INTERVENTION AS INTOXICATION!

RICARDA FRANZEN AND SOPHIE VAN BALEN

[…] we are the inhabitants of a culture hierarchized by a logos that knows how to speak but not how to listen and thus constantly avoids genuine dialogue; it primarily tends to induce *competing monologues*.

Fiumara ([1985] 1990, 85; emphasis in original)

When at the end of the 1980s the Italian philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara wrote these lines, she did so in the context of developing her philosophy of listening. Today, the notion of 'competing monologues' resonates again with 2020's polarised political climates around the world.

Fiumara's philosophy of listening was proposed as a response to nothing less than the problem of planetary survival and the 'inadequacy of the solutions' on offer at the time (55). This leap from the scale of the interpersonal to the planetary was critiqued at the time as alarmism. Thirty years later, however, the problem diagnosed by Fiumara has dramatically worsened whilst the solutions have remained much the same. The philosopher's search for new methods, then, is as vital now as it was then. Fiumara based her philosophy on 'less customary and less institutionalized areas of research' (41), which we were interested in picking up in the context of Performance Philosophy.

In assembling the diverse perspectives in this journal, we consider it worthwhile to assume a role which Fiumara refers to as 'apprentices of listening' (57). Generally, we allude, through such alternative paths of producing knowledge, to humble ways of responding to socio-political issues. We propose to frame Fiumara's philosophy more specifically as 'listening *as intervention*', as both a framework for organizing the contents of this edition as well as a recommended attitude for its readers.

In this journal issue, contributors consider alternative ways of 'intervening'. Originally a military term designating the moment of stepping in during a crisis, the notion of intervention has been transferred to instances of artistic (and) activist acts.[1] Still, each artwork or act of 'intervention' raises the question of the political anew and we were curious about the Performance Philosophical responses to it, responses that ultimately were developed for the pages of this issue.

The first testing ground for the ideas in this edition was the Performance Philosophy Biennial, which took place in March 2019 in Amsterdam, under the title '*Between Institution and Intoxication: How does Performance Philosophy Intervene?*', which we—the guest editors—were responsible for organising. Yet, the conversations and adventures of thinking on the pages of this edition are more than just secondary to or an afterthought of the Biennial. While authors in this issue were also presenters at the conference, we spent the last year virtually together to develop thoughts further and to translate the performance of conference contributions to the predominantly written medium.

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Intervention, institution, intoxication

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The central suggestion is to look at intervention through the lens of intoxication. Prominently encapsulated in the title of the Biennial and journal issue we invited contributors to rethink 'intervention as intoxication' as *a*—that is, one possible—way to invoke the ecstatic, inebriated, entangled, and aesthetic dimensions of intervention, and to open a dialogue with a performance/philosophical body of knowledge on intoxication. As the journey of developing a new way of looking at intervention started with a purposefully open and evocative call, responses to it were accordingly heterogeneous. This journal edition maintains the heterogeneity of research areas as well as working contexts, with each contribution specifying and situating the key terms concretely.

In the selection of the ten articles presented in this journal, a number of specific suggestions, questions, and hypotheses are developed. They relate to (the Biennial's) three key terms intervention, institution, and intoxication and resonate with the original conference call. Some article-overarching suggestions which were picked up from our original call mark the thinking experiments in this journal. Anticipating Silvia Bottiroli's essay—which was adapted from her conference keynote presentation—we introduce them here by means of what if-questions.

What if the vocabulary surrounding intervention is no longer adequate for the type of struggle we are encountering and the change we are seeking?

What if 'intervention' takes the shape of addressing structures of symbolic power (such as institutions) beyond critique? What if we left the oppositional logic between institution and intervener behind and instead explore the possibility that we might need institutions or networks to bring about change?

What if intervention was less of a sudden act from the outside inwards, but embodied, slow modification?

Institutional poison?

