dance) in Kurdish. As a heritage tradition of Kurds in eastern and southeastern regions of

Turkey, *govend* was marginalized in the 1980s and became a political symbol of the Kurdish struggle for cultural recognition in Turkey during the 1990s. *Horon*, on the other hand, has been considered a national dance representing a supposedly homogeneous culture and history of the Black Sea region, in northeastern Turkey. In fact, several ethnic communities were (and partially still are) living next to each other in the region including Pontian Greeks, the Hemşin, the Laz, Georgians, and Turks. Although they all perform *horon* with differences in style and execution, only one *horon* sequence, choreographed in the 1970s, is considered the national form.

Activists manipulate and transform the institutionalized choreographies by merging them with other folk dances, conglomerating their various stylings, using an ordinary movement vocabulary at moments of high tension, and engaging with a politics of emotions so that their dance demonstrates anger, mourning, and lament as well as joy against faces of power. In this tactic, protesters perform folk dance aligning their bodies in circles, semi-circles, and lines. Each dance group has a leader who improvises and guides others throughout movement sequences. In protests, the role of the leader becomes a temporary position that anyone can claim during the dance. Demonstrators usually convert traditional accessories of folk dances, such as handkerchiefs, into political signs such as banners; they may individually interpret and execute movements in rhythmic harmony with others; and they may freely enter and exit the dance. Many of these qualities are typically considered inappropriate in institutional and traditional iterations of folk dance. To "join in" the group, participants proactively hold hands with others, yet also consider those who may want to dance next to their comrades or only among women or men. When a dancer leaves the group, they step back gently to make sure that the (semi)circle or line form is not broken due to their absence. If the dance is terminated by a collective action, then protesters briefly clap and chant political slogans as a way of declaring the end of the event, and often disperse in different directions. Folk dance groups enable activists to rehearse alternative, enduring, and persistent choreographies of dispersal and also render temporal and smaller size assemblies possible since they can be performed for a few minutes and with a handful of people. The ways in which protesters unite, depart from, and position themselves in the dance also implies how they negotiate moving together, innovate political action, and contest power.

Dissenters discuss and negotiate the Arendtian concept of politics through a "choreopolitics" of dance that relies on several choreographic conditions which make moving together possible. Among those, below I discuss two components of folk dance as protest event: "temporality" that is necessary to explore *when* activists join in and exit from the dance, and "positionality" that provides information about *how* activists create a relational space during the dance. My examples analyze how dissenters develop ways of participation in the urban public sphere by differentially locating themselves among other bodies, learning steps from one another, and initiating acts of moving together. I focus here not on professional dancers but mostly non-professional dancer-activists who may or may not have previous dance training. Some demonstrators dance only in protest events, yet they commit to deploying folk dance through a persistent practice of learning, mentoring, and repeating during years of participating in political activism. Thereby dancer-activists own the authority of performance and dedicate themselves to execute the choreography despite spatial inhibition and police oppression. I engage with diverse dancer-activists' experiences

and voices in order to address how "choreopolitics" is enacted at a grassroots level to promote plural politics in the Turkish context.

With regard to temporality, folk dances are often spontaneously organized at the moment of demonstration: protesters initiate a dance group within a few minutes, convey their political message and demands, and disperse so as not to be captured. Activists usually perform for as long as they can and depart from the dance circle or line when the police intervene. Suzi, an activist in the Kurdish cultural rights movement and the labor movement, says that when she feels comfortable about the footwork, she joins the dance and keeps going "until the end," without specifying when a dance ends in a protest (Istanbul, 4 April 2017). Like Suzi, Ayla also prefers to stay as long as she can, saying, "I do not leave the dance until the music is over and the group is dispersed… even if I feel short of breath, I do not leave because I do not want to give up the energy that I share with other dancing people" (Istanbul, 26 April 2017). Similarly, Eylem, from a left-wing revolutionary group, is unwilling to leave before the dance is over because she does not want to disrupt the order of the dancing bodies. While she can freely enter and exit the dance, she finds line formations more difficult to leave because the line alignment would expose her absence if she left the dance. She stays in the choreography to show respect to others because her abrupt departure may cause confusion among her comrades and even "ruin" the dance (Istanbul, 6 April 2017). Folk dancing requires a profound consideration of how one's actions would influence the others in a collective movement and thus supports interdependency.

Although the dance may end within a few short minutes, activists repeat the choreography each time they gather during protests and continuously establish spaces for interaction among each other. During her vigil in Kalkhedon Square, Betül Celep performed folk dance many times together with those who came to support her. She emphasizes the importance of getting together with strangers in these protest dance gatherings, saying,

> You hold the hand of a person who you do not know. You work with this person on something that you both feel enthusiastic about; this is a very powerful [connection].
>
> You connect with a passerby for five minutes; and only in five minutes that you share with another person, you resist against isolating efforts of the system. (Istanbul, 28 March 2017)

A brief meeting that occurs during the dance has the potential to create change in a larger collective because dancers test the possibility of cooperation among each other through their interaction, negotiation, struggle, and support. The ephemerality of choreography allows dissenters not only to maneuver against forces of "immobility" and control, but also to relate to each other in ways that are always new, enabling them to mobilize the public while disorienting the police. In each gathering, activists redistribute, reinvent, and realign themselves in relation to others and against potential implications of police choreography, reclaiming controlled spaces through their kinetic knowledge. Instead of obeying commands of the police, activist-dancers perform agency by staying

in the choreography "until the end." They thus affirm political potentials of the dance through their persistent circulations against the isolating and individuating power of hegemonic dispersal.

With regard to positionality, dissenters not only maintain the intersubjective space by performing the choreography, but they also thoughtfully position themselves in the dance. For example, some demonstrators specifically perform next to an expert dancer to learn step patterns accurately, while others prefer not to hold hands with a neophyte dancer in favor of having greater enjoyment in the dance. Choosing with whom to dance and whether to perform a leader or follower position requires decision-making that is imbricated with other social, cultural, and political circumstances. Each time they dance in a demonstration, activists potentially gain more experience to navigate in the dance group. Negotiating positionality in folk dance collectives also helps protesters discuss discrepancies among allying groups. For instance, Keskesor, a Kurdish LGBTQI+ organization, conducted a Kurdish dance workshop in Maçka Park in Istanbul's Beşiktaş neighborhood during the week of the Pride Parade in June 2017. Following the workshop, an instructor told me that these dances promote diversity and equality because one has to hold hands with the next person "even if" this person is a "transwoman, an Arab refugee, or a gay man" (Alex, Istanbul, 25 June 2017). By using dance, the group encourages participants to challenge themselves to move together, and hence live together, with queer and trans individuals as well as migrants, sex workers, and other marginalized subjects in society. In our conversations, Keskesor activists underlined the uniqueness of a queer political practice in contrast to the heteronormativity that they see as embedded in the acts of many in left-leaning groups, who are often afraid of being considered gay when they hold hands with a queer/trans person during the folk dance.

While some people avoid dancing next to a marginalized person, others may have other criteria to position themselves within a folk dancing group. Lara, an environmental activist, indicates that she often joins the dance from the middle of the group because she feels more comfortable surrounded by other people; even though she takes a wrong step, she can adjust her rhythm to others (Istanbul, 3 April 2017). Melek, an activist affiliated with the women's movement and the labor movement, however, prefers to lead the dance because she is a competent dancer. She hopes that by taking the lead, diverse participants would enable to focus on and express a variety of emotions because, as she says, "Dance is an individual expression and you do not have to belong any political group to dance in a protest" (Istanbul, 22 March 2017). Similarly, Esma, a social justice activist, emphasizes: "When I dance in protests, I feel I am not alone; the people on whom I lean my hand, my arm, and my shoulder give me courage" (Istanbul, 13 April 2017). Dance in protest facilitates connection with another vulnerable person in the public space and creates a sense of belonging to a political community while allowing forms of communication among ethnically, racially, economically, and sexually peripheralized individuals. Each time they disperse to meet up in another dance group, dissenters re-evaluate their capacities and ways of moving together with surrounding bodies. The forms of departure from a folk dance collective provide them with information about how to engage and collaborate with other bodies.

Vulnerable bodies stand next to one another in a precarious public space and perform agency without necessarily synchronizing their motions or applying fixed movement patterns but initiating

novel ways of acting together. This inventiveness at the moment of departure from a folk dance community provides them with fierce *beginnings* and thus contains potentials for collective action. By differentially joining in and departing from folk dance groups, protesters exercise relationality against an Arendtian notion of isolation, and therefore, their action manifests resistance and resilience. By deciding on how to move; whom to follow, challenge, or hold hands with; and how to calibrate individual pace and energy with the dynamics of the group; as well as how long to move and wait until the next assembly and dispersal, activists navigate individually while also finding a sense of larger "body" of assembly. In their choreopolitical efforts, dancer-activists' "artistic interventions" (Mouffe 2007) in the public space not only disclose dominant political structures and violent maneuvers of the state apparatus, but also contest and defy these forces while fostering solidarity among dissenters.

Hannah Arendt reminds us that "while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it" ([1958] 1998, 202); and likewise, coercive police strategy could not completely prevent innovative political action. As I have shown, dispersal, in the case of Turkey, is used both as a hegemonic choreography of isolation *and* as a survival tactic of protesters, who mobilize individual and collective agency by persistently maintaining their connection in support of progressive politics. I have argued that by scattering themselves towards the peripheries of the central space of activism, dissenters re-choreograph a thanatopolitical strategy of dispersal in order to gain power. Dispersed protesters, in constant motion, improvise new forms of interaction—which may or may not be decipherable to the police, as they similarly study the routes, maneuvers, and engagements of resistant bodies in order to anticipate their next movement. Activists also perform an affirmative politics of dispersal by executing folk dance in protests. I discussed questions of temporality and positionality by examining how demonstrators participate in and leave the dance; how long they perform referring to multiple concepts of duration; and how they position themselves in the group based on their own experience and familiarity with the dance form. Protest participants' different motivations and analyses of their own actions demonstrate a wide variety of approaches in the performance of dispersal.

By foregrounding the experience and relationality of diverse individuals, Arendt's notion of politics provides us with a horizon to analyze how grassroots activists from different backgrounds can move together, embracing and building on this variety in experience. At the same time, activists appropriating the choreographic potential of tactics of dispersal propose new ways of making the separation of bodies relational, and thereby undermine the violence of isolation that Arendt describes. Whenever they gather and form moving assemblies, protesters relate to each other in innovative ways and continuously develop resilient choreographies of dissent.

Notes

[1] Thanks to Roii Ball, Mika Lior, and Archer Porter as well as the journal editors and anonymous readers for feedback on drafts of this paper.

[2] The activists' use of folk dance as a form of protest in contemporary Turkey is analysed in detail in my Ph.D. dissertation (Bayraktar 2019). I am grateful to my research participants who made both the dissertation and this article possible.

[3] In the 2000s, urban transformation projects aimed to bring about physical and demographic upgrading of their respective areas, yet they caused a process of property transfer and displacement of socially and economically marginalized groups (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010).

[4] Although the movement started against the neoliberal urban policies degrading public spaces and green areas in the city, authoritarian political practice of the government was the immediate object of the discontent (Ertür 2014, Yeğenoğlu 2013, Yörük and Yüksel 2014). Public surveys (KONDA 2014) showed that 51% of the Gezi protesters participated in a social movement for the first time in their lives, and 49% decided to join the movement after seeing the police violence against protesters in the park. The protests resonated both in upper-class areas of Istanbul and also in labour class neighbourhoods. The majority of activists were against the top-down production and organization of the space and demanded equal distribution of wealth and civil rights.

[5] The research participants' names have been changed to maintain the confidentiality of identities. The interviews were originally conducted in Turkish and translated to English by the author who is solely responsible for mistranslations.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

HEINER GOEBBELS'S *STIFTERS DINGE* AND THE ARENDTIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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At the pivotal moment in her "report" on the Eichmann trial, Arendt describes how, on the ninth day of the court proceedings in Jerusalem, Eichmann's guilt was established beyond doubt: he admitted not only to his role in transporting many thousands of Jews to their deaths, but testified that he had personally seen the destinations to which they were to be sent—the gas chambers and mobile gas vans, as well as the blood-soaked trenches filled with the bodies of those shot by the *Einsatzgruppen*—and that he had been "shocked out of his wits" (Arendt [1963] 2006, 90). With the delivery of this evidence, it was clear that Eichmann had not only "known what he was doing" but had known also that it was wrong: and so, Arendt writes, "one felt [the defense] could rise right away, for the criminal proceedings against the accused in this 'historic trial' seems complete, the case for the prosecution established" (90).

The moment is pivotal not because it marks the moment in which Eichmann's fate was sealed (in her assessment, the verdict in this "show trial" was a "foregone conclusion" (4, 92) but because it introduces the real subject of Arendt's analysis of the trial: the degradation of moral agency under totalitarian conditions. With the completion of this testimony (pre-recorded by the police onto audio tape and replayed for the court from a tape-recorder, while "the body that owned the voice" stood "strangely disembodied" behind the walls of a glass booth) there remained only one question to ask, "the most disturbing of all", addressed now repeatedly to the defendant by the judges: "Had the killing of Jews gone against his conscience?" (90–91). The legalities of the trial could be satisfied with the circulation of the defendant's confession and the presence of a body on which to enact a sentence; but this moral question of conscience, which lay at the heart of the political interest of

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):109–127
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51271
ISSN 2057-7176

the trial and was expressed now with urgency, could only be answered by the defendant in the present. Arendt's report reveals that what the court found it needed at this point, though *not before*, was a re-integration of Eichmann's voice and his body, a corporeal re-fleshing that would permit him to attest to the inner state that the court sought to discern through his words. But, she relates, even so these words proved difficult for the court to grasp in any definitive or conclusive sense: it had to ask for them "over and over again" (91) and discovered consequently that, the longer the trial continued, "the paler and more ghostlike became the figure in the glass booth, and no finger-wagging: 'And there sits the monster responsible for all this,' could shout him back to life" (8).

This episode is instructive because it captures, almost in parable form, the extent to which the "space of appearance" that Arendt regards as conterminous with her conception of the public sphere and of politics, and which she describes as "com[ing] into being wherever men are together in manner of speech and action" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 199), also materialises in her work as a space of *dis*appearance, experienced in quotidian life as sites of absence. For, in this case, in the District Court of Jerusalem, Eichmann's receding and ghostly figure itself stood only in a middle position between those present in the audience and other, even more distant and silent figures, for whom his testimony and that of the other witnesses served most unsatisfactorily as proxies: those of his victims, or of history itself.

This paradox of testimony, which confirms that "appearance" in the public sphere must be accessed in ordinary experience through attention to that which disappears—to the non-existent, to that which is "not given [...] and which therefore [...] [can] not be known" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 150)—is expressed again a generation and a half later in the formula offered by German director and composer Heiner Goebbels to describe his "theatre of absence": "Absence as the presence of the other, as a confrontation with an unseen image or an unheard word or sound, an encounter with forces beyond man's control, that are out of our reach" (Goebbels 2015, 4, 6). Goebbels himself acknowledges his debt to Arendt quite explicitly, quoting her *Vita Activa* to assert that "you can consider every performance to be a 'public sphere, ... in which it is necessary not to attack each other'—neither in the work relations nor in the relation to the audience" (Goebbels 2015, 58)—the public sphere is, here, once again understood in that aspect presented by Arendt when, following Aristotle, she appeals to the human being as *ζῶον πολιτικόν*, the political animal, whose nature is realised through the faculties of acting and speaking in contradistinction to violence.[1] My purpose, then, is to indicate in the following some of the ways in which Goebbels's work can be understood as an engagement with these Arendtian positions, and to demonstrate some of the ways in which reading Goebbels through Arendt can assist in elucidating the antirepresentational political aspirations of his practice. In particular, I hope to show how Goebbels's defense of the political value of "spontaneity", which he associates with the creative capacity of things and people to enact the unordained and new, finds its counterpart in Arendt's concept of natality, and with it traces a lineage back, via Kant, to the particular experience of freedom discovered by modernity to subsist in aesthetic judgment. To that end, I will begin by sketching an episode which denotes, early in Goebbels's career, his sensitivity to the conditions whereby performance enters into the public sphere, before offering a more detailed explanation of Arendt's treatment of this latter concept. I shall then turn to a close examination of one of Goebbels's later works, *Stifters Dinge* (2007a).

Goebbels's oeuvre provides numerous iterations of the double problem presented by Arendt in her account of the Eichmann trial scene: that of reattaching the speaker to his statements, which, once given, float reproducibly free to circulate with lives of their own; and that of the necessity for the witness to attest himself in words that predate his entry into the space of appearance. In many cases, this is achieved through Goebbels's extensive use of acousmatic voices—voices separated electronically from their source bodies—such as, for example, in the opening sequence of the 2012 "musictheatre" piece,[2] *When the Mountain Changed Its Clothing*, during which a mantra chanted by a group of teenaged girls and young women ("Just listen to me. Everything going to be all right.") simultaneously issues from speakers in recorded male and female voices that break across the space (the voices are those of Ulay and Abramović and are excerpted from their 1982 sound work, *Bioguarde*). Of the use of acousmatic voices, Goebbels quotes Helga Finter to explain:

> The recorded voice suggests to the spectator the construction of presence-effects, since he perceives the spoken words as being addressed to him. This can be attributed to the acousmatic status of such a voice, the source of which remains invisible. The spectator will thus connect what he hears with what he sees in order then to formulate hypotheses about motivation and causality. (Finter, quoted in Goebbels 2015, 6)

But this process is pursued most diligently in the 2007 "no man show", *Stifters Dinge*—Stifter's Things—which not only confronts its audiences with the problem of disappearance through the inclusion of many recorded voices of the dead—Malcolm X, Claude Lévi-Strauss and William Burroughs, as well as early anthropological recordings of unnamed voices from Papua New Guinea, South America and Greece—but which, excepting the fleeting entrance of two technicians in the opening minutes, banishes human performers from the stage entirely, replacing them as protagonists with "non-anthropomorphic machines and objects" evocative of a dehumanised world: "elements of nature" such as fog, water, ice, tree branches; and "elements of the *mise-en-scène*" including pipes, lights, screens, projected images and mechanised pianos (Goebbels 2015, 6). In thus staging human absence, *Stifters Dinge* extends the Arendtian concern for public "appearance" to non-human actors to pose the question of the kind of relationship human beings might have with a world they cause to vanish upon their entry into it—a world which must appear to them, like the voices of the lost, always in the guise of testimony.

*

Goebbels's career began, as he recalled during a 2014 Melbourne interview with the ABC Radio National presenter Michael Cathcart, approximately ten years after the Eichmann trial:

> MC: Let's go back and talk about your earlier work. So in the 1970s you were co-founder of a group whose name means something like "So-called radical left-wing orchestra". Is that right? [...] Tell us about this group.
>
> HG: I was part of a spontaneous movement in Frankfurt in the early seventies which brought up politicians like Joschka Fischer, for example, or Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who

> founded later the Green Party. But that was in the seventies when we were squatting houses. I lived in a squat house for example with Joschka Fischer in those days, and we tried to create a music which is as engaged as the movement but which also doesn't denunciate music just as a message-transporting instrument. So we tried to make music with a political ambition. We didn't try to make political music, if you know the difference… we would never have called ourself "Left Radical Brass Band", but somebody announced us in a teach-in as "Left Radical Brass Band"—this was before we had a title—so we thought, OK, now we are the "So-called Left Radical Brass Band".
>
> (Goebbels 2014)

Further information emerges in other interviews and writings. In an interview with John Tusa for BBC Radio 3 in 2003:

> JT: But was it entirely serious? Or again, did that [name] indicate a certain distancing from really high ground radicalism?
>
> HG: Yes, and from any fundamentalist position, either musical or political, yes.
>
> (Goebbels 2003)

And in 1996, Goebbels related the following episode during a forum chaired by Alan Read at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London:

> I remember very well when this orchestra—more connected to the spontaneous political scene before the Green Party was formed—played at a demonstration. There was another orchestra coming down the street—from a dogmatic communist faction—and they were really walking 'straight forward' they had the note-stands 'straight forward' and they played 'straight forward' in a strict four/four beat; in contrast we were very chaotic, had more of a 'free-jazz' sort of feeling; so we started to undermine their sound a little bit as they were passing by; and they were so pissed off by our way of playing—not by the meaning of our words—that they came and smashed our instruments. (Goebbels 1996, 54)

In this composite anecdote, one observes the telling of a story by an artist who, at decade-long intervals, returns to the same autobiographical ground in order to express the continuity of his practice. In this tale, certain concerns are clear: the nature of the relationship between performance and political life, the connection between authority and the naming power of language, and the contestation of public space through an opposition of bodily ways of moving. Understood as an artistic origin story, this anecdote may serve, then, to foreground in any examination of Goebbels's later works, a distinction that expresses itself here in the contrast between the two groups: on the one hand, the "chaotic", "spontaneous" energy of the So-Called Left Radical Brass Band and, on the other, the disciplined seriousness of the communist orchestra. This distinction, which lies between "political music" and "music with a political ambition", disassociates the political effectiveness of performance from its didactic capacity, its power to act as a conduit or instrument through which messages or truths might be conveyed, and instead

locates it in its sheer appearance as a *thing*. For the "music which is as engaged as the movement", or the "music with a political ambition", adjectivally unsupplemented, manifests its own volition, and thus emerges as a political protagonist in its own right. Politics here appears precisely in the guise described by Arendt in her lecture "Freedom and Politics" where she observes that the presence of freedom in human societies "needed a common public space [...] a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free-men could insert himself" (Arendt 1960, 29). That is, politics appears in the unpredictable moment of engagement between bodies, in the moment in which the So-Called Left Radical Brass Band, spilling into the street, chooses to confront the other, and not as something that, in wishing to deny the living encounter, passes through bodies in the execution of a script written elsewhere and in advance.

Substantially, the distinction drawn here by Goebbels registers also as a contrast between two procedures for inclusion: to be a member of the communist orchestra, the listener is told, means to conform to the strictness of an ordained rhythm; whereas the more polyphonic inclusion elaborated by the So-called Left Radical Brass Band emerges from the "Sponti" scene of 1970s Frankfurt and gains its motivation, as Goebbels reflects later in the Tusa interview, from this movement's ambition "not to exclude anything" but to connect with "the other qualities we try to develop"—ways of living, cultural possibilities, ways of making political protests—and therefore to regard the making of music as an extension of a common spirit (Goebbels 2003). Paul Hockenos describes how the "Sponti turn" in Frankfurt involved rejecting the implicit authoritarianism of party political association in favour of a decentralized ethic:

> At no time did the Spontis ever have a party platform, party membership cards, membership lists, an official central organ, or even an organization name [...] [B]eing a Sponti meant, first of all, *not* belonging to a dogmatic political organization. (Hockenos 2008, 112)

If the Spontis viewed traditional political agitation as encouraging individuals to assent *pro tempore* to a hierarchical discipline for the sake of a promised future liberty, they themselves refused this deferment, and instead sought impatiently to achieve this promise in the present. To be a Sponti, therefore, "meant not to be a Trotskyist, Maoist or communist party member" (Georg Dick, in Hockenos 2008, 112), but to turn one's attention to the structures of human relations and to try to find collective modes of interaction which could respect, rather than curtail, the self-determination of individuals and their potential development as whole persons. Likewise, Goebbels has throughout his career expressed a desire to foster, in the development of his works, collaborative and non-stratified relationships among artists and between artists and audiences: such relationships of equality, he suggests, are unlikely to be realized within the "centralizing" spaces of "institutions, which are not prepared for these given their gravitational forces and hierarchical structures" (Goebbels 2015, 58). Goebbels's artistic practice can thus potentially be traced back to this movement, which, in establishing co-ops and squat houses, and conducting teach-ins and decision-making assemblies on the bases of participatory self-government and the right of everybody to speak, endeavoured to create spaces in which collaborative life might be realized; a project that was not so much a withdrawal from the political sphere (as violent street

confrontations with police over the squats attested) as a recasting of its boundaries—what Jacques Rancière (2001) has termed "litigation", or the reclamation as "the space of circulating" of "the space of circulation" (¶22).

This points us back to the public sphere and to Arendt, who, despite Rancière's critique (a critique anticipated by others: see Benhabib 1992, 75), does not always envisage the public sphere in terms of a particular political model or "way of life that is proper to those who are destined for it" (Rancière 2001, ¶3), but argues also that the freedom of the public sphere might be thought in terms of the vanishing figure of an "apparition", a "lost treasure" or a "mirage" that appears only when a social order is challenged (Arendt [1961] 2006, 4). It is this reading of Arendt that Goebbels aligns himself with when, in his collection of essays *Aesthetics of Absence*, he claims "I am interested in the public sphere" (Goebbels 2015, 13). *Against* this conception of politics, the brutality of the communist orchestra can be seen as the actualisation of violence implicit in the will to maintain a certain spatial order: that of forward progress; but also that in which there is a repetition, a doubling or tripling of elements rather than their opening out to mutual visibility. The "straight forward" sound is doubled by the "straight forward" march, and doubled again by the "straight forward" note-stands. It is the potential for disruption of this tight control of the relations between things, this "strict" bodily disposition, that enrages the communists—the "way of playing" rather than "the meaning of our words".

Finally, one can observe in this episode a suspicion, on Goebbels's part, of *naming*, that appears intrinsically entwined with these other concerns. In the very name of the "So-called Left Radical Brass Band" appears an ironic detachment from language, a distrust in its ability to catch the truth of *things*. Goebbels's description of his band's music as "spontaneous" or (tellingly) "more [...] free" in comparison to that of the "dogmatic" communist orchestra, suggests active potentiality, a sentiment he elsewhere counterintuitively expresses as a desire for "absence", an urge to avoid "the things we expect, the things we have seen, the things we have heard, the things that are usually done on stage" (Goebbels 2015, 5). Instead, Goebbels seeks, quoting Elias Canetti, "To spend the rest of one's life only in completely new places...To burn everything one has begun. To go to countries whose languages one can never master" (quoted in Goebbels 2015, 5). This defense of spontaneity carries the suggestion that the "forwardness" of the note-stands is the element that disposes all of the others, leading them on, so that the rhythm of the music and of the marching bodies is subjugated to it and put to its use, becoming an illustration or reinforcement in the present of something already written in the past. Elsewhere, Goebbels decries the tyranny of "texts, which above all want to make announcements rather than maintain an artistic reality" (Goebbels 2015, 83); but this hegemony of writing and its order is also shown, in this scene, to end in and depend on a pre-linguistic enactment of corporeal force, which seeks to smash all alternative rhythms and means of articulation.

Yet insofar as Goebbels, in inheriting these Arendtian categories, can be biographically situated against this precise twentieth-century political moment, it is perhaps also helpful to step back and remember that spontaneity has been a political value in modernity at least since the moment that Kant, in establishing grounds for the appreciation of beauty in the *Critique of Judgment*,

distinguished between the beautiful and that which we find merely sensorially agreeable, connecting the former to the public sphere and grounding it in the representations of the imagination:

> For as to the agreeable we allow everyone to be of a mind of his own, no one requiring others to agree with his judgment of taste. But in a judgment of taste about beauty we always require others to agree. Insofar as judgments about the agreeable are merely private, whereas judgments about the beautiful are put forward as having general validity (as being public), taste regarding the agreeable can be called taste of sense, and taste regarding the beautiful can be called taste of reflection [...]. (Kant [1790] 1987, §8.214)

Indeed, it is precisely the quality of "spontaneity" that Kant ascribes, in the Analytic of the Beautiful, both to the multiform diversity of material existence as it appears to the subject—the obdurate persistence of things in apprehension even "without [...] a determinate concept of an object" (§22.241)—and to the faculty of the imagination, whose role is to refer the world's contents to the subject's cognition, and which Kant describes as manifesting a creative capacity "not taken as reproductive [...] but as productive and spontaneous" (§22.240); another word for this quality is "freedom".

In Arendt, as I have already hinted, this value surfaces as "natality", "the freedom to call something in to being which did not exist before" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 150) or the capacity to begin something new, and it is possible to discern two distinct treatments of this principle in Arendt's characterisations of the public sphere, which appear and run side by side. The first of these casts political participation in terms of a retreat or emergence from theatrical illusion. But this characterisation is also described as the emergence *into* a mutual visibility, and gives way for Arendt to a second, in which the public sphere is outlined as having a performative dimension.

An example of the former line in Arendt's thinking appears in the Preface to *Between Past and Future*, which she opens by quoting the French poet René Char—who, in attempting to distil the experience of his generation's struggle during the German occupation, reflected on the surprising discovery made by those who took part in the Resistance,

> that he who 'joined the Resistance, *found* himself,' that he ceased to be 'in quest of [himself] without mastery, in naked unsatisfaction,' that he no longer suspected himself of 'insincerity,' of being 'a carping, suspicious actor of life,' that he could afford 'to go naked' [...] stripped of all masks—of those which society assigns to its members as well as those which the individual fabricates for himself in his psychological reactions against society [...]. (Arendt [1961] 2006, 4)

In ceasing to be actors, Arendt writes, the members of the resistance had begun to act, to "become 'challengers,'" and to "create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear" (4).

Here, Arendt appears initially to defer to a long tradition of anti-theatrical thought whose impulse is also discernible, for example, in Habermas's account of the representative public sphere (see Habermas 1989 and 1992) and which rests ultimately on a fear of credulity, since the insubstantial forms of the theatre are viewed as dangerous not merely because they are false (which in itself signifies only a lack of plenitude) but because their charismatic force leads them to be believed. In Arendt's formulation, the fear of credulity inspires the recovery of an extra-theatrical authenticity that contests social control: in taking off those masks "which society assigns to its members" the members of the Resistance "find" themselves, unconcealed, in a truer, wider environment undistorted by fictions of role. The unexpectedness and rarity of this discovery—which Arendt describes as an "age-old treasure" of the order of "Unicorns and fairy queens" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 4–5)—reveals the difficulty of breaking the theatrical spell. But the fear of credulity is also not complete in Arendt: in her work, the lost treasure of revolution surfaces periodically throughout history as "the innermost story of the modern age" (4) and, moreover, is each time discovered afresh by the people themselves. Thus Arendt emphasizes that the members of the resistance had "taken the initiative upon themselves" (4) and, in so doing, commenced something new, namely, the resurrection of the public sphere as an active principle.

Is there not something incongruous, though, in this description of a "public realm" as something so elusive, both as an iteration of a phenomenon that is hardly perceptible to history and also because it appears, in the nature of its revolutionary struggle, as something that must be "hidden from the eyes of friend and foe" (3)? For in speaking of something "public" we usually mean that it is visible. In what sense, then, does this public sphere maintain its connection to visibility—characterised, as it is, as the concealed and the unnoticed?

Only in the public sphere, writes Arendt in *The Human Condition*, can individuals demonstrate their "specifically human quality" of uniqueness (Arendt [1958] 1998, 22), of being able to appear to one another as irreducible to the generality of the species-life by virtue of a distinct life story:

> This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order. (Arendt [1958] 1998, 19)

In *Between Past and Future*, this rectilinear movement is also the path of thought that runs transverse to the colliding vectors of past and future, along the "non-time-space" of which the thinker treads deliberately back and forth, and in which gap alone can he (*sic*) appear *as* "a 'he' [...] and not a 'somebody' [...] in the full actuality of his concrete being" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 12–13). In the Eichmann account, Arendt similarly identifies this "non-time-space" with the maintenance of individual conscience and the refusal of its co-option by "common sense" or the authority of the leader. Janelle Reinelt (2015) sums this insight up neatly: the public sphere is the space in which the "who" and not the "what" of a human being can appear through her capacity for actions that exceed the conditioning forces of natural necessity or the momentum of human affairs. In beginning something new, something "which was not given" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 150), human beings can aspire to the only immortality of which they are capable, namely, remembrance: which,

through History, admits into the company of eternal nature only those mortals who have distinguished themselves through their deeds and words. But because "who-ness" is coeval with its own enactment, it must come as "a revelation and often as a surprise, even to the subject herself" (Reinelt 2015).

Those who discard their masks and step into this space are no longer hiding: indeed, everything is visible. They are "naked"; all may scrutinize their choices and courage and, therefore, to act in this sphere entails an acceptance of responsibility for one's passage through the world. The *opportunity* for each to act in this "naked" way is, for Arendt, the very essence of democracy. But this is not the case passively, but actively; there are always those who desire to banish citizens from the public sphere and "to deprive them of the time necessary for participation in common matters" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 222). The democracy of the public sphere must be claimed by its members, and sustained, rather than understood as an already open space into which one enters with prior "rights" established.

Yet it is in this activity and becoming-visible that the second sense of Arendt's descriptions of the public sphere as "a space of appearances" and "a kind of theater" begins to emerge. For the metaphor that Arendt uses for this activity is precisely the virtuosity of the performing artist:

> Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by "virtuosity," that is, an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it. (Arendt [1961] 2006, 151)

Politics, understood as the disclosure of human unicity, implies both an enactment—a claiming—and context of plurality. For visibility demands to be seen; human beings cannot aspire to remembrance without witnesses to their words and deeds. Moreover, without the presence of equals to disturb the inexorable movement of the individual will to its execution, the special quality of human action remains indiscernible. Arendt distinguishes between the performing and the creative arts in the same way that she distinguishes between the nature of human beings and of the gods: the demiurge, toiling in solitude to shape the substances of the primal world, anticipates no interference with the execution of his designs, which become the living creation; but to religion and the poets, he is veiled behind namelessness, or behind many names, which notify his subsumption into *function* (Arendt [1958] 1998, 22, 23 n1). She writes: "Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it" (22–23). Likewise, the creative artist herself disappears behind the completeness of her works, which exhibit an ideal of a perfection of will, and which announce her mastery of her "doings from beginning to end" (220). But the performing artist does not so disappear and is not so subsumed by function; rather, she enacts her own special quality unsubordinated to any judgment that respects an end or *telos*. Arendt makes the connection explicit:

> Performing artists—dancers, play-actors, musicians, and the like—need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their "work", and both depend upon others for the performance itself. (Arendt [1961] 2006, 152)

Hence, to discard one's masks and to step forward in one's nakedness is not to leave the theatre. On the contrary, one still *performs*; only the configuration of the spectacle has changed. If, in their authenticity, Char and the members of the Resistance momentarily abandoned a stage of one kind, they did so only to establish a different "space of appearances" where, regardless, "they could *act*" (my emphasis). In this sense, Arendt's casting of politics as "a kind of theater where freedom could appear" requires not so much the rejection of theatricality as the reorganising of the theatrical event, and a redistribution of the positions it allows, in order to stage a mutual showing of virtuosity in which everyone participates—or, at least, everyone free.

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In light of the foregoing, it is worth turning now to *Stifters Dinge* and to Goebbels's arguments in *Aesthetics of Absence* and elsewhere for "Theatre as a 'thing in itself'" (Goebbels 2015, 2), or for theatre as "an art form, that like a painting, or like a sculpture, or like an installation [...] has its secret [...] its possible space of imagination for the one who's looking at it" (Goebbels 2014); and to his acknowledgement of Cathcart's proposition that:

> when we listen to a piece of music we don't say, 'Well, now I have a proposition about the world that is demonstrated by that particular key change.' We just experience the music in and for itself. (Goebbels 2014)

For this "secret" of the artwork, which appears in its "thingness" and "itself-ness" rather than its power to represent (important *topoi* in Goebbels's work and of postdramatic theatre generally) is precisely the virtuosity described by Arendt.