In these pages, we continue the commitment of the arts and humanities to interact with the world and socio-political causes; indeed the arts and humanities have a civil, social, and political role to play. As Gielen and Lijster (2017) argue, this commitment is further mirrored by cultural institutions, who increasingly place themselves in the 'civil sequence' leading from personal anger or despair to public civic engagement or action —and thereby seem to defy the strict opposition between intervener and institution. 'Institutions' are treated as sites and symbolic structures, organizing education, facilitating art, and structuring thought alike. This open-ended definition is voluntary and emphatic, and is differently formulated in the different articles, while it is specifically the *relationship with* institutions which is under closer scrutiny. Palpably shared amongst several articles is a certain understanding of intervention in its forms of disobedience towards the logic of an institution (Celikates 2016, 44).[2]

In addressing institutions and our (idealist's, intervener's, intoxicator's, critic's) relationship with them, we are parting with the well-known discourse on intervention as the critique of institutions. In this line of thinking, institutions are often seen in Foucauldian terms as symbolic structures of power (White 1985). Since the late 1960s and through to the 2000s, discourses of institutional critique worked on capturing typically interventionist art practices, which inquire critically into (art) institutions, their power structures and workings.

But critique as a way of engagement and mode of practicing thought has come under fire in recent years. Following Latour (2004) among others, there is a need—particularly in academia—to redefine the critical spirit, to stop taking the route of critical *distance*, but to instead move closer to the observed, and therefore to reflect on the critic's own involvement. For if critique cannot move beyond the untouchable critic (yet—according to this critique of critique—mercilessly unmasking any scientist or scientific fact as being constructed through power), academia is arguably losing knowledge it might not want to lose and gaining the 'wrong' kinds of critics, according to Latour. Or, as Rita Felski reckoned in her work on the limits of critique, decades of academics (and artists for that matter) domesticized critique as the ever recurring gesture of unveiling dominance (Felski 2015, 66), trapping critique arguably in an inside/outside logic, with the critic's presumed role as that of an outside eye.

The question of modes of engagement and methods of intervention, however, remains concrete and urgent even in departing from critique in its 'original' conception and relation to the Institution. If we (authors, editors, readers) look for engagement with socio-political causes within the environments in which we operate, we might not want to accept that the institutions we move in are by default regarded as not being on the right side of intervention. For how do the whole (of an institution, any institution for that matter) and its parts (individual teachers, students, artists, researchers) relate to each other and to the world?

Unravelling even further, Biennial keynote Nikita Dhawan identified the position of the critic, and potentially the role of critique in relation to institutions, as an exclusionary logic to start with. She

declared the urge for a new type of intervention, as exemplified through the postcolonial project. In Dhawan's words—spoken during the Biennial—there is a need for 'a shift from street politics as the site of de-subalternization to other areas of intervention (e.g., the postcolonial state, which is like a *pharmakon*, both poison and medicine). In contrast to the state-phobic rhetoric of protest movements, the relation between the postcolonial state and the subaltern must be reconfigured, thereby converting poison into counterpoison' (Dhawan 2015).[3]

In search of a vocabulary for reconsidering intervention in institutions, this particular dialectic of poison and counterpoison seemed rich and became the proposed notion of 'intoxication', encapsulating for us as conference organisers the possibility to expand the field of intervention beyond the necessarily Western notions of critique, and beyond the polarization between institutions and critics.

Intoxication's currency

By focusing on intervention as intoxication, we suggest to develop, trace, and/or think different modes of intervening, in the field of arts, in academia (in particular the humanities), and in politics in the broadest sense of the word.

We are aware of the irony of inviting intoxication in and from Amsterdam, where drug consumption has long been a part of its branding. Likewise, we are aware of the many philosophical works on intoxication based on or revolving around a subject's alcohol (Baudelaire, Nancy), hashish (Benjamin), or cocaine (Freud) experience.[4] However, apart from some reflections on the intoxication of the body, this journal does not deal with the drug-induced discourse as a subject matter. Instead, we follow Walter Benjamin when he contends that 'the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic) as the profane illumination of thinking will teach us about the hashish trance' (Benjamin 1999, 216).

Philosophies on and of intoxication usually identify two contrasting and seemingly incompatible experiences of intoxication beyond the chemical and medical understanding. The experience of intoxication is usually considered *apolitical* because of the subject's altered state. In this common view, intoxication is seen as an escape from society and as severed from sober norms of rational discourse. At the same time, other perspectives—in line with Benjamin—ascribe *transformative qualities* to experiences of being alienated from the world, creating possibilities for engagement with the world in altered states (Brennan and Williams, 2015).