"Thingness", of course, is also reflected in both the title of *Stifters Dinge* (*Stifter's Things* in English) and the non-name of the So-called Left Radical Brass Band. But "thingness" is also an apt word to apply to the writings of Adalbert Stifter, the nineteenth-century Austrian realist whose work, like that of Arendt and also Gertrude Stein, serves as a touchstone for Goebbels in multiple pieces (not least *Stifters Dinge*). If Stein's remarkable experiments, as Sianne Ngai (2005) has noted, at times tend exhaustingly toward "taxonomic analysis and differentiation" (253), a similar deliberate dullness is evident in Stifter, whose lengthy specifications of the forms of the natural and human worlds are often so thorough as to overshadow the pretexts for his characters' entry into them. Stifter's laborious commitment to the enumeration of particularity is clear, for example, in the title of his 1853 collection of novellas, *Many-coloured Stones* (see Sammons 1989), an image suggesting at once mundanity and the joy of the collector in the special qualities of objects. Of this author, Friedrich Hebbel wrote that "he obviously had Adam and Eve in mind as his readers, because only

they could be unfamiliar with the things he describes extensively and in depth" (quoted in Goebbels 2015, 27). W. H. Auden, too, marveled at Stifter's "breathtaking risks of appalling banalities [...] a sort of fugal repetition of descriptive details" (Auden 1945, viii). In the present context, it is worth noting that the astonishing pressure of these details, which in Stifter's writings perpetually interrupt the forward momentum of the plot and threaten to escape its bounds, finds a surprisingly accurate echo in another context within Arendt's explanation of the importance to ancient history of the isolated moment:

> What is difficult for us to realize is that the great deeds and works of which mortals are capable, and which become the topic of historical narrative, are not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress is always on single instances and single gestures [...]. The subject matter of history is these interruptions—the extraordinary, in other words. (Arendt [1961] 2006, 42)

And indeed Arendt, in her own unpublished review of Stifter's novella *Rock Crystal*, names Stifter as "the greatest landscape-painter in literature", calling attention to his "extraordinary precision" and his "distrust of generalities, of the very quality of an abstract word"—

> and this to such a degree that, for him, the word *horse* is already too much of an abstraction. He will never write of a rider on a horse but rather of a certain well-described man on a dapple-gray. (Arendt 2007, 111)

Goebbels himself incorporates a number of excerpts from Stifter into *Stifters Dinge*, which may also be described as a "landscape piece" in that, physically, it presents a varied stage topography filled with a rich flora of objects over whose features the audience's attention ranges, and because the marginalization of human figures permits a scenic tempo to displace "drama" in the progression of the work. Most prominently, Goebbels includes excerpts from the "Ice Tale"—a fragmentary piece that describes the abandonment of a journey through a forest due to the onset of immense cold (Stifter [1846] 1997). The tale appears in two separate moments: in the first, a recorded voice "reads" the text aloud while, on stage, the audience watches the colours of a projected image slowly change; in the second, the text of the "Ice Tale" itself becomes a collection of "things" as its words and letters are projected across the uneven surfaces of the stage space, evoking, in their broken whiteness, the snow and ice of the storm.[3] This is obviously an encounter with sublimity, and Johannes Birringer (2013) confirms this in his review of *Stifters Dinge* when he writes: "Stifter's narrative voice evokes the Kantian sublime, the amazement and terror that might grip us when facing the imponderable and abysmal, threatening us to lose ourselves 'into that thing...'" (6). Yet the complex mood of Stifter's text can be caught also in those places where, counter-intuitively, there appears the presence of something else. For as well as awe and terror, there appear smaller, happier emotions—a countervailing domesticity and interest in the particular object:

> To keep the fir tree beside my small summer bench from being damaged, someone had knocked down the ice from it with long poles as far as he could reach, and when the top of the tree seemed about to tilt, my other servant, Kajetan, had climbed up to it, carefully knocked down the ice, and then tied around the highest

> branches two barn ropes which he let down and shook from time to time. They knew this tree was dear to me and also very beautiful, with green branches so thickly bunched together that an enormous weight of ice had been clinging to it which might easily split the tree or at least break its boughs. (Stifter 1997, 54)

The tension conjured in this image, between the beauty that inheres in the closeness of the "green branches so thickly bunched together" and the "enormous weight [...] which might easily split" stems from the expression of a personal preference, which has at its origin a first turning of attention, a direction of the gaze towards a depth which is not open and ultimately enveloping of the subject, but finitely circumscribed, receding within the interior of a defined shape. And in writing about the scenes in which these texts appear in his works, Goebbels as often invokes feelings of pleasure—of "animation", "relief", "delight" or of being "untroubled" (Goebbels 2015, 5–6; Goebbels 2011)—as he does of dread, fear, or the strangeness of alterity.

Writing about the origins of *Stifters Dinge*, Goebbels observes that "[t]he starting point of these experiments was initially to attempt an absence of performers onstage" (Goebbels 2015, 28). Elsewhere, he writes of the "narcissistic" disposition of theatrical spectators who look to find themselves reflected in the human figures of actors or other performers, or even in constructed anthropomorphic objects that, because they "move in a human-like manner" are able to serve as "projection surface[s] for our [...] desire" (6, 31, 32). Instead, Goebbels states that *Stifters Dinge* arose "from an experimental desire to develop something on stage which we cannot use as a mirror [...] to assemble things on stage which remain strange to us" (32):

> Hence, *Stifters Dinge* became a 'no-man show', in which curtains, lights, music and space—all the elements that usually prepare, support, illustrate and serve a theatrical performance and its performers, become (in a kind of justice long deferred) the protagonists, together with five pianos, metal plates, stones, water, fog, rain and ice. (Goebbels 2015, 5)

Instead of a human performer, in the middle of the theatrical space in *Stifters Dinge* is a rectangular pool, divided into three sections roughly the size and dimensions of cinema screens, around which the forest of all of the other "protagonists"—the tree branches, pianos, pipes and plates—are arranged. But this reflective surface does not, like Narcissus's pond, throw back the image of the viewer who bends towards it, but rather is angled obliquely away from the audience and, over the course of the performance, casts up its own secrets, in shapes that insinuate the indifference of a de-anthropomorphised world: blocks of light that pass over it, almost but not quite like clouds; the illuminated puckering of "raindrops" hitting its surface, which, side-lit in the darkness, look quite like the reflected twinkling of stars; fog that bubbles up from dry ice pellets in popping spurts and seems to thicken the water, nearly resembling a liquid marsh belching gas from its depths. These impressions, in their "nearly-ness" and "quite-ness", seem to point to the strategy in Goebbels's work that Corey Wakeling (2017) (following Todorov)[4] has identified as "signification but not representation": the recollection of absent things by present things, which evoke them without being reducible to them. In *Aesthetics of Absence*, as already noted, Goebbels writes of "a confrontation with an unseen image or an unheard word or sound" (Goebbels 2015, 6) and also

the possibility for the spectator of "an artistic experience [that] does not have to result exclusively from a direct encounter, but can also be thought of as a triangular, indirect, non-immediate relationship with a mediatized third-party" (Goebbels 2015, 85). In this aqueous central void (which is not one), then, one discovers encapsulated the sink into which representation falls—the fluid inexactitude of being vis-à-vis what is supposedly missing. The pool does *not* reproduce the world as it might appear in the absence of human beings (which action would involve the illogicality of regarding the spectator's gaze as the absence of a gaze), but introduces things (squares of light, droplets, bubbles) that, because they cannot be anything other than what they are, are able to stand as symbols, not of what is missing, but of the thought of absence itself.

This scenic arrangement of water amidst a forest of things is subsequently doubled with the appearance (via projection onto a gauze curtain) of Jacob Isaackszoon van Ruisdael's *Swamp*.[5] Like the other painting appearing significantly in *Stifters Dinge,* Paolo Uccello's *Night Hunt*,[6] *Swamp* similarly features trees which perspectivally encircle an emptiness (in this case a marsh); just discernible near—but not quite *at*—the vanishing point of this painting is a tiny human figure. With this doubling, the noises that pervade *Stifters Dinge*—humming wires, a scraping stone, the sharp *snap* of a light shutter closing, the deep *blat* of a flap hitting a pipe-end, trickling water, discordant piano phrases—suddenly resonate as the unheard sounds of deep nature—of nature by itself. Even the recognisably human music of a Bach piece (the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*), playing on one of the five automated pianos, registers a sense of loss as the keys visibly move up and down by themselves, revealing the invisibility of the player, her disappearance from the present. It is clear that this painting synechdochically reciprocates, on the level of the image, *Stifters Dinge* itself. *Swamp* is more overtly evocative of sublimity than *Night Hunt*—an overwhelming and foreboding vastness of space within which a single individual vanishes into the grotesqueries of the landscape—and yet in writing about the compositional method of *Stifters Dinge*, Goebbels uses vocabulary that refers more clearly to the "inspiring principle [...] fully manifest only in the performing act" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 151) than to the paralysis of terror:

> When there isn't anyone on stage any longer [...], when nothing is being shown, then the spectators must discover things themselves. The audience's delight in making these discoveries is enabled only by the absence of the performers, who usually artfully fulfil the task of demonstrating and focus the audience's attention on themselves. Only their absence creates the gap, which renders this freedom and pleasure possible. (Goebbels 2015, 5–6)

"Freedom", and "pleasure" in discovery are exactly the terms used by Arendt to describe the subject's experience of action: a pleasure only possible in this case in the roving motion of perception over objects where, in Kantian terms, "no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule" (Kant [1790] 1987, §9.217). This *rule* is that which determines the exact placement of the "pure line of the horizon" (indistinguishable in the image) towards which, as The State Hermitage Museum's website (2019) informs viewers, the lost traveller in *Swamp* "seems to be trudging in search of firm ground".

What is *missing* in Goebbels's "adaptation" of *Swamp*—and what connects his adaptation back to the "freedom" and "pleasure" of action—is the human figure near the centre of the image. Moreover, a similar absence is apparent in the decelerated motion through which Goebbels slowly reveals to the audience small glimpses of Paolo Uccello's *Night Hunt*. This painting, which bends all of its figures toward the vanishing point of a great chase, is projected in a late scene by Goebbels across the otherwise darkened space of the theatre, catching the surfaces of some of the objects it contains: tree branches, mechanized pianos, water, light-stands, speakers. Here and there a fragment of Uccello's image is reflected indistinctly back, but for the most part the work remains invisible until a small screen, suspended from two wires and a pulley system, descends and begins a crawling circuit of the visual field. As this opaque screen travels around the projected image and catches the projected light, some of the *Night Hunt*'s features become visible: first, animals running—apparently directionlessly—deer and dogs moving along jumbled and seemingly purposeless vectors; then other bodies, which quickly disintegrate into a series of impressions—a head, a tail, a torso, legs, a tree stump, flowers, a hand clutching the shaft of a spear, the eye of a horse.

Notable in this movement is the fact that the screen, and thus the implied gaze, circles around but never arrives at the vanishing point of Uccello's perspectival composition, the goal of the chase—and yet, when one examines the original, it is not clear what this goal is. *Is* it a deer? For in the centre of Uccello's picture the animals recede amongst the trees until it is uncertain whether the furthest figures are deer or dogs; following this line back to the foreground, one finds both species mingled together and now also intermixed with both men and horses, so that again it is not clear who is chasing whom. There is no final figure that leads and thus gives order to the hunt. Deer, dogs, horses and men all appear before and after one another, yet all equally streaming toward a quarry that remains undefined; it is not hard to imagine this line extending forever, a continuous locomotion of bodies in pursuit of a *purpose*, which would allow them finally to cease all of this exertion and rest in an authoritative determination of their connection to one another—a purpose towards which each body moves but always just falls short of achieving. Figured in the spectacle of this painting's great hunt, then, is the restless motion of being's inequivalence to its concept: a motion arrested by Goebbels, who, in unmooring the image from the referential anchor of its visual focal point, allows the flotsam of its details to float free. Untethered from the gestalt of the whole, things lose their relation to one another: deer and dogs; but also body parts, which become animated in their independence, yet also inscrutably desiring—so that the fist holding the spear seems to do so for no other reason than to grasp it eternally. The spear, too, shorn of utility, ceases to be a *spear*; the trees of the forest loose themselves from the regimentation of their mathematical espacement and emerge promiscuously from the background, no longer holding to their function as a perspectival grid against which the movement of agents can be measured, but asserting themselves as things in themselves which, as the screen moves across them, gather our attention just as much as those other objects that we now attend to: an ear, a blade of grass, a face—or even the lines and colours of the brushwork itself, which, too, shake themselves free of the shapes that they make up, to appear in the unique complexity of their textures, liberated from the demand to represent something other than themselves. They cease to be "actors", and become visible.

This excision of the centre which bends everything else towards it (observed here on the level of the image) becomes a principle of much of Goebbels's work: the diffusion of attention over the entirety of the sensory field, rather than its capture by a single organising element. Goebbels says: "Literally, an empty centre stage [means] the absence of a visually centralised focus, but also as the absence of what we call a clear theme, topic, of a play, or a message" (Goebbels 2011; cf. Goebbels 2015, 5). Thus, in the "staged concert" *Eislermaterial*,[7] Goebbels arranges the orchestra around three edges of the stage, leaving the centre vacant and asking the musicians to play without the guidance of a conductor (the conductor's position is occupied by a small statue of Eisler, as if to emphasise his absence; see Goebbels 2015, 3); a similar moment occurs in *When the Mountain Changed Its Clothing* when the Carmina Slovenica choir, in order to sing the *Las Huelgas Codex*'s "Benedicamus Domino", likewise positions itself along three sides of the performance space, behind a ring of white tables, leaving the interior unoccupied. And the empty centre is, of course, the generative premise of this "no-man show" or "performative installation without performer" that is *Stifters Dinge* (Goebbels 2015, 5, 27).

What one witnesses, then, in both this scene involving *Night Hunt* and the earlier one involving *Swamp*, is a double dissolution: the disappearance of a disappearance that therefore also marks a re-emergence to view. On the level of content, the denial of the vanishing point causes the image to break down into its minutest details. The hunt ceases, bodies and textures shake themselves loose, the infinite line expands to a volume. But as each image flattens out, it also becomes impossible to ignore that aspect of the representation that reaches out into space to become a *thing* amongst the landscape of branches, stones, water, and ice. Or rather, two things, which now also separate from one another: for the projected image is also a "screen", which catches the "light". Notably, in their intersection, each renders the other visible: the small screen, stumbling brightly around the features of Uccello's composition, reveals the hidden presence of the projection of the work, reflecting its light partially back to the viewer; reciprocally, the flux of the projection illuminates the screen itself and reveals it to be a surface inequivalent to the forms that pass across it. Light, here, is disclosed in its double nature: just as the details of the image separate from one another, so one observes—in the transience of those impressions from *Night Hunt* that, appearing, soon slide back into darkness as the screen moves on—light separated from the information it carries. Light in its mediality: as that which enables objects to be seen, but is in itself invisible. Or rather (like all mediality), as that which is the only thing that can be seen: to use Hans-Thies Lehmann's phrase, as "the phenomenality of visibility that is blinding" (Lehmann 2006, 164).

Additionally, though, in the roving motion of the screen around the theatrical space, is it not possible to see reflected the wandering motion of the eye itself: a gaze that, as if it were tracing the lines of thickly clustered branches from the comfort of a summer bench, winds anfractuously inward from the limit of a circumference? Goebbels describes how, with the separation of elements, the audience is granted a "freedom of perception" (Goebbels 2015, 11) that enables "the onlooker's eyes [to] wander from left to right, from background to the front, from this scene to the next" (11). Thematised here, then, is aesthetic judgment itself, or the restlessness of conscience, the power of natality. For just as things reappear "in themselves" in this dissolution of content, this appearance is described by Goebbels in terms of pleasure and a reprieve from authority: "Audience

members," he writes, "often let me know afterwards with some relief: 'Finally, nobody on stage to tell me what to think'" (6).

Stifters Dinge thus at last returns us to the paradox of testimony offered by Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which demands that under conditions of modernity judgment must be dissevered from authority for justice to be served. In the postscript to her report, Arendt locates Eichmann's moral failing in his "lack of imagination", which led him to act "fully within the framework of the kind of judgment required of him [...] he did not have to fall back upon his 'conscience'" (Arendt [1963] 2006, 287, 293). The logical culmination of this bureaucratic mindset is "the rule of Nobody" under which subjects devolve into "functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery" (Arendt [1963] 2006, 289); a retreat from individual distinctness that in the twentieth century converges with unprecedented crimes whose target is the plurality of the human world, "an attack upon human diversity as such" (Arendt [1963] 2006, 268–9). In our own time, faced with other, similarly vast disappearances of the natural world and of culture, Goebbels's work meditates upon the likelihood that any attempts at justice will have to navigate related problems of representation. How is the case to be made for the vanished and vanishing; by whom and to whom? Arendt's diagnosis of the Eichmann trial's shortcomings was that the District Court of Jerusalem was ultimately unable to grasp such facts, including that Eichmann was a "Nobody": and hence, in failing to see nobody, compelled him clumsily to visibility.

Compared with this tenuous focal presence, the "empty centre" of Goebbels's compositions points to a different type of absence. This "other" absence is perceptible in Arendt's depiction, in the preface to *Between Past and Future*, of the public sphere as a gathering of equals around a table, at the head of which an empty place has been left. Quoting the men of the European resistance, she writes: "At every meal that we eat together, freedom is invited to sit down. The chair remains vacant, but the place is set" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 4). The empty chair is itself an invitation to agency that consists precisely in there being "no-one at the head",[8] to which Goebbels adds that such "table parties" (which he stages quite literally in the opera *Landscape with Distant Relatives*) "are hence also invitations to the audience to figuratively find their own seat at the table" (Goebbels 2015, 14). In the presence of this absence or void, which Arendt also figures as a "mirage", a "fata morgana" or "an apparition of freedom" (Arendt [1961] 2006, 4) those gathered must create "that public space between themselves where freedom could appear" (4); this can occur to the extent that each gazes upon the invisible and describes, in their own terms, how this lost treasure appears.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Arendt [1961] 2006, 22–23. Referring to the example of the ancient Greek *polis*, Arendt writes: "The distinction was that the Greeks, living together in a polis, conducted their affairs by means of speech, through persuasion (*πεέθειν*), and not by means of violence, through mute coercion. Hence, when free men obeyed their government, or the laws of the polis, their obedience was called *πειθαρχία*, a word which indicates clearly that obedience was obtained by persuasion and not by force." By contrast: "Barbarians were ruled by violence and slaves forced to labor, and since violent action and toil are alike in that they do not need speech to be effective, barbarians and slaves were *ἄνευ λόγον*, that is, they did not live with each other primarily by means of speech."

[2] Goebbels uses both "musictheatre" and "music-theatre" as terms for describing this and similar works. (See Goebbels 2015, 13; also www.heinergoebbels.com.)

[3] Goebbels provides the text of this section of the "Ice Tale" in his Program Notes to *Stifters Dinge*: "Now we recognised the noise that we had heard earlier in the air; it was not in the air, it was close to us now. In the depths of the forest it resounded near us and came from the twigs and branches as they splintered and fell to the ground. It was all the more dreadful as everything else stood motionless. Not a twig, not a pine needle stirred in the whole glittering brightness, until after an ice-fall a branch would come crashing down. Then all was silent again. We listened and stared; I don't know whether it was amazement or fear of driving deeper into that thing" (Goebbels 2007b).

[4] See Todorov 1990, 69.

[5] Circa 1660. Listed by the alternative title of *Marsh* on the website of the The State Hermitage Museum, St Peterburg (2019), and often also known as *A Wooded Marsh*. "*Swamp*" is the name given to the painting in the program notes for *Stifters Dinge*.

[6] Also known as *The Hunt in the Forest*. c. 1460. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. "*Night Hunt*" is the name given to the painting in the program notes for *Stifters Dinge*.

[7] First produced in May 1998 in Munich as part of the *Musica Viva Festival* and Hanns Eisler's one hundredth birthday commemorations.