Nietzsche reminds us of the incompatibility of the two states; regardless, he goes on to think the duality of both states, of (political) individuation (arguably connected to the Apollonian) and (apolitical) ecstasy (of the Dionysian) ([1872] 1992), only one possible example of a sustained duality which authors in this journal discover and work with.

Rethinking intervention

The urgency of why and how we should rethink intervention at all is something to still address. Alongside the team of conference organizers agreeing that an emerging field such as Performance Philosophy could keep rethinking its own political bias and commitment as well as its institutional entanglements, it was the references to intoxication that gained traction during the Biennial encounters in unexpected and rich ways. While we had instigated the idea of intervention as intoxication based on current examples of artistic acts (e.g. Thomas Bellinck's *Domo de Eŭropa Historio en Ekzilo* [2013]), it was only through contributions at the Biennial and through the entirety of contributions to this issue that we understood the complex and often paradoxical translations of intoxication into urgent and original forms of engagement addressed through intervention as intoxication.

A theme emerged and took hold which we had anticipated only indirectly through allusions to intoxication as pharmakon: the invitation to think change from within highlighted the paradoxical logic inherent to intoxication—between collectivity and withdrawal, between outward change and internalization thereof, or even ingestion of the intoxicating element. It resulted for the majority of contributions in a reflection upon one's own physical position, the role of one's own body and/or attitude (see pavleheidler; Carolin Bebek, Kate Katafiasz, Karian Schuitema, and Benjamin Weber; Paul Geary; Michael Haldrup, Madeleine Kate McGowan, and Kristine Samson; Simon(e) van Saarloos; Ingrid Vranken).

In working with this paradoxical logic, we recognize the timely acknowledgement of how complexly entangled we all live: climate change (invoked by Haldrup et al. in terms of 'toxic climates' and as a critical interpretation of our suggestion to explore intoxication) is not a topic we choose to be the outside eye on; we are complicit in it; the physical involvement in touching finds its site in a dance class (pavleheidler) as well as in child-rearing (Bebek and Weber); the physical and experiential observations of a human working with plants (Vranken); the radical materiality of violence (Van Saarloos). As editors, we can think of—and admittedly somewhat interpret—this inclusion of positionality, apparent in most if not all papers in this issue, as a relevant response to our time and scholarship.

We think of Donna Haraway's suggestion to trace our plenty and complex entanglements in constructing and developing our reaction, or response-ability, to the world. For with Haraway we ask, "How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?" (2016, 35). Interpreting Hannah Arendt's famous analysis of Eichmann's thoughtlessness, Haraway urges that *thinking* means connecting, it means to place and relate oneself in/to the world around you.[5] Looking at the world around us, being confronted with irreversible damage to ecosystems of humans and non-humans alike, Haraway reminds us that we are always part of this world, and party to its trouble. Therefore, we echo after her, after Arendt: Think we must.

And with this point we can connect our observations of the articles with the project mentioned in the beginning: In developing a philosophy of listening, Gemma Corradi Fiumara negotiated the type of knowledge she produced. Her words resonate with the question which we as editors saw emerge in the assembly of articles: through asking *how* Performance Philosophy might intervene, an emphasis is palpable in many of the articles on ways of knowing. In Fiumara's words:

> we are not dealing with a polarization between rational objectivity and irrational subjectivity so much as with a distinction between different types of investigation; on the one hand 'established' philosophy […] and, on the other, less customary and less institutionalized areas of research. (Fiumara [1985] 1990, 41)

In this journal issue, what becomes readily visible is the search for and commitment to types of investigation, ways of knowing, languages of interpreting, and forms of presenting that are uncommon in academic circles.

This has demanded from us, as editors, but also from reviewers and (most likely) from you as reader, an immense readiness to dive into different contexts and experiments in each article. We evoke one last time Fiumara's 'apprenticeship of listening' in order to mark a humbleness and to open to a paradox or contrast which enables, urges, irritates, or confuses us into thinking afresh: the contrast between the outward and inward direction of involvement and entanglement in institutions; between the established institution of philosophy and new ways of performing knowledge; between individual contribution and collective work in a shared field of study. It is after all not only entanglement and engagement which comes along as association with intoxication, but also the paradox of the pharmakon of poison and counterpoison alike.

> If we were apprentices of listening rather than masters of discourse we might perhaps promote a different sort of coexistence among humans: not so much in the form of a utopian ideal but rather as an incipient philosophical solidarity capable of envisaging the common destiny of the species. (Fiumara [1985] 1990, 57)

Note

It is not without the productive (in)security of early career academics operating in dependency of several institutions (e.g. peer reviewing), that we here are presenting diverse material by authors from all stages of academic careers. Each argument, or rather thought process, here presented, deserves its own breathing space and context. It is our responsibility to have assembled them together in their loose association with one another. Yet, along with the project of each next to the other comes at the same time a wish and hope to do academia differently.

We invite readers to explore along with us the knowledge(s) that emerge from a wide range of research and forms of presenting it, to get acquainted with new epistemologies, and to attempt listening before critiquing.

Intervention as Intoxication in this journal: the articles

In their collection here, the articles offer a wide spectrum of methods for producing and engaging with knowledge. Following each of them in its own right will require the reader to change methods, contexts, and sites. The articles in this volume—in line with the focus on modes of engagement—purposefully do not continue strictly with established schools of thought, nor is there an explicit emphasis on historical perspectives. The positionality of authors is often part of the reflection.

In terms of our invitation to experiment, some of the contributions maintain explicitly the performative character of the conference (video, dialogue, Q&A) while others work with traces and ideas of the Biennial by translating them, also in terms of form, to the written medium. That means that in addition to a multidisciplinary assemblage, you will find formal experiments on different scales. One different medium other than writing is presented in the video paper by Michael Haldrup, Kristine Samson, and Madeleine Kate McGowan. You will find a roundtable dialogue (Carolin Bebek, Karian Schuitema, Kate Katafiasz, and Benjamin Weber), a breath-holding experiment interrupting and supporting reflections (Simon(e) Van Saarloos), reflections on the practice of working with plants interspersed with recipes (Ingrid Vranken), as well as poetic layout within a speculative essay (pavleheidler). Writing styles vary purposefully, with a younger generation revealing itself through choice of words, and in some cases intervening into academic style writing with literary and/or journalistic elements.

Throughout the first part of this volume, several contributions both interrogate and concretize our hypotheses on intervention, institution, and intoxication, as well as contribute to rethinking their characteristics.

The relationships between the subject and the world, teacher and student, individual and collective are addressed by, respectively, Daniel Villegas Vélez, Silvia Bottiroli, and Thijs Lijster.

In "Interruption—Intervention: On the interval between literature and music in Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Myth Interrupted,'" **Daniel Villegas Vélez** proposes to 'hear "intervention" and "institution," alongside Nancy's concept of an interrupted community, as part of the project of Performance Philosophy'. In doing so, he rethinks 'to intervene from within' in musical terms. Epistemologically speaking, Villegas Vélez's article can be read as shifting the focus from literature (Nancy) to musical performance.

How does intervention take place on the level of the institution or the Institution? In "A 'What If' Exercise: On the institution of the art school," **Silvia Bottiroli** engages with the thinking exercise of the "What if" at the site of a specific institution—the art school. She seeks to integrate thinking and performing of such institutions with the progressive/disrupting forces within/inherent to it, tracing their agonistic potential in line with—amongst others—Chantal Mouffe. Thereby, Bottiroli accepts the challenge to think through an institution changing from within.

In "From the Opium of the People to Acid Communism: On the dialectics of critique and intoxication," **Thijs Lijster** unpacks the critical distance paradox. He starts from the friction between critical distance and intoxicated engagement, working towards a dual conceptualisation of intoxicated critique and the possibility of critical intoxication, guided by a reading of Walter Benjamin.