[8] See Rancière 2001, ¶2.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

A PUTATIVE (PRIVATE) LIFE OF HANNAH ARENDT: BIO-PORTRAITURE AS PERFORMANCE IN THE WORK OF MIRIAM SHENITZER

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> He [Kafka, acc. to Benjamin] wanted to preserve it [viz. tradition] even though it was not truth, if only for the sake of this "new beauty in what is vanishing [...] and he knew, on the other hand, that there is no more effective way to break the spell of tradition than to cut out the "rich and strange," coral and pearls, from what had been handed down in one solid piece.
>
> Hannah Arendt (2019, liii)

> I'm speaking to my ancestors. And of course I don't see eye-to-eye with my ancestors. But at the same time I cannot deny their existence.
>
> Jerzy Grotowski and Elizabeth LeCompte in Rebecca Schneider (2011, 111)

> For remembrance, which is only one, though one of the most important, modes of thought, is helpless outside a pre-established framework of reference, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected.
>
> Hannah Arendt (1961, 6)

We are all complicit. There are no bystanders, only degrees of perpetration, as Ute Frevert said in a recent speech.[1] To speak of bystanders offers exculpation to people who can claim, in hindsight, to have committed no evil. To deny such exculpation demands a new conception of agency. It stipulates that we act even when we think of ourselves as not acting, as being passive, as merely observing the actions of other. I will use this consideration as an entry point to Hannah Arendt's

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):128–148
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51272
ISSN 2057–7176

insistence on the difference between the public and the private. Historically speaking, "inner emigration" or retreat into privacy appeared as an adequate response to totalitarian rule. But Arendt's insistence on maintaining the difference between private and public cannot be used as an excuse for inaction in the public sphere. What does the difference between public and private mean for us today? I will argue that Arendt's distinction between public and private cannot be maintained in the abstract. It requires concrete "performance" in order to be realized. One such performance I will discuss is that of Miriam Shenitzer's *A Putative Life of Hannah Arendt*, a faux biographical series of images and objects that confounds the biographical expectation of insight into the intimate and private side of a thinker, turning the gaze back on the viewer and challenging us to reconsider our conceptions of knowledge of individuality and personality in an age of a massive in/voluntary erasure of the boundaries between private and public. It thus restores the ineffability of the individual in form of a public display that disputes access to the life of Arendt. Shenitzer's "putative" biographical portrait of Hannah Arendt thus marks an Arendtian performance of the elusive distinction between private and public.

Difficult freedom[2]

Culpability for inaction is not a new concept. The Catholic tradition knows of sins of omission. Similarly, the German legal system encoded the offense of "failure to provide assistance" (*unterlassene Hilfeleistung*).[3] The assumption is that if you could have acted, then you ought to have acted. If you can, you ought. The philosopher Immanuel Kant famously turned this sentence around, marking the transition from natural law to idealist ethics: *Du kannst, denn du sollst* ("You can, because you ought"; see Braun 1975 and Schöndorf 1985). If reason, or rational thought, commands you to do something because it is good, then you ought not to doubt your ability to pursue it. According to some interpreters, Kant's categorical imperative was based on an important corollary, namely, that no one can hold us responsible for the impossible.[4] The impossible would, in any circumstance, be irrational. Reason would be the measure of the difference between the possible and the impossible. But is it true that we are responsible only for what is possible? Cannot this maxim be turned into a convenient excuse? This seems to me what Hannah Arendt saw in Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the so-called "final solution of the Jewish question." According to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: *A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt [1963] 2006), Eichmann had honed the ability to make excuses and exemplified what to Arendt was the perversion of thought into an instrument of self-exculpation. Arendt saw Eichmann as the apex of thoughtlessness in the face of evil. Although her assessment of Eichmann has been called into question in view of Eichmann's diaries (Stangneth 2014), Arendt still has a point. Thought alone can reveal to us the difference between what we can—and therefore ought—to do, and what others expect of us. Contrary to what we might believe, thought is not an instrument of generalization but of concretization. In Heidegger's terms, thought is precisely what drives us to overcome the power of general expectation, or the "*man*."[5] In contemporary ethics, it is Emmanuel Lévinas, another one of Heidegger's "Jewish children" (see Wolin 2001, 2015) who teaches us to exceed Kant's categorical imperative by making it both concrete and overwhelming. By prioritizing the face of the other, Lévinas teaches us, that the ought, in order to be fully ethical, must extend beyond the possible.

We must hold ourselves responsible in the face of the impossible. In light of the Holocaust and similar atrocities, the ethical imperative can no longer be limited to the possible, to what may be expected. It is one of the qualities of Arendt's writing that she draws our attention to the daily, rather than extraordinary, occurrences of erasure of humanity, not by ecological cataclysm, but by our complicity in thoughtlessness and facelessness.

We can learn from the writings of Hannah Arendt where to look for those things that prevent us from accepting full responsibility not just for our action but for our inaction. Where does inaction begin? Why is it pervasive? What leads us to adopt habits that advance the demise of the human and hasten the advent of the post-human? Arendt warns us that the human element, the human as such, is being gradually erased, and that we contribute to its erasure. We bring this erasure about by acting thoughtlessly. This sounds like a paradox. How can one *act* without thought? Is not thoughtlessness a lack of thought and hence a form of inaction? Here we see the parallel between a weak conception of thoughtlessness and the notion of the bystander. The bystander is an actor, as is the one who acts without thought. Thoughtlessness is more than lack of thought. It is a choice, an activity, an erasure rather than the result of inaction. The act of thoughtlessness accomplishes a self-erasure. Like an opiate, it accomplishes oblivion, a happiness without perfection, a forgetting of the most important element that, in the Kantian tradition, indicates our freedom and therefore our humanity. We seem to use our ability to think, the "freedom to be free," only to pervert it, using it to abandon our tenuous selves to mechanisms of unfreedom and the erasure of genuine selfhood. The freedom to think is, to Arendt, the most eminent attestation of our "freedom to be free." A 1967 lecture by Arendt bearing this title was recently issued for the first time in German (Arendt 2018). It became an instant bestseller, a harbinger of the Arendt renaissance now in full swing.

This renaissance comes with perils. Thomas Meyer, the editor of that small book which has had such a remarkable success among contemporary German readers, now warns that Arendt has become all-too-easily available, her life too well-known, the standard narrative about her too familiar for us not to fear that what we think we know will distract or downright prevent us from reading Arendt carefully (Encke 2018). The Arendt myth has become a manner of dehumanizing, namely, de-concretizing and obscuring the private person behind the public mask.

The difference between public and private was essential to Arendt. It is a fundamental imperative that those of us using "social media" violate on a daily basis. We submit our most private experiences to public scrutiny and to corporate abuse, surrendering what truly makes us human to the short-lived and seemingly ever- renewable thrill of exposure in unselfconscious (thoughtless) acts of exhibitionism. It seems as if we are hell-bent on cashing in our social capital without regard to the fact that we are allowing others to commodify what remains of our private lives. We are eagerly dissolving ourselves into data and we take issue with others who resist doing the same with themselves. The exchange value for our loss of privacy consists of what we gain in putative insights into the lives of others. The measure of "justice" on social platforms consists in the balance between "followers" and "following," in other words, in popularity. We know of the dire

psychological consequence of this new exchange economy on young people, which therapists refer to as social media addiction.

Miriam Shenitzer's *A Putative Life of Hannah Arendt*

At its best, visual art can perform an interruption of such trends. In the following I will describe and interpret a particular series of work that uses Hannah Arendt as a (putative) point of reference or, perhaps more accurately, as a cipher open to interpretation, while interfering with our assumptions about biographic information and its function in the economy of "data" (literally, things that are "given"). Shunning conventional "givens"—such as dates of birth and death, photographs, documents, and other tokens that correlate a particular life to generally assumed realities—Shenitzer's putative life of Hannah Arendt confronts the viewer with drawn images, displayed on drawn frames, and augmented by drawn or found objects, accompanied by labels that falsely suggest connection with, and significance for, a life, putatively that of Hannah Arendt.

Miriam Shenitzer's *A Putative Life of Hannah Arendt* uses the encomiastic expectations associated with the "lives of great men" to accomplish a thorough interrogation of the categories of knowledge we bring to this and, by extension, any iconic figure. The title of Shenitzer's installation of pseudo-biographical drawings and faux-authentic objects clearly enunciates the performance of an epistemic *aporia*. By rendering the expected "life of Hannah Arendt" *putative*, the artist draws the viewer into a vexing situation. At an exhibition and seminar-style discussion of this work, one of the audience members ended up exasperated, asking: "What is the percentage of true information about Arendt presented by this work?" In other words, the viewer was disturbed by the "action" of the display, which invokes a name while both denying and providing access to its presence. As in classical aesthetic theory of drama, the effect is interactive. The performance accomplished by this show takes place in the interaction between words, images, and audience response. The visual work aims to trigger a reaction, similar to the moment of recognition (*anagnorisis*) experienced by the audience that completes the tragedy acted out on a stage, but without any real *catharsis*. More open than its classical antecedent, though no less shrouded in mystery, the interaction stimulated by the visual display holds no clear intention or demarcation of its success or failure. The artwork provokes, but does not prefigure or guide, the thought of the viewer. It is neither leading nor misleading. I will attempt to consider this performative accomplishment of a biographic *suggestio falsi* as an Arendtian admonition to heed the boundary between public and private lives: a simultaneous revealing and concealing of ineffable individuality accomplished by staging the life on display as identifiable and typical, yet utterly concrete and particular.

In the following I will describe the organization of the show, its biographical taxonomy, and some of the images, artifacts, and the "captions" that identify what is depicted as putatively related to Arendt and ostensibly provides access to the "life" one might piece together from the images, objects, and verbal cues on display. The basis for these observations will be the documentation of an exhibition held at the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies at Boston University that opened on May 27, 2018, and was on display until the middle of August of 2018 ("About *A Putative Life of Hannah Arendt*"). What interests me in particular is the artist's attention to the details of private life.

Some biographic details appear related to the actual life of Arendt (e.g., her relationships as a university student), while others seem to convey cryptic messages about a private life that could have been Arendt's but actually wasn't, very much like the personal messages and memories encrypted in the paintings of Gerhard Richter who admits that many of his paintings convey hidden personal meanings that only the painter himself is aware of, while leaving the audience to project their own assumptions onto the canvas, or reflect on a painting's aesthetic or social meanings. Like Richter, Shenitzer leaves no obvious hint in the images to their private meanings except the images, objects, and words themselves. Nor does she indicate anywhere that the life depicted is ever any other than that of a putative Hannah Arendt.

The panels of images and objects displayed nearby (at the BU exhibit these were on the surfaces of bookcases located beneath the walls) are organized by themes and roughly follow the typical chronology of an actual biography from childhood to adulthood. The drawn titles of the eleven panels of images (dictated by the characteristics of the space, the former boardroom of the university, the grand parlor of a late nineteenth-century patrician residence, a locale that evokes putative bourgeois European origins) read as follows:

The Apple doesn't Fall Far from the Tree: Family and its influence on Arendt's Political Philosophy

A force to be Reckoned with: The Women in Arendt's Family

Strange Bedfellows: Hannah Arendt and Religion

Fuchs, Du hast den Ganz[6] Gestohlen: Arendt and her Caregivers.

A Mixed Blessing: Childhood and the Mediation of Power

Ach, Du lieber Augustin: Arendt's Teenage Years

Hoppe, Hoppe, Reiter: Hannah Arendt's Love of Sports

Wer ist der Mann da, auf der Verandah? The Men in Arendt's Life

Don't Mean a Thing, If it Ain't Got That Swing: Hannah Arendt & the Arts

An Uneasy Truce: Hannah Arendt and the Academy

Which Promised Land: America or Israel?

The range of subjects shows that this putative life of Hannah Arendt is limited to the subject's formative years. Little attention is given to a later career, to marriage, old age, or death, where the putative life would have had to compete with the all-too-well known facts of an actual life. The artistic faux-biographer thus evokes the genre of the "anecdotal" biography of famous people, a life, character, or personality as revealed from hidden or private sources, sources that may have remained unmentioned by the official or authorized biographers. An antique suitcase on display suggests the serendipity of preservation of the artifacts of a life that was likely interrupted by the

vicissitudes of migration, as suggested by the last panel, which leaves the question of Hannah Arendt's destiny without a definite answer; for example, four out of the six images the artist chose for the last panel of the exhibition at Boston University depict personages from among "Hannah Arendt's" circle who settled in Palestine, and only two relate to an American experience of Hannah Arendt, foregrounding the road not taken. The biography thus leads up to the mid-century disruption of European Jewish lives without making it explicit. It encapsulates and suggests a world that was lost.

Figure 1: Wicker Suitcase belonging to Arendt's Tante Ezie. She bought it for her tour of the Crimean, where she danced for the Kaiser's troops. (Photo: Bill McCormack)

The visual style and wording of the captions by which the panels are organized suggests silent movie panels or panels carried across the stage between the acts of a variety show, art forms associated with the historical period of the putative life being depicted. At the same time, the fact that the panels are drawn in the same style as the captions that go with, and sometimes are part of, the drawings introduces an element of irony, as ordinarily captions or titles are not part of an image on display in an exhibition but represent the curatorial voice, offering authoritative interpretation. The show intentionally blurs the lines between image and objects, captions and images, artistic imagination and sober curatorial annotation. It is, in that sense, a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* of denied authenticity.

Figure 2: Adjustable shoe-lasts invented by Hannah Arendt's Great Grandmother Rose Aharon. Rose's husband stole the patent. (Photo: Bill McCormack)

The panel of family antecedents invokes the kind of historical photographs we either possess ourselves or have seen in the homes of others, those collections of framed photographs, sometimes faded or damaged, that are part of our own western bourgeois version of ancestor worship. The artist uses grey paper and monochromatic colors for the drawings and their captions, evoking materials that have faded with time, or black and white films from the early 20th century. At the same time, each family has its idiosyncratic characters, and ancestral pictures often go with stories that summarize the character, as in the name-*cum*-title of a gallery of pseudo-noble ancestors that can be easily spoofed. The antedecents of Shenitzer's putative Arendt are her (Great) Great Grandfather Friedrich Aaron (the caption mistakenly refers to him as Great Grandfather), depicted in 18th-century costume and identified as the "inventor of the stacked heel," Great Grandmother Rose Aharon, née Finck, inventor of the adjustable shoe-last, and Great Grandfather Moses Aharon, who "never lived up to his father's expectations and ended up claiming the patents for his wife's inventions," among others.

Jarringly, on display nearby is a set of adjustable wooden shoe stretchers accompanied by two labels, one suggesting that "Hannah Arendt took obsessive care of her shoes, a family tradition;" a claim backed up by a saying, apparently handed down in the family: "Respect your shoes, and the world will respect you." The other label connects between the image caption for Rose Aharon and

the objects on display: "Adjustable shoe lasts invented by Hannah Arendt's Great Grandmother Rose Aharon. Rose's husband stole the patent." The circularity of the references and the solidity (and antique character) of the object on display create cohesion and verisimilitude, and thus offer a hermetic moment of initiation into a true/false family tradition. What is true about it is not disclosed. The claim made by the drawn image, which is not a historical photograph and hence lacks all authenticity, though not plausibility, is backed up by the object, which is incorrectly called a "shoe last" but looks authentic. The result is a *précis* of the show as a whole: a circle of hermeneutical confusions about what is real or true and what isn't.

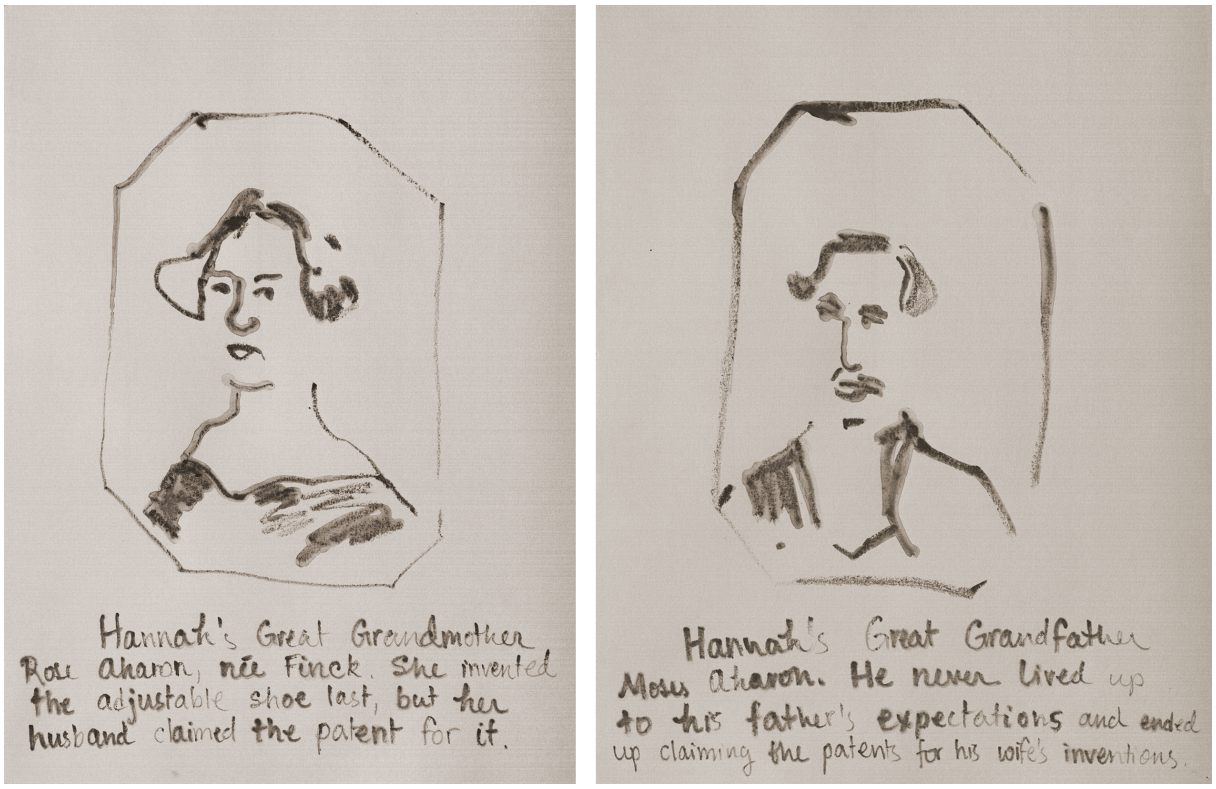

Figure 3: Hannah's Great-Grandparents (photo: Miriam Shenitzer 2019)

Significantly missing among the antecedents and from the women in Hannah Arendt's putative family is an image of her mother, who is never depicted, although she is mentioned in some of the captions. (For example, she is mentioned in the caption for Madame Solinka, the medium regularly consulted by Hannah Arendt's mother.) On the other hand, the artist's own mother makes a cameo appearance in one of the images of the "Sports" panel where she is depicted as a swimmer. The caption names "Sarah Pomeranc," but the uninitiated viewer would not know that the woman looking back at her confidently was the artist's mother. The caption further states that Sarah "easily defeated Hannah Arendt in the Women's Triathlon" and "called Hannah 'that Yecke.'" While denying access to "Hannah Arendt," the rich tapestry of intimate images in fact provides a kaleidoscopic inventory of the artist's own imagination, populated by partly actual and partly invented characters and experiences.