Ingrid Vranken and Michael Haldrup, Kristine Samson, and Madeleine Kate McGowan explore the environment and its framing conditions for an altered way of intervening and engaging. **Ingrid Vranken** offers in "Rooted Hauntology Lab: Attempts at vegetal curation" a reflection on her recent Master's project of working with plants and evokes their ghosts for the reader. She moves from her personal experiences with these plants, such as their apparent silence in contrast with her own human loudness, their different sense of time and slow way of reacting, to curational choices inspired by these observations. The interjection of recipes into the text bares a trace of the performance lecture offered during the conference. The probing of ambiguous human-nonhuman-human relationships may be seen to speak from the position of practice to a seminal paradigm shift within theory.

In "Toxic Climates: Earth, people, movement, media," a video contribution by **Michael Haldrup, Kristine Samson, and Madeleine Kate McGowan**, the authors explore the toxic climates of urban environments, giving attention to the 'intoxicating and dehumanizing forces at play' on the levels of citizenship, mobility and spatial rights, and argue that 'we need remedies for sobering up rather than intoxication'. In using video as their medium, the authors bring theory into action with the positionality of the academic/media activist taking on a particularly self-aware role.

The question of epistemologies, of knowledge(s) that are yet to be institutionalised and might often work with an idea of a body's intoxication, resonates with the contributions by pavleheidler and Paul Geary. **pavleheidler** speculates on "The Physical Consequence to Knowing: A speculative report," drawing from their experiences as dancer/dance teacher, and from literature by, amongst others, Karen Barad. Thereby, the author counters the institutionalized assumption that puts the 'Enlightened mind over the sacrilegious body'. Examples are drawn from pedagogies and epistemologies which radically include a person's experience and embodied knowledge, such as Body-Mind-Centering®. The layout and structure of the article work with interruptions, which arguably fulfils a function similar to the examples of physical practice discussed: 'It is customary for questions to arise, for people's workflow to be interrupted, and for books to be put down. It is customary for the exercises to take more time than anticipated […].'

In "An-aesthetic: Performed philosophies of sensation, confusion, and intoxication," **Paul Geary** explores intoxication through the relationship between aesthetics and aneasthesia. The seeming incompatibility is overcome through a close reading of Michel Serres' *The Five Senses* in combination with the experience of the performance *After Dark* (2016). In line with Serres, the author suggests 'two modes of knowledge: that of dissecting analysis and that of sensory experience.'

The authors of the last section—Van Saarloos; Hadikoesoemo; Feinberg; and Bebek, Katafisasz, Schuitema, and Weber—each explore different sites and intricacies of intervening from within.

'Where is the threshold between learning about another person's point of view and becoming complicit through listening?' A vulnerable fine line between empathizing, embodied experience and assuming radical practices is performed in the paper "Blow your mind! Shards hailing, on superfluous violence to stop surviving" by **Simon(e) van Saarloos**. The author works and engages with examples of violence. The 'hailing shards' of inquiry might hit and miss depending on the reader, while the author reminds us of the open-endedness of their inquiry. In drawing together literature and experience in a way that intervenes consciously in institutions of thinking, the article's style alternates between journalism and academia.

In "Altering Bodies: Thinking of intervention through impersonation," **Niki Hadikoesoemo** brings the reader to the realm of theatre through examining the actor as a site for what she refers to as 'performative intoxication'. Departing from the canonical texts of Plato's *Ion* and Diderot's *Paradox* the author concludes with Lacoue-Labarthe to undermine the passive/active opposition. Hadikoesoemo raises questions such as 'How does the actor's intoxication differ from the audience's? What relation between passivity and activity do we have to presuppose in order for an intoxicating practice to result in intervention? Why is impersonation the intoxicating practice par excellence to provoke catharsis as well as critique?'

In "Understanding Anti-performance: The performative division of experience and the standpoint of the non-performer," **Joseph Feinberg** introduces several gestures of refusal and resistance to common assumptions, such as on the subversive character of theatre. At the same time, he complicates the idea of anti-theatricality. If Hadikoesoemo looked at the performer, Feinberg is explicitly interested in the perspective of the non-performer. Feinberg brings in Czech philosopher Karel Kosík to think through play as an antidote to theatre and to think (anti-)politics of performance.

In conclusion of this journal, in "On (In)security: A conversation on education and intergenerational dialogues," **Carolin Bebek, Kate Katafiasz, Karian Schuitema, Benjamin Weber [and in the background Theo Weber]** expand the topic of touch, consent, and intervention to that of (art) education through the intervening/disrupting character of intergenerational dialogue. Their article is an elaborate roundtable version of the Q&A subsequent to their contributions during the Performance Philosophy Biennial, which ends the journal with a trace of where it started: in the live moment of engagement in Amsterdam 2019.

Notes

[1] This is not a new suggestion. Most famously, perhaps, were the Situationists in this respect (Hartmann, Lemke, and Nitsche 2012; Thompson and Sholette 2004).

[2] Celikates problematizes the sharp distinction between conscientious objection and civil disobedience. From this, we take up the idea that intervention, too, might not need to be an active interference, but could also be the refusal to do something.

[3] A version of Nikita Dhawan's keynote was published by the time the Biennial was taking place. If this journal does not follow up on intervention in the context of postcolonial thought more systematically, it is in this case due to circumstance rather than merely conceptualization. In a journal edition occupied with doing 'institutions' differently we can't leave these aspects unmentioned: There were authors who we approached who were not able, partially in too precarious positions, to find the time for the publishing process. And this might be one of the most palpable exclusions a journal as part of the academic institution has to work with: Who is in a position to publish?

[4] The economies of violence and exploitation which Amsterdam's drugs are tied into as well as the modern/colonial conditions of often quoted texts on intoxication (see Bjelić 2016) need acknowledgment, but are not the focus of this journal. A contribution at the Biennial which dealt with the 'pharmacolonial condition' did so through the 'coloniality of sense' in particular (https://performancephilosophy-amsterdam.nl/Macia).

[5] Haraway writes about Eichmann (through Arendt's eyes as it were) "Here was someone who could not be a wayfarer, could not entangle, could not track the lines of living and dying, could not cultivate response-ability, could not make present to itself what it is doing, could not live in consequences or with consequence, could not compost. Function mattered, duty mattered, but the world did not matter for Eichmann" (2016, 36).

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Biographies

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INTERRUPTION–INTERVENTION:
ON THE INTERVAL BETWEEN LITERATURE AND MUSIC
IN JEAN-LUC NANCY'S "MYTH INTERRUPTED"

DANIEL VILLEGAS VÉLEZ INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY, KU LEUVEN

When a voice, or music, is suddenly interrupted, one hears just at that instant something else, a mixture or an interstice [*entre-deux*] of silence and diverse noises that sound masked [*recouvrait*], but in this something else one hears again the voice or the music that have become in a way the voice or the music of their own interruption: a kind of echo, but one that does not repeat that of which it is the reverberation. (Nancy 1991, 62; translation modified)

When I presented this material at the Performance Philosophy conference in Amsterdam, I began with a sound clip. Audience members may have recognized it as a passage from the prelude to Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*—perhaps a keen ear even identified it as Solti's 1973 recording. The passage—the *leitmotif* known as *Grundthema* or "Communion"—is a 6-bar melody that arguably condenses within it all the musical material of the opera. I interrupted this melody just before the arrival of the A♭ major chord in the second presentation of the motif to dramatize Jean-Luc Nancy's observation, quoted in my epigraph, that "when a voice, or music, is suddenly interrupted, one hears at that instant something else." This micro-performance aimed to orient a series of associations that will be fleshed out here in more detail. The talk was part of a no-paper panel with Nidesh Lawtoo and Niki Hadikoesoemo, principal investigator and graduate fellow, respectively, of an ERC-funded research project, *Homo Mimeticus: Theory and Criticism* at the Institute of Philosophy,

KU Leuven.[1] Our panel, *Mimetic Intoxications*, responded to the conference's focus on institution, intervention, and intoxication by drawing genealogical connections from Plato through Nietzsche, Bataille, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy in an effort to diagnose the political, affective, and intoxicating dimensions of the various experiences these diverse authors group under the heading of mimesis.