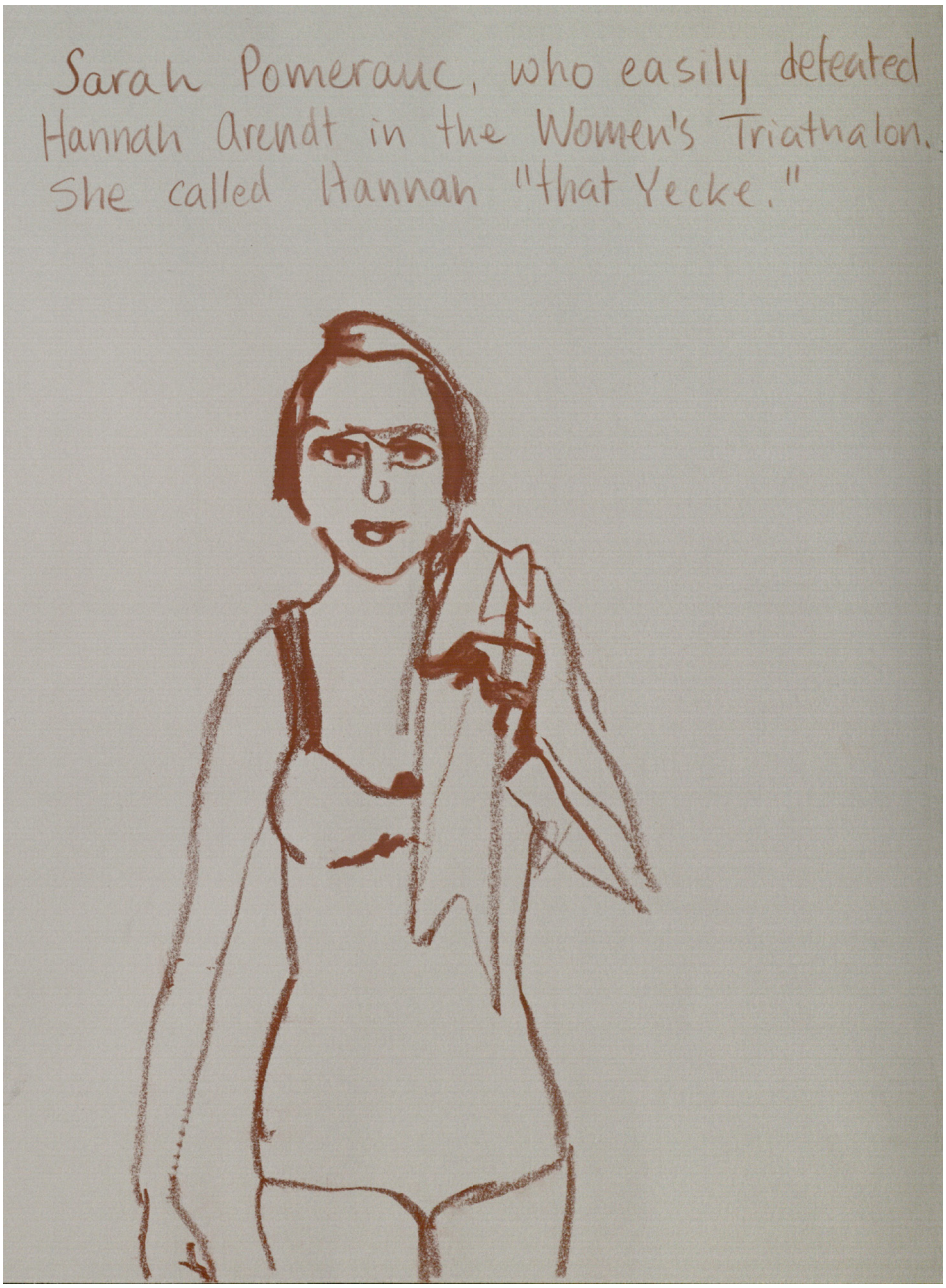

Figure 4: "Sarah Pomeranc, who easily defeated Hannah Arendt in the women's triathalon. She called Hannah 'that Yecke'" (photo: Miriam Shenitzer 2019)

The show thus issues a veiled invitation to engage with the very private inner life and re/collections of the artist herself using a narrative superimposed on the figure of Hannah Arendt. This hermeneutical double-take thus preserves the privacy of the artist who lavishly draws from her own experience and from objects collected over time and imbued with personal meaning, while forestalling all curiosity that would attempt to know the real Hannah Arendt better than she knew herself.

Aniconic portraiture and the freedom to remain invisible

Shenitzer's faux-biographical portraiture puts a life on display, though not the one the viewer is invited, tongue-in-cheek, to imagine. The putative "Hannah Arendt" is individualized, but she is also thoroughly hidden. Just as the subject's mother never appears, the putative Hannah Arendt also rarely appears in person, and only in forms that disallow the formation of a clear image. Instead, we get pictures, as if from a neglected drawer, a cigar-box with the discards that didn't make it into any official album, or an album assembled from the pictures that somehow made it across the historical abyss that is never mentioned. In place of a portrait of Hannah Arendt we get a thick, though veiled, image of the artists' own memory fragments and jumbled references that are so typical of our family traditions: half-truths and barely remembered bits and pieces, things they carried, and that are all that we have to pass on to the next generation. The "putative life of Hannah Arendt" affirms the fragmentary character of our personal lives and underscores the disjointedness of disrupted lives.

My purpose was to show the subterranean connections between Shenitzer's "putative life of Hannah Arendt" and Hannah Arendt's insistence on maintaining the boundaries between public and private lives as a condition of freedom, dignity, and humanity. In place of using readily

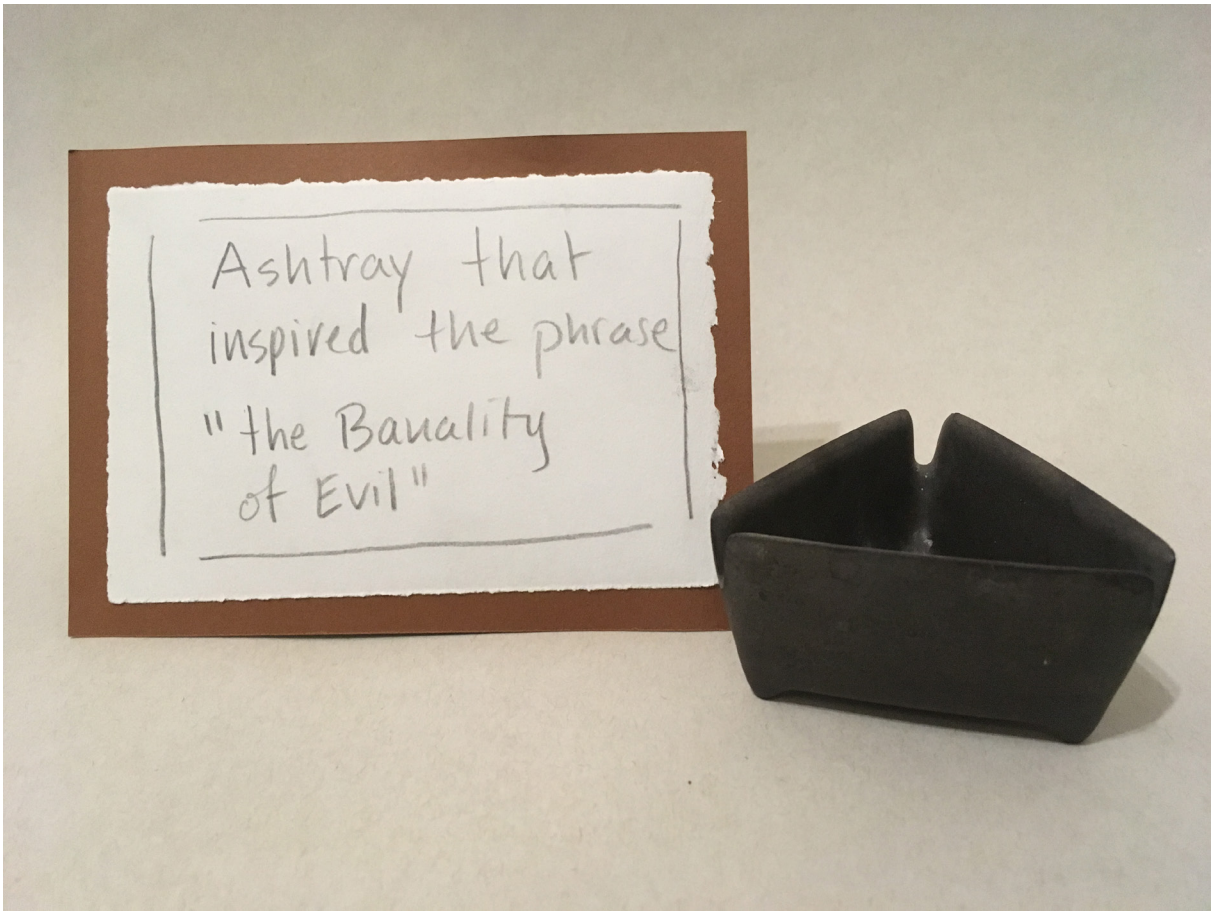

Figure 5: Ashtray (Photo: Bill McCormack)

available, but ultimately facile and essentially questionable biographical conventions, Shenitzer's work draws attention to our essential ignorance of any but our own life. As we traverse the putative life on display, we realize just how much our lives are lived with others, given and determined by others, by the personages that populate and make our reality. The life at the center emerges from the negative space, from the undepicted, in the interstices between the remembered and forgotten, the putative and the real.

The assembled images and objects constitute an "archive" of sorts. As Jacques Derrida writes in *Archive Fever* (1996), the *arche* of the archive alludes to both commencement and commandment. The title of the visual archive, *A Putative Life of Hannah Arendt,* provides the directive on how to view the images. Like all historical evidence from which we attempt to retrieve or reconstruct the past, the visual archive of this putative life resists our attempts to impose prior knowledge, or prior assumptions, on the being that appears in the images, artifacts, and captions. We are to suspend our assumptions and allow for an encounter of a different life, a different personage, a different way of telling a story to take place.

Shenitzer's putative life of Hannah Arendt intuits the "relatedness" of the self that Arendt sought to reassert in her thinking about what it means to be human. This "related" self—as Andrew Benjamin (2018) argues in a recent paper—"twists itself free from what [...] Heidegger criticized as a 'metaphysics of subjectivity'" (215). In place of the isolated self of the thinker, often invoked in iconic photographs that might appear on book covers, Shenitzer's Arendt appears in an array of imagined figures and coincidental configurations. In the manner of a family album that neither fails nor succeeds in documenting the emergence of a character, while inadvertently documenting the styles, social habits, and historical contexts of a life, Shenitzer's drawings, artifacts and inscriptions capture the milieu, the aura, and the possibilities inherent in a particular time and a particular place. The particular time and particular place evoked in the putative life series is that of the 1920s and 30s, somewhere in Central Europe, somewhere in the "unbearable lightness of being," as Milan Kundera titled his breakout novel about private lives on the margins of the 1968 Prague Spring. The putative life of Hannah Arendt is constructed from memory fragments of unknown origins that are nevertheless real and suggest familiarity. We become acquainted with a persona, a character, without being entirely sure of the knowledge conferred by this archive.

Defying the biographical convention that the early life of a personage adumbrates their eventual greatness, Shenitzer depicts the putative early life of Hannah Arendt as a set of ordinary moments, serendipitously captured and preserved in a visual archive of seeming trivia. This vindication of the everyday, the intimate, the fleeting moment, the odd relationship on the margins of a life, captures the tapestry of emotions and attachments that are often ignored, emotions of joy and disappointment and attachments of friendship and distrust that are here foregrounded as formative and normative in how we turn out as human beings. By retrieving, albeit virtually, the putative life of Hannah Arendt, Shenitzer's visual archive serves as a stage for the life of the emotions. Emotions and encounters constitute links and bonds between individuals where concepts and classifications fail us.

By creating the simulacrum of a putative life Shenitzer both asserts authority of access and memory preservation as well as relinquishes all claims to authoritative depiction. Gesturing at the ineffability of the true self, the putative life of Hannah Arendt denies as well as affirms access to the persona at the center of the series. The artist is thus in equal parts mystagogue and demystifier, enchanter and disenchanter.

The artist as collector

In the passage from Arendt's introduction to her edition of Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* that I placed at the beginning of this essay, Arendt illustrates Benjamin's obsession with collecting books, many of which he proudly acknowledged not to have read, and quotations, with a view to pursuing an ideal of writing that would consist exclusively of quotations. Arendt perceptively describes what Benjamin shared with Franz Kafka (and, one might add, with Leo Strauss [2002, 69–70, passim]), which is a realization that dawned on Benjamin only gradually, namely, that the loss of the authority that tradition had previously bestowed on revealed or uncovered (unconcealed, *unverborgen*) truths had left truth bereft of a certain "consistence" (Arendt 2019, li). To Benjamin's chapter in which these considerations unfold, Arendt gives the title "Perlentaucher" or "The Pearl Diver," which is her metaphor for the collector. As a thinker of the modern condition (see Arendt 1958, 1961), Arendt describes not only the fracturing of the beautifully unified world of pre-modern humanity but interprets the works of liminal modernists like Benjamin and Kafka who articulate the unraveling of the consistence of the modern project from their own socially marginal perspective as members of a tribe of colonized colonizers and a "pariah" people (see Arendt 1978).

In Arendt's reading of Benjamin, the fracturing of tradition, and of the abeyance of the function of tradition as providing "consistence" to received truths, finds expression in literary work that is more poetic and aphoristic than prosaic, linear, or systematic. Arendt thereby explains Benjamin's seeming failure to produce anything larger or more sustained than essays that are at best to be classified as "criticism." The form and style of his writing is thus a true reflection of how he perceives and works through the phenomena he engages with. In terms of perception and representation, what is essential here is Arendt's attention to the difference between metaphor and allegory, a subject she discusses in connection with Benjamin's friendship with Brecht and his distance from Adorno who rightly, as Arendt believes, dismissed Benjamin's Marxism as "vulgar," i.e., as lacking an appreciation for dialectics. Arendt sees Benjamin as someone who appreciated the metaphoric character of all things, the smaller the better, by which he turns his back on the preference for allegory, common among rationalist philosophers of all stripes, for whom essence precedes existence.

Much like Benjamin, as described by Arendt, *The Putative Life of Hannah Arendt* created by Shenitzer revels in the miniature, the *faux objets d'art*, as a form of representation. Her work presupposes not so much the difficulty of retrieving tradition in general but rather the denial of return of a past shattered by the Holocaust. There is nothing "handed down in one solid piece" and even the "coral and pearls" on display, as if rescued from a shipwreck, are recognizably inauthentic (Arendt 2019, lii). The reason this works, or rather the effect achieved by attributing the images, objects, and

memory fragments "preserved" and put on display in the labels to a putative life of Hannah Arendt, is that "Hannah Arendt" provides a sub-structure, a named, auratic persona, to which these memory fragments can be plausibly affixed. (I am suggesting the term "auratic persona," combining [and contrasting] Walter Benjamin's notion of "aura" with Deleuze and Guattari who speak of "conceptual personae"; see Young 2013). It further works because the putative persona serves to conceal something that is simultaneously revealed, namely, the actuality and reality of the memory fragments, miniatures of lived recollection, that are put on full display without being fully identified for what they truly are. What the viewer, uninitiated as s/he remains into the biographical sources of origin of the linguistic and visual elements, engages with is therefore a true representation of realities disguised as falsehoods, much like Jewish tradition treats the surface level of the sacred text of the Torah.

Why Arendt/"Arendt" in the first place? The work is part of a series of putative lives of "great European thinkers" that, at present, also includes "Walter Benjamin" and "Mikhail Bakhtin," in addition to "Hannah Arendt" (for Arendt's take on "greatness", see Arendt 1961, 47.) The choice of personae indicates auratic presences, a pantheon of sorts, mediated by particular names. This onomatopoeic conjuring shines a light on the dialectic of presence and absence, on the vanishing of the recalled. The choice of names—everyone knows, ought to know, ought to have heard and, in fact, read them—focuses attention on the interconnected problems of knowledge-production, -transmission, and –inheritance, on both the levels of past knowledge and the making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of a faux-biographical archive. The name provides a literal vanishing point around which the images and objects are arranged, with the captions providing the thread that connects images and objects to that vanishing point.

Like Arendt with regard to Benjamin (see Arendt 2019, liii-lv), whose attitude toward collecting value-less objects calls into question the commitment of the collector toward preservation and hence neither confers market value nor intrinsic meaning on the collected objects, so it seems with Shenitzer's Arendt as well. The randomness of the (re-)collected moments, grounded as they may be in memories of unmarked origin, creates a voluminous assemblage that, both, in spite and because of its persuasive range, destabilizes the image evoked by the totality of images and objects. We walk away uncertain of the "take-away" or "cash value" of the encounter.

Another parallel between Arendt's observation on the effect of Benjamin's approach to collecting and Shenitzer's Arendt is the appearance of whimsicality that arises from the utter disregard for "public significance" characteristic of the *flâneur*:

> [S]ince this "deepest urge" in the collector has no public significance whatsoever but results in a strictly private hobby, everything "that is said from the angle of the true collector" is bound to appear as "whimsical" as the typically Jean Paulian vision of one of those writers "who write books not because they are poor, but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like" [...]. (Arendt 2019, liv-lv)

Shenitzer describes humor as a tool she uses to deal with the emotional force of the recollections that provide the *sujet* as well as the impetus for her work (Shenitzer 2019). In Arendt's reading of Benjamin, the whimsical arises from the recruitment of objects of putative public significance for the purpose of seemingly satisfying a merely private obsession. What confers a peculiar significance on this act of withdrawal is the background of dark times, of "an era of public darkness" (lv). By eschewing the representation of an actual Arendt, by giving us a simulacrum of biographical actualities instead, by offering moments of uncertain veracity drawn or constructed from real fragments of memory of uncertain provenance, Shenitzer speaks to those dark times without naming them. Herein lies her "collector's" withdrawal from public significance that gives her "putative Arendt" the misleading appearance of mere whimsicality. As Arendt writes about Benjamin,

> there [...] appears a disturbing factor to announce that tradition may be the last thing to guide him and traditional values by no means be as safe in his hands as one might have assumed at first glance. (Arendt 2019, iv)

Even more pertinent and perhaps key to Shenitzer's work is another observation Arendt makes about Benjamin as a "collector." In contrast to the traditional private collector who transforms, while preserving, a past for a present, but inadvertently wreaks some sort of destruction upon it ("the heir and preserver unexpectedly turns into a destroyer," lvi), Benjamin is exempt from this charge of appropriation because he already finds the objects of his interest (children's books, the *Shma' Yisrael* engraved on two grains of wheat, etc.) already severed from any meaningful tradition. In other words, his manner of collecting indicates, rather than wreaks, destruction. Using this as a possible analogy one may be able to describe the logic of Shenitzer's use of "Arendt" as a persona or an icon that is "collected" or picked up as a "coral or pearls" from the debris washed up on the shores of a post-Holocaust world. By making Hannah Arendt the object of her work of memory collection and rearrangement, preferably displayed within the context of a bourgeois home, a cabinet, a private museum-type setting, she creates a new, appropriated, de- and re-contextualized, present/absent figure called "Hannah Arendt" that denies the possibility of asserting authenticity, historicity, or the authority of certain access to tradition or the past.