In this context, I invoked Nancy's reflections on community and his notion of literature as an "interruption of myth" in order to offer counterpoints to the conference themes of institution, intoxication, intervention. In particular, I was interested in the idea that artists embrace, transform, and revalue new forms of institutions "by intervening in existing institutions from within or by instigating new institutions in ways that are potentially intoxicating."[2] In this paper, I examine how artistic practices and aesthetic concepts can be simultaneously interventions and institutions, drawing on the intoxicating power of artistic practice to transform institutions "from within." Now, "an intervention from within that transforms the institution it intervenes in" might be a good paraphrase of Nancy's claim that literature creates a new concept of community by interrupting the foundational institution of communities, the institution of myth. What happens when we hear "intervention" and "institution," alongside Nancy's concept of an interrupted community, as part of the project of Performance Philosophy? This paper aims to answer this question.

The concept of intoxication evokes the idea of Dionysian fusion, of a type of community based on a certain philosophy of myth that, as Nancy shows, becomes "totalitarian" when the fictioning powers of myth are linked with art and politics in the attempt to create a community.[3] (An intoxication that aims to create a community is what I simultaneously sought to invoke and interrupt with the "Communion" *leitmotif*.)[4] In "Myth Interrupted," the second chapter of *The Inoperative Community,* Nancy intervenes in this tradition to question the philosophical account of myth's function in creating communities, to develop an alternative account of the community that results from literature's continuation-as-interruption of myth. This concept of literature inflects the critique of myth with a theory of performativity on the basis of a general reformulation of the concept of mimesis that Nancy has developed alongside Lacoue-Labarthe in their collective and individual work over three decades (see especially Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988, 1990; Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 1990b; Nancy 1991, 2016). However, despite the emphasis on performativity, I suggest that these works have paid relatively little attention to performance in the "strong" sense, as theatrical and especially musical performance, which are similarly important dimensions of mimesis as Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe understand it.

Indeed, the common term that links myth and art to politics is mimesis. But here mimesis should be taken neither as an issue of realist representation nor as secondary copying. Before mimesis becomes a question of "truth"—of the adequate relation between an artistic or literary image and its real-life object, let alone a question of simulacra and phantasms, and before it is opposed or even superseded by the Romantic notions of autonomy and originality—mimesis is a paradoxical condition. Indeed, mimesis is the human condition for the emergence of the notion of the subject— even, or especially, as the modern subject imagines itself to be autonomous and original.[5] As Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe have shown in examinations of a range of texts reaching from

Rousseau to Heidegger (passing through the Jena Romantics and Nietzsche), modern philosophy has engaged in an incessant struggle with the paradoxicality of a subject—a *subiectum,* or substance—that is constituted by what is not proper to it. Lacoue-Labarthe describes this paradoxical condition as a hyperbolic logic, a "hyperbology," whereby the modern subject only becomes itself by imitating: the more it imitates (others), the more it becomes what it is (its proper self). Mimesis, the appropriation or incorporation of the characteristics of the other, paradoxically "constitutes" the self. The being that emerges through this process of self-constitution as imitation is thus a paradoxical being—neither self nor other, always in excess of itself. In other words, as Derrida puts it, the subject is an existence or "desistance" constituted through dis-appropriation.[6]

This account of mimesis as desistance leads Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe to identify a complicity between art and politics, as they go on to show how the philosophy of myth serves as the founding fiction of a community that results in the catastrophe of National Socialism (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1990; Lacoue-Labarthe 1989). In their analysis, fascism is a totalitarian project that seeks to accomplish this philosophy of myth, that is, to fashion—to produce artistically, almost as a work of art—a people, no matter the consequences, according to the founding fiction that National Socialism produced for itself. The scandal, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, is that the philosophies most critical of modern subjectivity—those of Nietzsche and Heidegger—are inattentive, and even complicit, with the fascist accomplishment of this catastrophic union.