Staging Dis/Appearance: Shenitzer's Arendt from the perspective of performance theory

Heeding the maxim that "every artist paints (her)self" (Eisler 1987), Shenitzer's work relinquishes the illusion that it could be otherwise. What appears, then, in the putative life of Hannah Arendt is Shenitzer's autobiography in disguise, a self-portrait in stages, echoes, fragments of the remembered, forgotten, and suggested. Just as Rembrandt might paint himself in historical costume (or like early 20th-century modern Ottoman citizens would pose as Palestinian peasants to have their portraits taken by the Armenian photographer across from the Jaffa-Gate), Shenitzer portrays "herself" in the guise of a putative Arendt. The name that provides the focal point is the screen onto which the artist projects a kaleidoscope refracting her own fragmented self.

In order to "work" as a work of faux-biographical art, the series could have played toward verisimilitude. Shenitzer could have used pseudo-historical photographs instead of drawings, creating simulacra of an actual past. The mixture of drawn images, the handwritten labels, and pseudo-objects mixed in with actual could-be-authentic objects the artist forces the viewer to recognize the installation as contrivance and artifice, disrupting the possibility of illusion. Ready to suspend disbelief, viewers sometimes fail to realize that Shenitzer never signed the compact of illusion.

What is going on here may be illustrated, by way of contrast, in Rebecca Schneider's writing on theatrical reenactment (2011). Schneider vividly describes the impossible mandate and the abiding mystery of theater, which is to make the absent present. The mandate of reenactment is to render a past present and bring it to experience. But the past is past and unavailable, and our means of representation are not just limited, but positively distorting. To have full access to a past would mean to visit it, be in it, live it, as in the fantasy of time travel.[7] All reenactment—in whatever form of artistic or scholarly production—rests on the acknowledgment that a repetition of the past is neither possible nor desirable. As Schneider describes in relation to one of her examples, the Wooster Group's literal reenactment of an earlier work by Jerzy Grotowski, the more precise the reenactment, the more "eerily false" it rings (112). Schneider, leaning on Dunkelberg (2005), describes the experience as follows: "Indeed, watching the labor of exact replication from the audience, it seems as though the more they get the reenactment exactly right, the more uncannily wrong it begins to feel" (112). If one takes that reenactment of an earlier play, its precise quotation, as one end of a spectrum and places Shenitzer's *Putative Arendt* on its other end, one may arrive at the following observation. Whereas the Wooster Group's precise imitation of its original feels eerily false, Shenitzer's complete obscuring of the original, to the point of making it vanish, except for the name on which it hangs, feels perplexingly authentic.

More carefully considered, all consciousness of the past is always the present consciousness of a past and hence the index of a present. Reenactment, repetition, imitation, quotation, and the like, when sustained by a compact of illusion and the suspension of disbelief, is then a form of escape into a virtual past, a form of repressing our self-awareness of the present. When art shines a light on this dialectic and disrupts the illusion (as in a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*), we are reminded that the past, precisely because it is beyond our reach, is at an advantage over the present. All retrieval is purchased at the loss in the values of memory, authenticity, and genuineness. Because of this inevitable loss, promise of access to the past, even illusory access, is so highly prized.

But it is not at all certain that such access is even sought by Shenitzer. In fact, the "real" Hannah Arendt, putatively present in the archive of her writings, letters, images, interviews etc., disappears behind the "putative" archive of faux authentic images, captions, and objects that, at the same time, act as a kind of ghost photography showing material traces of a spirit "Arendt" who oscillates between appearing and disappearing.

Despite the very different means and virtually opposite stance toward the problem of mimesis (one perhaps rooted in a Jewish, rather than Christian, disposition toward the *the-horein* of

aesthetic production), Shenitzer complicates the assumptions of sincerity that might be expected in an aesthetic re/production of a deadly serious past. One might say that by using the most "sketchy" of all artistic media (i.e., drawing), and by placing the *faux-bios* in architectural spaces that evoke the false solidity of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century bourgeois spaces of ostentatious *arrivistes* homes, Shenitzer creates something that is so obviously ironic that it becomes serious: in a secondary seriousness about that which is beyond earnest representation, commemoration, or (G-d forbid) reenactment. In this context, the very suggestion of "camp" attains a different meaning.

Inheritance or appropriation?

Schneider's wrestling with "reenactment" as a characteristic of mimetic stagecraft is helpful in thinking about the dialectic of inheritance and appropriation. Hannah Arendt, in the preface to *Between Past and Future* (1961), cites the French poet and writer René Char, to indicate the problem she aims to describe in her own thinking about the space between inherited past and made future, whereby past, present, and future seem to share the property of being public rather than merely private and hence "idiotic" (71). In Arendt's reading, the history of modern revolutions is not so much a continuum, as it might be for Hegel or Marx, rather than a series of moments when men and women were released from the opaque sadness of private lives and placed in that existential space where past and future significantly intersected in lives called upon to regenerate that eminent space that is at the heart of meaningful, i.e. political, life, in the non-trivial sense of the political. Arendt also makes it clear that the "lost treasure" pursued by those who saw themselves placed on the stage of history and in the spotlight of public deeds was ultimately a "mirage," which may be her way of saying, a fiction (Arendt 1961, 4–5).

In the passage quoted by Arendt, Char speaks of an "inheritance without testament." In his words, *Notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament* (Arendt 1961, 3). Arendt may have been drawn to this quote because of the existentialist implications of an "inheritance without testament." What better illustration of what Heidegger means by "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*)!

Our more or less literal appropriations of the past are both inevitable and ethically problematic. It is inevitable for us to appropriate the past, with or without mandate, because without appropriation we would have no language at all, no means of communication, no forms of expression, and nothing to express. It is ethically problematic because of the lack of mandate, in other words, because of our situation "beyond all tradition," a situation diagnosed by Friedrich Nietzsche but more virulently and viscerally experienced as true by the generations who witnessed the destructive forces that led to, and became manifest in, the two World Wars of the twentieth century.

Lack of mandate, thrownness, loss of tradition, and the like mid-twentieth-century tropes of *malaise* were forcefully rejected by the Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim in his later work, post-1967, when he began to articulate a new type of mandate, one emerging from Auschwitz. In Fackenheim's reading, Auschwitz revealed, as a matter of absolute moral clarity, the mandate not

to allow Hitler any posthumous victories. Fackenheim called this the 614th-commandment, one more than the 613 commandments rabbinic tradition counted as having been revealed at Sinai. This is how he put it:

> Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world [...], lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. (Fackenheim 1972, 84)

This is not the place to critique Fackenheim, even though it may well be asked what it means that he formulated his famous postulate very much in light of, and in response to, a completely different event, namely, the 1967 Six Day War in the Middle East, giving the present moment meaning in light of a past that, to him and many others, all of a sudden seemed repeatable. The imperative he formulated was based on a profound fear of repetition on the historic stage of an event that had to remain unique and, in an eerie sense, divine. In other words, far from representing a simple act of accepting an inheritance or formulating a mandate *of* the past, Fackenheim's 614th commandment (transgressive as it is, as it is explicitly forbidden in the Torah to add to or subtract from it) is a mandate issued by a present *on* a past, and hence perhaps another case of appropriation without mandate, inheritance without testament.

Much like the men described by Arendt who were forced to conduct "all relevant business in the affairs of the country [...] in deed and word" and thus "constitute(d) willy-nilly a public realm" (Arendt 1961, 3), Fackenheim's generation found itself in a similar place where, in hindsight, the past was disclosed as issuing a mandate to which one had to respond. Or, rather, the present threat of an unknown future focused the attention of men and women living in a time dominated by "knaves or fools" (Arendt 1961, 3) to act on their own and extract from a fractured past what mandates they could. The reason why Arendt became an outcast from Jewish politics was that she derived different mandates from the same past, usable ones, to be sure, but perhaps not toward the same vision of the future as, say, Fackenheim.

Is Shenitzer's Arendt indicative of a retreat to "the weightless irrelevance of [...] private affairs, once more separated from 'the world of reality'," an expression of "the 'sad opaqueness' of a private life centered about nothing but itself" (Arendt 1961, 4)? In other words, is the life depicted a purely private life, or does the depiction, the choice of name as cipher, the surreptitious revelation of the artist's private moments, also entail the assertion of a mandate emanating from the past, even in its "campy" denial of any relevance of such a possibility? Would this require for the show to be about the "real" historical Arendt? Like Arendt, Shenitzer is compelled to reenact by the existential distance between the past and us, between us and the past. The question is, then, what art can do to draw our attention to that space between past and future that we inhabit. What kind of past, what kind of future?

Like one of the erstwhile Sabatians and Frankists, who felt mandated to cross over into the world of darkness where the sparks of light are trapped that needed to be redeemed and restored to their proper place, so as to repair the cosmic order shattered in the beginning, Shenitzer feels compelled to lift up the fragments of her own memory, those "coral and pearls," that signify her (and through her artwork now also our) connection to a past that gains its significance from being remembered, represented, reenacted, and, if need be: reinvented, so as to be carried forward. What remains unacknowledged in Fackenheim, namely, the sleight-of-hand by which he attributes the mandate he formulates for the future to the past, becomes visible in Shenitzer's "Arendt." By substituting her own memory fragments for those of an actual Arendt, Shenitzer's putative "Arendt" reenacts and renders present elements of actual pasts to give us the mimetic opportunity to propel ourselves forward, once again, from where "Arendt" stood, to see our present in light of a putative, and hence not necessarily usable, past. This, then, is the "public" side of this work of art: that it reminds us that we retain responsibility for the past precisely because we inherited its various and contradictory mandates.

Naming the treasure

Being without tradition (or testament), we are disconnected or untethered from the past. This, no less than the sudden nameless (because unheralded and unanticipated) gift of freedom obtained by means of revolution described by Arendt, is a condition that lacks a name. Whether or not to treasure it is as uncertain to us as was that gift of freedom obtained by means of revolution, which means by violence. We, the unintentional heirs of a future never heralded by any past, depend on fragments of remembrance that historians no more or less than artists assemble into a treasure chest, to be carried forward. As such we are manufacturing the testament for the future. Arendt resolves the riddle when she translates "treasure" into the historical language proffered by, and used in regard to, those revolutions: public happiness and public freedom, with the emphasis resting on "public." Unbeknownst to themselves, so Arendt, that was what those men in revolutionary times unexpectedly found in their hands: a new, unheralded and unnamed thing that may be called public, or the republic.[8]

Of the situation of the historian of thought Arendt writes as follows:

> If one were to write the intellectual history of our century, not in the form of successive generations, where the historian must be literally true to the sequence of theories and attitudes, *but in the form of the biography of a single person, aiming at no more than a metaphorical approximation* to what actually happened in the minds of men, this person's mind would stand revealed as having been forced to turn full circle not once but twice, first when he escaped from thought into action, and then again when action, or rather having acted, forced him back into thought. (Arendt 1961, 9; emphasis added)

What I find intriguing in this statement is the highlighted part of the sentence where Arendt envisages the task of writing history *metaphorically*, through the prism of a particular life, as "no more than a metaphorical approximation to what actually happened in the minds of men". The

plural matters in that the individual biography provides the medium or metaphor for what happened in the minds of men, of which the individual is only one among others. It strikes me that this is precisely what Shenitzer does in her "putative life of Hannah Arendt." She picks a name and makes the life she concocts from her own memory fragments a window into what obtained in the lives of those who, like Arendt, were compelled to make certain choices in a particular world and situation. Less confident of what went on in those minds, Shenitzer nevertheless construes a plausible life that, in all its particularity, bears metaphorical character. And just as anticipated by Arendt writing on "in-between" periods, i.e., periods of contemplation rather than action, Shenitzer zeroes in on the world between the wars, the very period of Arendt, Benjamin, and others who found themselves challenged to make sense of the shambles of the past while readying themselves, unbeknownst to themselves, for futures into which they were soon enough propelled, forced from contemplation into action, a future that to us is a fractured past and that reminds us of the preciousness of the short-lived-ness of those moments of reprieve, including our own.

Notes

[1] Ute Frevert is director at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. The remarks I am referring to were made in a speech at Boston University, on October 15, 2018. See http://www.bu.edu/jewishstudies/calendar/the-elie-wiesel-memorial-lectures/. While Frevert, who studies the history of emotions, spoke of the past, I am extending her observation to the present and to the general question of action in history.

[2] "Difficult Freedom" is the title of a collection of writings by French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. See Lévinas (1976) and (1990).

[3] See the German *Strafgesetzbuch*, Paragraph 323c. On the pre-history of this law see Haubrich (2001, 56ff).

[4] The legal principle is often formulated as "*ad impossibilia nemo tenetur*" or "*ultra posse nemo tenetur.*" See Fellmeth and Horwitz (2009). On Kant, see Milz (2002, 182).

[5] "*Das man*" is the early Heidegger's term for the anonymous force we may call peer pressure, the world of conventional morality, etc.

[6] It is not entirely clear whether misspellings or grammatical errors in the German of the titles and captions are intentional or unintentional, or whether the viewer is meant to take note of them, or how one is to react to them. In this case ("den Ganz" instead of "die Gans" of the original nursery rhyme), the misspelling gave rise to a hilarious (and compelling) interpretation offered by Arendt biographer Thomas Meyer during the opening symposium.

[7] Time travel, that wonderful fantasy, is fuelled by its paradoxical impossibility: that the past in which we want to insert ourselves would no longer be the actual past but something new, an alternative past, changed by our having inserted ourselves in it. The visited past is transformed rather than "immortal." See Arendt (1961).

[8] A careful glance at the history of early modern political theory reveals that the modern republic was anything but unheralded or unnamed. It appeared in reality after centuries of theorizing the ancient Hebrew republic.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE ARTIST AS FACILITATOR: BEING PRESENT WITH & LOVING THE UNKNOWN

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Everything is hard: everyone is their own kind of asshole:
still you have to keep doing good in the world.

These are some ideas navigating good, about cultivating goodness,
about art, facilitation and presence,
as means of navigating ethical responsibility,
especially to all the things.

It is not a catchall, a universal declaration of Universal and Forever and Fuck Everything Else Goodness: it is some ideas, accompanied by examples, expansions and attributions.

Everything is hard: we need multiple tools, cultures, avenues of growth. Everything is not included here. But I do discuss some tools for navigating Everything.

To begin: artists are facilitators of meaning.

Facilitation here means not just the khaki-and-whiteboard meeting context. It means supporting an exchange, of attempting understanding. Between people, and between things. Because we're sharing space with a lot of things, and those things both effect our own health and well-being, and deserve to be heard for their own sake.

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):149–157
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51114
ISSN 2057-7176

To be heard and understood is a fundamental human need, so fundamental that its lack creates conflict, leading to violence, terrorism, and other misunderstandings and extremisms, which themselves (the "things" of misunderstanding and extremisms) desperately, frustratingly, call out to be heard and understood.

Facilitation: to lead (a discussion).

A tool for understanding.

A good facilitator has the capacity to manage multiple perspectives. They ensure that all participants in a conversation have an equal voice, that no one voice dominates the conversation. They manage the use and experience of time (CDC 2015).

This includes the facilitation of *things.* Things are alive (Bennett 2010), they are mutually entangled, defined by one another (Barad 2003). *Things* include invisible, intangible concepts—like ideas, memes, social constructs (Bogost 2012).

Let's look at a few examples.

This is an act of Facilitation:

Discourse: Projector: Plant: Filter *(2015), Defibrillator Performance Art Gallery. Still from video documentation by Lal Avgen.*

I am directing the can of air to breathe onto the microphone. Later I will clean out the projector's air filters with the can of air, and direct it to smell the flowers. It is a precise and futile breath-based endeavor. I saw OOUR perform "IWALY" two years earlier.

When we think of material and concept through our art work, non-human things develop *presence*. They are alive—they *perform*, and *all art is implicated within performance* (Beitiks 2013). Regardless of whether it is sculpture, video, sound, installation—the presence of the non-human in art is central and ubiquitous, and the artist is ethically implicated in its management and engagement.

This is also an act of Facilitation:

IWALY *(2013), a performance by Selma Banich, an OOUR production. Photo by Daniele Wilmo.*

While watching the piece by OOUR, I had an excruciating experience of presence, a total attunement to the simple, powerful, deliberate gestures that Selma made, and a very subtle and visceral connection to the tabletop surface. I saw Robin Deacon perform Stuart Sherman's tabletop work about a year earlier.

The Performing Table

Imagine I am attempting to facilitate an exchange with a table. I can sit or stand on a table. (An old adage from theater school: never build a piece of furniture that can't withstand the weight of an actor). I can place other objects on the table. I can smush my face against the table, and so on, you get it. My understanding of the table is in part defined by its size, shape and material, and it is in part defined by its context, both culturally, and within my own perception. I can see and understand a table as coherent with or disparate from its surroundings based on its size and shape. I can understand it as a kitchen table, a workbench, a dining table, a black basic table, a placeholder for a generic or Western Table.

Many meanings of the table can coexist simultaneously. It takes only a shift in a performer's tone, or cadence, body posture, maybe a change in light, sound or position, to completely transform my understanding of the table. It is the same table. It has the same size, shape, quality. It has not transmogrified into something else. The table could be split into two tables simultaneously, kitchen and desk, moving and not-moving, dining and workbench. It could even represent not-table—a bed or rock, without changing physical form. Each of these meanings is in part constructed by the performer's movements, gestures, emotions and environments, and the composition of light, sound, space.

If the world is a dialogue between human and non-human, including things that are *also themselves* language and communication, then art is a framework that takes us out of that everyday space, and creates alternate spaces for this communication.

Within this framework, meaning is facilitated, by artists. Who must attempt to understand the entities in dialogue—in order to be responsible facilitators.

This proves to be pretty damned difficult when the thing you are trying to understand is a table.

In "The Third Table" (2012), Graham Harman expands upon physicist Arthur Eddington's concept of two tables, as experienced by humans. Eddington argues that within the same object exists a table of *everyday experience*, and a table of *science*—consisting mostly of empty space. Harman's table exists somewhere in between. "The arts are in a unique position to give us the third table. They can never give it to us directly—there is no direct access to reality" (Harman 2014 15:05). The real is something that can be "loved, but never fully known." Art opens space for the love that comes from attention, attunement, the recognition of other.

Anthony Howell embodies that kind of love in a review of performance artist Stuart Sherman's work.

> I have never seen so much happen in so short a time, but I am unsure of what I have seen [...]. Anyway, I go to a nearby bar to mull over what I remember. I have to make a phone call. I go to the phone, put down my drink on the ledge, pick up the phone, put it down while I unzip my jacket, search for my address book, my dime, my specs, pick up the phone, insert the time, dial, pick up my drink—and there I am perceiving myself doing this, coping with the myriad procedures of living. (Howell 1999, 75)

Howell's experience of Sherman's work has led him to reconsider his own relationships with objects. Robin Deacon would later re-perform Stuart Sherman's work in "Approximating the Art of Stuart Sherman," a dedicated rendition of object-based interactions. I would help document this performance for Deacon's documentary of Sherman's work, "Spectacle: A Portrait of Stuart Sherman."

Several years later I would put a table in a shed with a bull.

This is an act of Facilitation:

Approximating the Art of Stuart Sherman *(2009), Robin Deacon. Courtesy of the artist.*

Presence: Present: The Present

I can love a table, I can reflect on my relationship to a table. But is the table "present" in my conversation? What space does it occupy in the exchange artists facilitate?

Harman claims "The nature of objects is to withhold themselves" (1:28:20). Put another way, objects are *not present*.

Timothy Morton (2013) argues, "What is called the *present* is simply a reification, an arbitrary boundary drawn around things by a particular entity—a state, philosophical view, government, family, electron, black hole" (93). Here as in *right now*, *this moment*, is a false definition, according to Morton—an imaginary boundary.

But in terms of theater, or performance—the media, the discipline, the art form—*to be present* is a very real thing. It is, in fact, often a state performers seek out. To *have presence* means to occupy space, to be in tune with all that is and is happening, to encompass a special quality that is engaging to the viewer.

This moment of awareness, this achievement of presence, opens up avenues for listening. When a thing *has presence*, we as audience members feel attuned, connected with it. When a thing is *present*, we have an almost-inarticulable understanding of its being. We may not be able to describe its history or biography, but we are in communication with it. The work of performance, of artmaking, that points itself to the cultivation of presence, becomes a necessary act of facilitation. We achieve something akin to understanding.

Describing presence primarily as "the inter-relational tool through which the subject networks (and is networked by) the external world," Gabriella Giannachi (2012, 54) articulates her definition of the term through research in cognitive science. Presence is a heightened experience of a performer/thing, an experience that reminds us of our entwined existence. It is, according to Giannachi, "an ecological process that marks a moment of awareness of the exchanges between the subject and the living environment of which they are part" (54–55).

Performance-presence and ecological-presence enact "moments of awareness" in the work.

This is also an act of Facilitation:

Systems of Pain/Networks of Resilience (New York) *(2016).*

I left a table in a shed with a bull. I walked away to get my gear, and when I came back, the bull was nuzzling the table. This went on for several minutes. I watched, entranced. I spent a lot of time wondering about the bull and the table.

In developing an artwork, by a human, and largely for an audience of humans, a facilitator might be straining, reaching, grasping, for a connection to the table as-it-is, for an experience of the objects' *presence*. Even if they have no way of accessing the "reality" of the table, they do have some control over light, composition, sound, structure, the gaze of the audience. Some experience of its being. This is where the hard work of opening space for empathy comes in.

Unrequited Empathy

Anthropomorphism is a tool that is debatable in its usefulness. On the one hand, it's an unavoidable projection of human experience onto the non-human, potentially clouding our ability to regard the non-human as-it-is. On the other hand, it extends and expands our experience of empathy. Jane Bennett (2010) writes, "We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism—the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature—to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). We need a tool to expand our human-centered perspective.

There is at least one social study that confirmed that anthropomorphism does indeed prompt the consideration of non-human perspectives.

> Compared to participants who remained detached, participants instructed to take the perspective of the imperiled bird or tree reported stronger empathic feelings toward those objects, and toward the environment as a whole. These empathic feelings translated into a greater willingness to help the environment: The people prompted to feel empathy wanted to give more money to environmental causes than did the other study participants. (McIntyre 2007)

This projection of perspective is not the same as truly knowing a table (whatever that means). But it is a useful attempt, a meaningful action. And our understanding of plant-animal-table is influenced, in part, by our cultural exposure to these things—our experience of them and their experiences in images, in artworks, in our everyday lives. My understanding of a table is shaped, in part, by the art I have seen with tables (performed by Selma Banich, by Robin Deacon, by Stuart Sherman, a bull in upstate New York). I can acknowledge these influences and still stay attuned with my own unique perspective.

How then, as artists, are we present with the non-human? How do we listen to it, open up room for it? *How does the work ask the viewer to consider the perspective of the non-human?*

We can begin by simply asking ourselves, within the creative process, to consider the material's *presence* as an articulation of its own perspective. We can consider the potential influence of the work on perspectives toward non-humans. We can care for the material *beyond its responsibility to the work.* We can *consciously navigate* the potential diplomatic and ecological impact of the work. We can facilitate the human-non-human relationship. Be with things. Care for things. Listen to things. Try not to be an asshole to things. Give space to things on what could be their own terms.

To facilitate *well* is to be painfully self-aware, to own our own faults, mistakes, and limitations. To redirect our attention to the voices of those who haven't been heard or understood—to those for whom being heard or understood wasn't even being recognized as a need—with the elusive and impossible goal of creating greater understanding between all entities. To make work that makes space for us to be present with one another. To love things we may never fully know.

Thanks to Christine Shallenberg and Fereshteh Toosi for their input and feedback.

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Biography

Meghan Moe Beitiks is an artist working with associations and disassociations of culture/nature/structure. She analyzes perceptions of ecology though the lenses of site, history, emotions, and her own body in order to produce work that analyzes relationships with the non-human. She received her BA in Theater Arts from the University of California, Santa Cruz and her MFA in Performance Art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She was a Fulbright Student Fellow, a recipient of the Claire Rosen and Samuel Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists, and a MacDowell Colony fellow. She is currently an Interdisciplinary Studio Art Lecturer at the University of Florida. www.meghanmoebeitiks.com

PERFORMANCE
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ONE PART WATER, TWO PARTS STARCH: PERFORMING OOBLECK AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE

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Oobleck is two things: a non-Newtonian fluid, a mixture of cornstarch and water showing properties of both a liquid and a solid; and an invention by Dr. Seuss, an odd green weather occurrence whose fluid, adhesive, and elastic attributes manage to threaten the entire state apparatus of the "Kingdom of Didd." Re-viewing the children's book *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, and in light of its starch-and-water namesake, I argue that we can learn an insurrective strategy of political resistance from its performativity.

Double Oobleck

Theodor Geisel is probably one of the most celebrated names in children's literature. If you enter a family home, especially in the United States, chances will be high that you will come across one of his books, written under the pen name "Dr. Seuss". While an undoubted staple in a lot of young anglophones' reading experiences, he is somewhat less important in other parts of the world. I grew up in a small town in Germany where Dr. Seuss carried no cultural or personal significance. Horton, the Lorax, and the Grinch are no fixtures of the public conscious. For all I know, I might have well gone about the business of growing up without ever coming across his stories, if it was not for my next door neighbour, Frau (*Mrs*.) Grüner. Frau Grüner was an older lady, either in or just before retirement, who had been an English teacher all her life. Her house and ours shared a driveway and the gardens in the back ran along the same knee-high chain-link fence. You could

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 5, NO 1 (2019):158–171
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21476/PP.2019.51265
ISSN 2057-7176

sometimes hear the stairs creak when Frau Grüner or her husband moved around the house. When we were on holiday, Grüners would—indulgently—look after our cat. And when they were gone, my mother would go over to water the plants.

Shortly after I had begun learning English in school, it must have been third grade or fourth, Frau Grüner started to move, little by little, a whole wealth of books from their place to ours—leftovers, perhaps from her own children, or from her time as a teacher. And thus I slowly started to accumulate books for language learners and simple children's literature in English. Among them, too, a few works by Dr. Seuss. While writing this review and talking about it to some of my American friends, I realise that the book I am going to speak about is actually not particularly well-known. Most people do not recall reading *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. It might be because it is one of Geisel's few prose works, not written in the anapestic tetrameter he is so famous for. It might be because *Bartholomew* is not as fun of a protagonist as the Cat in the Hat. I do not know. For me, all of Dr. Seuss came in the same box. And in fact, until quite recently, I had all but forgotten.[1]

At some point in *39 Microlectures in the Proximity of Performance*, Matthew Goulish writes about breaking down traditional dichotomies of art and criticism, passion and intellect, among others:

> Take for example the problem of glass. What is glass? Until recently, glass was considered a mostly transparent solid. It behaved like a solid; if struck, it shattered. But then, in the ancient cathedrals of Europe, it was observed that the tops of windows let in more light than the bottoms. A simple measurement proved that a window of once uniform thickness had grown thicker at the bottom and thinner at the top. Only one explanation exists for this phenomenon. Glass flows in the direction of the pull of gravity, exhibiting the behavior of a liquid. Thus, one cannot conclusively define glass without the inclusion of time. At any given moment, glass is a solid, but over a period of one thousand years, it is a liquid. The problem of glass forces us to accept the inaccuracy of the traditional distinctions of solid or liquid. While the qualities of solidity and liquidity retain their difference, glass in fact is both, depending on the duration of observation, thus proving that these two states inextricably coexist [...].
>
> As creative and critical thinkers, we may find it rewarding to attempt works of criticism, which, over time, reveal themselves as works of art, thus following the example of glass. (2000, 44)

This story of medieval glass flowing downwards has been debunked. Some glass might theoretically sag at room temperature, but only after about 10^{33} years ("Cathedral Glass Myth" 1998)—the universe, by comparison, is just over 13.8 billion years old, a fraction of that time. Additionally, there are examples of glass, from ancient Egypt for example, not showing those qualities. Rather, the explanation lies in the production process: "At that time, glassblowers created glass cylinders that were then flattened to make panes of glass. The resulting pieces may never have been uniformly flat" (Curtin 2007). Even though Goulish's example of glass has been shattered, as he himself has noted (Goulish 2015), its implications are still intact. Goulish reconsiders his example and writes instead:

> Now I will say it this way. The glass retains the material memory of its brief life as a liquid—the slightest waveform, suspended. Duration doubles a substance. In the function of the solid (the window) remains the antithetical trace of the liquid moment (the pool with its flow). Allow the memory of the creative in the function of the critical. (2015, 133)

And so, I am still left with a flaming sense of excitement about two things: firstly, criticism becoming art with the inclusion of time. Secondly, the existence of things that are at once two states of matter. As it turns out, those actually exist: Non-Newtonian fluids are fluids that exhibit both liquid and solid attributes. Chemico-physical misfits. Perhaps the most famous example of misbehaving substances: oobleck.

Oobleck, also sometimes referred to as ooze, is a substance that can easily be made at home. Many schoolchildren might have at some point experimented with it. Its recipe is simple: two parts starch (cornstarch for example), one part water. You can submerge your hand in it and pull it back out, and the thick ooze will drip off your fingers, not dissimilar to a thick paint perhaps or molasses. But once you add an amount of force, the slime resists. If you punch oobleck, it is a solid. The surface becomes impossible to penetrate. If you filled a pool with oobleck, you would be able to run across it, but standing idle you would sink. There are many videos online that put oobleck to the test: dropped, shot at, things thrown at it; punched, massaged, caressed, poured over people. It is named after a strange green, adhesive, gooey substance invented by Dr. Seuss in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, and so after years I remembered Frau Grüner and her book.

I bought a new copy of the book for this review. My original copy might still be at my parents' place in Germany somewhere, gathering dust. I turn over the red cardboard cover and start reading. Large, page-filling drawings in black, white and green, and always one or two paragraphs of text.

Bored by the eternally returning four seasons and the climate's limited diversity, King Derwin, ruler of the little kingdom of Didd, commands his magicians to come up with new weather (Dr. Seuss 1949, n.p.). The next morning it starts raining oobleck, "queer little greenish blobs". The king rejoices and orders Bartholomew, his page boy, to ring the bell and proclaim the day a holiday. Bartholomew heads to the bell tower and wakes up the royal bell ringer, but they cannot ring the bell as the oobleck, a gooey, adhesive substance, a green molasses, is stuck to it. Bartholomew, understanding the danger of the situation, begins his quest to save the kingdom. He finds the trumpeter in order to warn the people. But oobleck oozes into the trumpet and clogs it. Bartholomew tries the captain of the royal guard: in an attempt to prove his masculinity, the captain scoops up some of the oobleck with his sword and swallows it—resulting in "his mouth [...] glued shut with oobleck". Realising the responsibility to warn the citizens of Didd might lie with him, Bartholomew heads to the stables, but unsurprisingly it is too late to step outside. Everything is already covered with the strange gummy adhesive. Even the inside of the castle no longer offers safe refuge. "With an angry roar, the oobleck was suddenly hitting the palace harder [...]. Like a sinking sailboat, the whole palace was spitting leaks [...]. It was dripping through the ceilings. It was rolling down the chimneys. It was coming in everywhere [...] even through the keyholes!" The royal cook, the royal laundress, the royal fiddlers, all of Bartholomew's friends are immobilised, "flopping

and floundering, all hopelessly stuck in the goo." In the throne room, the king, too, is covered with ooze. "His royal crown was stuck to his royal head. The seat of his royal pants were stuck to his royal throne" (ibid.). No longer rejoicing, the king commands Bartholomew to fetch the magicians to reverse the spell, but—of course—they too are stuck in oobleck. The king tries to recite the chants himself, but cannot remember all of it. In the end, the king admits his guilt and Bartholomew convinces him to use "*simple* words" and apologise:

> Maybe there was something magic in those simple words, "I'm sorry."
>
> Maybe there was something magic in those simple words, "It's all my fault."
>
> Maybe there was, maybe there wasn't. But they say that as soon as the old King spoke them, the sun began to shine and fight its way through the storm. They say that the falling oobleck blobs grew smaller and smaller.
>
> They say that all the oobleck that was stuck on all the people and on all the animals of the Kingdom of Didd just simply, quietly melted away.

Oobleck, this apocalyptical phenomenon, is a strange substance. It drips through cracks and holes, it oozes. But it also acts like glue, sticking to things and surfaces. Its blobs vary from the size of grape seeds to that of footballs. At first, it falls like rain or snow, but is also described as hard-hitting. It is flexible and stretchy, though also retracts forcefully, like a rubber band. It seems to be a thickish fluid, but also takes the form of soap bubbles. Yet no lasting damage seems to have been done, it is no corrosive or toxic substance. Its water-and-starch namesake is of a similar ambiguity, being both solid and liquid.

Seussian Fantasies and Plastic Material

Oobleck seems like a thing of science fiction and fantasy, but it is also a real, physical compound. In her book *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway often thinks through notions of SF: "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far" (2). In times of global urgency and planetary entanglement, and with a wealth of bacterial, fungal and tentacular metaphors, Haraway calls for feminist leadership in imagination, thoughts and action to unravel ties of kinship and speciesism (102). In an attempt to follow her example, I will entangle myself with the oobleck for metaphorical fabulation. Science fiction as fertile speculation on social flesh. Perhaps this socio-political fabulation can become a figuration of solidarity. Indeed, my claim is that we can learn a solidarity from oobleck. That we can become politically resisting bodies by performing oobleck.

Oobleck is a substance. Yet, in Dr. Seuss's fable, it also has attributes of a being. It seems to have a telos, maybe even a will. At times it seems angry, and that anger is directed. It might be sentient, perhaps also sapient. One can make a strong assumption, at the end of the book, that oobleck is able to communicate and understand—simple—language. Once the king admits his guilt and apologises, the oobleck retreats. How the events took place exactly and why seems to be opaque to the people of Didd, but my understanding is that the oobleck made a conscious choice to

disappear. It could thus be seen as more than an odd aggregate, but also a being, a creature, a critter. One of significant intelligence.

In an article entitled "One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance" (2016), Catherine Malabou sets out to elaborate the thought "[t]hat a resistance to what is known today as biopower [...] might emerge from possibilities written into the structure of the living being itself" (429). Malabou hopes to activate resistance to biopolitics on a biological level: a cellular potential for radical politics. In Foucault's work, biopolitics is the application of biopower to regulate political subjects, an attempt to govern all aspects of the subjects' lives. Biopolitics thus operates through the erasure of its subject as a living being (Foucault in Malabou 2016, 429); but precisely within the subject's biology, there might lie the possibilities for insurgency, Malabou claims by looking in detail at the implications of research into epigenetics and cloning. From epigenetics she deduces that no matter how much determinism is suggested by the absoluteness of our DNA, this genetic code gets constantly interpreted and read differently through our RNA—ribonucleic acid, a molecule essential for the decoding and expression of genes. Nothing is quite as set in stone as it might appear. From cloning, and ideas of human beings reproducing and regenerating independently, Malabou takes a perspective that is at both looking forward and backward: to the future of transhumanism and to anemones hydra, bacterial lifeforms—our most distant, prehistoric relatives. The fact that this source of biopolitical resistance has never been thought is due to the antibiological bias of philosophy:

> Contemporary philosophy bears the marks of a primacy of symbolic life that has been neither criticized nor deconstructed.
>
> Symbolic life is that which exceeds biological life, conferring meaning upon it. It refers to spiritual life, life as a "work of art," life as care of the self and the shaping of being, peeling our presence in the world away from its solely obscure, natural dimension. (431)

It is both an interrogation of epistemology and biological science—and thereby ontology—and a call to arms. Malabou exerts that recent trajectories in biological research should keep us hopeful: she envisions a new materialism, which might reinstate the simultaneity of symbolic and biological life (438), the "fact of living and the elaboration of a mode of being" (433). Becoming conscious of the biological potential, of "[w]hat is most material and most vital in bodies" (433), could thus spark a political resistance. Proposing that we should become or perform oobleck—as I will in just a moment—seems like it is fully prioritising the symbolic over the biological. There could hardly be a proposition more symbolic. But oobleck is very much material and learning from it is grounded in the real. And perhaps this kind of speculative fiction, this Seussian fantasy, might also be a way of diluting the dichotomy of the biological versus the symbolic. After all, a bit of SF might be a necessary ingredient in "making kin" (see Haraway 2016) as well as in the "development of a new materialism" (Malabou 2016, 438).

Oobleck, in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, might well be an intelligent, sentient being. An agent in the story, not only an event. As such, we might follow Haraway's call for inter-species solidarities in

the Chthulucene. But oobleck, the non-Newtonian fluid, is also a chemical compound. Malabou invites us to search the cellular, the microscopic, and the most material for political potentials. And we could do just that. We should follow Malabou's and Haraway's example when it comes to cornstarch and water. Can we become—or become with—oobleck? Is there a potential for political resistance in the gooey compound? I believe so.

One part water, two parts cornstarch. A simple recipe for political resistance. Could we become oobleck, or oobleck-like? We would be at once a solid and a liquid, defying Newtonian laws. When met with force, we become hard. A resisting solid. If engaged slowly and with care, we soften. A compliant liquid. As oobleck, we do not have an internal stability, we are spineless. Each time we take shape might look different. As shapeshifting oobleck, we are hard to describe and impossible to pin down. We might cover or veil something, we might lubricate, we might stick. We might spill, flow, drip, and slip. We can fill any crevice, cover any object, leak through even the smallest loophole. Could we become bodies that are only water and starch? The German word for starch is *Stärke*, which also means strength or fortitude. To become entirely comprised of water and strength might not be a bad goal.

Though the call to become oobleck is a symbolic one, it might be less abstract than it appears at first glance. In *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2008), Catherine Malabou works out a political and ontological position based on the assertion that we are "plastic". Malabou develops the Hegelian notion of plasticity, which contends that human subjectivity is always both passively formed and actively forming. She does so by drawing from present neuroscience and neurobiology—which speaks of the plasticity of the brain—as well as the tripartite meaning of plastic—being formed, giving shape, and possibly exploding. She ties the scientific insight of our brain's plasticity to a metaphysical elaboration of the human subject and simultaneously establishes a powerful political metaphor. In our current capitalist society, what is being continuously postulated is a "flexible human subject," flexible about her schedule, availability, wage, geographical location, skills, profession et cetera. But flexibility only carries one of the meanings of plasticity—that of receiving form. "Flexibility is plasticity minus its genius" (12). What this ideological portrayal of the human does away with in plasticity is both our creative potential to give shape and our explosive potential to negate and destroy form. Gaining consciousness of our plasticity thus carries tremendous political potential for Malabou, even if her call to arms always operates somewhat on the metaphorical. Elsewhere, Malabou further expands, "[p]lastic, if you look it up in the dictionary, means the quality of a matter, which is at the same time fluid but also resisting" (Malabou in Vahanian 2008, 6). Our plasticity already holds the key to oobleck performativity.

One third water, two thirds starch. In cooking recipes, starch is used as a binder. In political resistance, oobleck performativity might do the same, enabling us to build stronger solidarities. We could mix better and hold together. Furthermore, water and starch help make a single mass, resisting individuation and the risk of being singled out in a protest. Mixture (of a dough for example) and crowd (of people) are one word in German: *Masse*. Becoming oobleck, performing social dough.

In the face of what many, including myself, perceive as a suffocating capitalist system, exploitative institutions of all kinds, a precarisation of everyday life, patriarchal, racist and ableist hierarchies and so many other forms of domination, we are constantly in need of finding effective forms of resistance, that also enable systems of mutual care. Especially in the current moment, when political structures seem unable to answer economic, ecological and social crises, when the legitimacy of representative democracy in its various forms is being questioned, and when tried and trusted forms of political engagement and protest seem no longer adequate, we are bound to look for new solutions. The Institute for Precarious Consciousness (2014) argue that each phase of capitalism comes with a dominant reactive affect, which in turn necessitates different strategies of resistance, and that contemporary strategies of resistance no longer answer the current reactive affect of capitalism (1–2). Theorists such as Judith Butler draw out how we might utilise our vulnerability as precarious bodies. Coalitional politics and bodily vulnerabilities might inform one another to bring about ethical and political norms (2015a, 123). In this sense, it might be time to look for ways of becoming vulnerable resistants:

> A group acting together has to be supported to act, and this takes on special meaning when the action takes place increasingly as a way of demanding enduring support and the conditions of livable life. It could sound as no surprise that the bodies gathered in social movements are asserting the social modality of the body. This can be a minor way to enact the world we wish to see, or to refuse the one that is doing us in. Is this not a form of deliberate exposure and persistence, the embodied demand for a livable life that shows us the simultaneity of being precarious and acting? (Butler 2015a, 153)

Two parts starch and one part water. Oobleck holds a certain performativity which I find inspiring for political tactics. We would hold properties showing an unusual behaviour. A person could run across us without sinking. Becoming oobleck, we might thus constitute the ground for revolutionary charges as well as lines of flight. When struck or hit, oobleck is a solid: we negate and resist. When slowly interacted with, touched, caressed, delved into, oobleck is a liquid: we comply and engage. A non-Newtonian fluid: another step on our path away from the dialectics of Enlightenment. Is oobleck what a contemporary vulnerable resistant could look like? Performing oobleck, we would hold the power to absorb care whenever we desire, and resist force whenever we need to.

Was Frau Grüner teaching me about political performativity as a vulnerable resistant when she passed on *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*? Likely not. And yet, reciprocity, share-economies, neighbourly solidarities and mutual support are all little but very important aspects of political solidarity. On a very small scale, passing on books, watering plants, and feeding the cat are examples of what Judith Butler calls "enduring modes of dependency and interdependency" (Butler 2015b, 8) and are small nods to the fact that the politics and labour of care expand beyond the human subject. And what did Dr. Seuss have in mind with the oobleck, when he wrote the story? I doubt that his fabulation was one for political resistance, either. Certainly, that is not how I

understood it, when I first read it. I cannot really remember what I thought the story meant. But I suppose what I took from it was a moralising conclusion: the King is urged to apologise and admit his guilt in simple language in order for the "just punishment" to stop. A story about karma; and about man's hubris, tempering with things he has no authority over. From today's perspective, it could also be a fable about environmental harm and our ecological impact, as we continue to affect the climate and weather of this planet through unsustainable consumption, resource extraction and lifestyles. A work of and on the anthropocene. But now, years after first browsing the book, I take something very different from it.

What if the oobleck is actually the story's protagonist? Dr. Seuss tells the story from the perspective of Bartholomew. We follow his adventure through the castle, trying to fend off the catastrophic results of his ruler's actions. It is a sequel to *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. Signs are pretty clear as to who the protagonist of the story is meant to be. Bartholomew Cubbins works as a page boy for King Derwin, ruler of Didd. His responsibilities however shift as the story develops, from running errands for the king to trying to save the kingdom from the impeding oobleck. Though he does eventually shake up the hierarchical power structures a little bit by confronting the king and urging him to take responsibility and show remorse, he does not generally question the constituted structures of the state or its ruler's powers. Should we really side with character who is fully part of the ruling forces and who is concerned, throughout the story, mainly with restoring the monarchy to its previous status quo? When I was reading *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* again, I found myself siding more and more with the inexplicable weather occurrence, the ooze throwing the kingdom and its king into peril. The story presents us with a sovereign clearly abusing their might and also with an effective strategy of resistance. The oobleck performs this resistance. It manages to slow the kingdom down to a halt. It stuns the king, his army, it infiltrates the castle, jams its communication technologies.

I read the eventual unexplained disappearance of the oobleck not as a defeat. The little kingdom only gets reinstated to normality after the oobleck chooses to disappear. The people never quite find out why the oobleck melted away. Perhaps because its intelligence, language, and behaviour are too alien to them. Nonetheless, I believe that Dr. Seuss is suggesting that the king's apology to the oobleck was necessary. Oobleck showed itself satisfied and took mercy on the kingdom. But during its short onslaught on the kingdom, the oobleck performativity is able to suspend the state apparatus in its entirety: the constituted powers are unable to respond or retaliate.

This complete subversion of the state's infrastructure is precisely what Giorgio Agamben has in mind when he talks about "inoperativity." In 'What Is Destituent Power?' Agamben names inoperativity as the primary tactics of destituent power.

> Inoperativity does not mean inertia, but names an operation that deactivates and renders works (of economy, of religion, of language, etc) inoperative [...]. This essential inoperativity [...] is not to be understood as the cessation of all activity but as an activity that consists in making human works and productions inoperative, opening them to a new possible use. (Agamben 2014, 69)

In opposition to the common political paradigm of constituted power versus constituent power, as championed by Toni Negri and others, Agamben proposes the post-anarchist notion of destituent power, necessitating completely new political strategies, instead of resorting to "a violence that establishes and constitutes the new law" (70). Agamben remains vague on what a destituent power looks like, but oobleck might provide one way of thinking this notion. It performs an operation, rendering the works and infrastructure of the Kingdom of Didd inoperative. Its royal bell, its trumpeter, its royal guard, stables, cooks and even the king itself become deactivated.

The performativity of oobleck should inspire our political tactics. Two thirds starch and one third water: a recipe for inoperativity. Dr. Seuss's oobleck teaches us how to render the state apparatus inoperative, deactivate its infrastructure, suspend its violence. The "actual," chemical oobleck teaches us to repel force whenever needed while accepting care whenever desired. Oobleck politics is both internal and external.

In 'Resist Like a Plant! On the Vegetal Life of Political Movements' (2012), Michael Marder theorises anarchic tactics on the basis of vegetal ontology (29). Marder sees many benefits in "resisting like a plant": rather than the simple "grassroots" metaphor, it might allow to change our understanding of key notions such as growth, networks, decay. Marder is also able to elaborate notions of violence and non-violence by offering what he calls "ontological violence" (25). Plants, often seen as a symbol of nonviolence, actually display a significant degree of force in their occupation of space, self-assertion through growth, etc. Oobleck to me seems to display a similar ontological violence, a will-to-power, or a "slow violence" (Nixon 2013). Marder further ponders the political implications of what it means "to be plastic enough to metamorphose into a different state" (2012, 28). Political movements with a vegetal ontology promise "to be, at the same time, pliable and rigid" (30). But we have also learned from Malabou that this plasticity is already an inherent component of our human ontology. And I would argue that "resisting like oobleck" might be an even more successful tactic. Marder takes from the vegetal ontology a rhizomatic, acephalic structure that makes protest movements hard to grasp or address. Without clear structures or a "head" of the movement, vegetal protests such as Occupy Wall Street are inherently an-archic, which holds both prefigurative and tactical promises. Oobleck too is acephalic and rhizomatic. It too expresses an inherent anarchism, as well as an almost alien swarm intelligence.

Plant resistance operates through a politics of space, "resist[ing] on the basis of radical passivity" (27). I would argue, that this passivity is not "inertia," no "cessation of all activity," as Agamben would delineate from inoperativity (2014, 69). And indeed, Marder points out that this radical passivity transgresses the common opposition between active and passive and instead shows a highly political character (2012, 27). It thus closely resembles inoperativity and might well be regarded as a part of the destituent vocabulary. But the two are by no means identical. In my opinion, radical passivity cannot necessarily claim to render other operations inoperative. Neither does it inherently constitute a ground for new possible use. We can see this in the example of Occupy that Marder employs: though redefining engagement with public space and the modes and bodies of resistance, Occupy Wall Street did not render its target inoperative. No doubt Wall Street was inconvenienced by the Occupy protests, but it never ceased to operate. While the radical passivity

of the movement does assert Marder's point of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly coinciding, and thus fundamentally shaping the movement's ontology, it falls short of performing inoperativity in the Agambian sense. I see in radical passivity a promising internal mode, giving the movement its structure, and in inoperativity a more effective external tactic of addressing directly the constituted structures. Oobleck performs its political resistance through a similar radical passivity, whereby its mere existence in the space becomes a political act—but it goes further than Occupy and Marder's ontological violence of a radical passivity by not only inconveniencing but fully deactivating stately power structures. It has attributes of inoperativity as well as radical passivity. Oobleck seems extremely well suited at calling into question both: aggregate states and sovereign states.

And yet, of course, this non-Newtonian fluid is no antidotal serum. Afterall, φάρμακον (*pharmakon*) is a term with two opposing meanings: poison and antidote. Arguably, states themselves have become far more oobleck-like. In "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992), Gilles Deleuze draws out how we have moved from disciplinary societies, a coin termed by Michel Foucault, to societies of control. Having moved away from a disciplinary social structuring of enclosures, we are now faced with different apparatus of control:

> Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point. (Deleuze 1992, 4)

Since then, Deleuze's predictions can might perhaps be perceived as more relevant. We are experiencing governing powers as constantly fluctuating and modulating. We are dealing less and less, according to Deleuze, with a dichotomy of mass and individual and instead with the "dividual" and its "samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" (5). What can be observed is an oobleck-like veil that infiltrates and covers all aspects of life. Similar changes in state operations can be observed in urban warfare, with Eyal Weizman (2017) pointing out how Israeli military have been subverting architecture and urban design by moving through the walls of apartment buildings instead of windows and doors: "a conception of the city not just as the site, but as the very *medium* of warfare—a flexible, almost liquid matter that is forever contingent and in flux" (186). In the age of dataveillance, with an ever-growing proportion of our activities taking place online, Deleuze seems to be suggesting more and more ad hoc regulation and surveillance. Through this growing individualisation of governance, collective performances such as an oobleck solidarity might prove increasingly difficult. Furthermore, as Isabell Lorey (2015) convincingly argues, the very essence of modern government is the management of insecurity, whereby subjects find themselves in a constant state of precariousness, yet never quite at the point of insurrection (2). If this is the case and we find ourselves at a threshold of precarity, our margin of error when becoming vulnerable resistants is discouragingly slim.

But as bleak as it may look, we might want to return to Deleuze once more, when he resolutely concludes: "there is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons" (1992, 4).

Of course, when Marder argues for the human being as φῠτόν πολῑτῐκόν (*political plant*) over the ζῷον πολῑτῐκόν (*political animal*), he knows that this is not literally the case (2012, 28).

> Purely vegetal beings do not protest, do not set themselves against anything, do not negate—symbolically or otherwise—what is. But if we act *as though* we were them, following a useful theoretical and practical fiction grounded in the vegetal heritage of the human, we would need to follow a non-possessive, non-appropriative way of being, resonating, at once, with the conclusions of botany and with the image of post-metaphysical ethical subjectivity. We would, consequently, repudiate the ideal of sovereign and decisive action, directed by a rational, conscious or self-conscious, individual or collective subject and, instead, nurture the horizontally and an-archically growing grassroots that crop up wherever protest tents are pitched in the shadow of skyscrapers. (26)

In a similar vein, Haraway postulates the importance of SF in theory and practice, and Malabou uses our brain's plasticity as the basis for courageous political imaginary. My project is using the same methodology: we should perform oobleck as an inspiring tactic of becoming vulnerable resistants.

But I believe that oobleck is not only a tactical fabulation, but actually quite close to a description of recent protest movements that seem to have moved away from how protests were constituted in the past. Marder's "Resist Like a Plant!" offers a fresh take on the Occupy movement. With Occupy, he says, "freedom of expression and freedom of assembly merge into one: physical presence (or, rather, co-presence) expresses, without representing anything, in the most embodied sense of expression imaginable, the demand for a different world-order" (2012, 25). Oobleck shares with the Occupy protesters that their mere presence holds the potential for calling the legitimacy of the rulers into question. But I would add that not only do protests like Occupy Wall Street or the French *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) merge freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, but on its most fundamental, ontological level, what is being exercised is their right to exist. And this is where oobleck as an interpretative framework can go one step further than vegetal ontology, as it is already its existence itself, ahead of its public assembly, that is a political act.

Many commentators were disturbed by Occupy's shapeshifting physicality: no leaders or clear messages made it hard for officials to engage. Without an apparent order or structure, some like Chantal Mouffe (2016) argued that Occupy Wall Street was unable to become a player in the political landscape, make demands or compromises, be addressed or understood. But exactly this, says Marder, is its anarchic potential: the movement remained acephalic and rhizomatic. The protests bestowed Wall Street with a new kind of colour, aesthetic, haptic and affect. People were unsure about what exactly had hit them and why. Oobleck, too, is acephalic. It takes the king a long time to find the right way to communicate with it. Its goals and demands are opaque, its exact reasons for eventually giving way remain a mystery. But on top of its vegetal ontology, Occupy, in

its many iterations, could be understood through oobleck performativity: the protestors covered public space, slowing life down on it, sticking to the streets of Manhattan, and many other places across the globe, like glue.

One part water, two parts starch. Oobleck provides us with an inspiring recipe for shapeless, headless, rhizomatic, alien, resisting, vulnerable, inoperative, passive spatial resistance. It provides us with a subversive tactic on how to respond to a sovereign abusing their powers. It is a timely recipe, the performativity of which we can see implemented in recent protest movements. Occupy, especially in the US, is a good example, but it also applies aptly to the *gilets jaunes* movement in France. As a complex and ambiguous movement, it is hard to theorise. Many on the left are unsure whether to reject it or show solidarity. It seems as if a common language has yet to be found. The movement, equally made up of rural Front National voters and left and anarchist protesters and rioters, is calling into question the legitimacy of the government. The protest seems shapeshifting, cacophonous, and acephalic. One of its major tactics is that of slowing down. My friend Stephen Wright told me an anecdote from his village in France where some yellow vests were crossing the street at such microscopic speed that they brought the whole intersection to a standstill. They were rendering the state's infrastructure inoperative: a destituent strategy, gluing cars, trucks and police vehicle to the ground, like Seussian oobleck. They were doing nothing illegal, just crossing the street. But in the process of doing so in such a decelerated fashion, they subverted the legal procedure of crossing a street into a "radical passivity." In the same way, King Derwin's demand for new weather was followed, but in a way so subversive that it called his sovereign legitimacy into question. Incidentally, the French protests, sparked by a rising diesel tax, is also about a sovereign trying to alter the weather. The *gilets jaunes*, whatever else we make of their motivations or politics, are already performing oobleck.

Learning about the non-Newtonian fluid and reviewing Dr. Seuss' children's book, we can be inspired by oobleck. It offers us a recipe to simultaneously absorb care and reject force. It teaches us how to be the ground of revolutionary charges and lines of flight. It offers an ability to organise in a unifying way, where we become one shapeshifting, headless substance that drips and slips, that spills and flows. As oobleck, we can occupy spaces, rendering whole states inoperative. We can glue armies to the ground, silence alarm bells, and frighten kings in their throne rooms.

Matthew Goulish (2000) speaks of glass to argue that the state of matter of some things has to be perceived as ambiguous with the inclusion of time. Both solid and fluid. Both pliable and rigid. Over time, criticism might become art (44). With the inclusion of time, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* reveals itself to be both: a children's story and a recipe book for political resistance.

Notes

[1] For their indispensable help and feedback on this essay I want to thank the entire cohort of artists/researchers of the DSRA "Document and Contemporary Art," *le bi-corporalité*, and *cher collègue.* Sharing time and space through readings, seminars, and late nights has been an incredible enrichment. For his anecdote on the *gilets jaunes*, Stephen Wright; for pointing out "slow violence," Thomas Guillot. For always finding the time and clear, pragmatic suggestions, Andrew Culp. For teaching me to *edit*, Patricia Sazani. For deep, critical, and reparative feedback, Effy Morris.

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Biography

Josh Widera is one of six members of The Doing Group, an international collaborative performance group concerned with the process of 'doing'. Projects of the Glaswegian experimentalists have taken multiple forms and seek to explore the limits and depths of artistic research. Josh graduated from the University of Glasgow with an MA with Honours of the First Class in Politics and Theatre Studies and from the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles with an MA in Aesthetics & Politics. He is a Fulbright Scholar and supported by the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes and the Lillian Disney Scholarship.