To think of the human subject as (de)constituted by mimesis, as a *homo mimeticus,* means tarrying with this condition and this history, both of which form part of any claim towards art's capacity to institute communities, particularly where art is defined by its performative aspect.[7] This is the second element of Nancy's text that interests me: Nancy emphasizes the performativity—in the sense of "doing things with words"—of the formative-fictioning power of myth and art. Yet, while Nancy analyzes this performative function through literature—and this is my intervention to Nancy's interruption—I suggest that the performative aspects of mimesis can be better conceptualized through acts of performative—yet embodied—mimesis: that is, through performance "proper."[8]

The trajectory of my paper is as follows: first, I reconstruct Nancy's defense of literature—or *écriture*—as an interruption of "immanentist" communities based on myth leading to a "literary communism" linked to what he calls a singular-plural "being in common." I then argue that the concept of literature employed by Nancy still corresponds to the Romantic tradition he criticizes and offer a re-reading of his text that focuses on musical performance, in particular the ancient Greek concept of *mousikē* understood as the collective performance of music, poetry, and dance based on mimesis that Plato indicts in the *Republic*. While the notion of literature deployed by Nancy is assumed to include music, I suggest he repeats the Platonic gesture by overshadowing certain aspects of musical performance that can help us rethink the notions of intervention, institution, and intoxication. To this aim, I relate Nancy's notion of interruption to that of iterability, proposing an understanding of musical performance based on the interval between one interruption and another, between one iteration and the other. Finally, with this concept of the interval in place, I return to the term "institution" to propose that the community that emerges

from the interruption of the interruption is an institution intervened from within, that is, an in—stitution in desistance. Is this the kind of institution that Performance Philosophy wants to be?

Interrupting the Myth of Myth

Nancy's "Myth Interrupted" is part of an infinite conversation with Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida, and Lacoue-Labarthe (with Heidegger as their common starting point) on the issue of literature and community, or "literary communism," that extends through the second half of the twentieth century.[9] We will have to enter—interrupt—this conversation belatedly. At stake is the attempt to imagine a kind of community that responds to the challenges issued by the catastrophe of National Socialism and the broken promise of communism after 1989. A dominant aspect in this conversation emerges through the philosophy of myth that extends from Herder and Goethe to Lévi-Strauss in which, according to Nancy, myth is defined as an "autopoietic mimesis," that is, a representation or a fiction of the community that represents and produces itself out of and through myth (Nancy 1991, 55). In this philosophy, myth sits at the origin of humanity. To be more precise, myth *is* the origin of humanity: "myth is of and from the origin, it relates back to a mythic foundation, and through this relation it founds itself (a consciousness, a people, a narrative)" (45). To analyze this concept, Nancy distinguishes two strains in this tradition: the first situates myth as the birth of human consciousness, as a passage from nature to culture, *muthos* to *logos*. The second denounces the first as a fiction, while recognizing the formative function of the fiction of the mythic origin. These two traditions attain their clearest expression in Schelling, for whom fictionality itself is at the origin of humanity: myths are the founding fictions of a certain idea of community defined as communal fusion and total participation, often but not exclusively as the result of Dionysian intoxication. The imagined community forged from myth is one in which the individual disappears into the whole, in which the plenitude of social belonging preexists the atomization of modern individuals, and which promises a new community of equals as the utopian solution for alienated modernity.

One crucial characteristic of this idea of myth is that it is only presumed to exist as such elsewhere: either in the past (paradigmatically in ancient Greece or "primitive peoples," even in currently living non-Western societies still considered "primitive") or in the future, as the promise of all sorts of utopian projects that extend (to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's consternation) from the "New Mythology" of the Jena Romantics to the appropriation of Teutonic and Greek mythology (via Wagner and Nietzsche) in National Socialism (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1990). In any case, what matters is that "we"—Europeans (or Europeanized subjects) that imagine themselves to be modern or post-modern, in short, the "West"—have nothing to do with myth. Instead, Western modernity defines itself by the double gesture of lamenting the present absence of myth all the while postulating—as a source of hope, political acumen, or both—a possible future where community is again unified by myth (think, once again, of *Parsifal*).

And if the West is defined by this will to community based on the power of myth, Nancy suspects that such a will to community is essentially and inescapably totalitarian or, in his language, *immanentist*. The essential definition of myth (whether it is thought as a real or a fictional origin) is

precisely such a will to unity, a will (*volonté*) to community as a desire (*volonté*) to realize the community as a communion of individuals gathered under a single will. Indeed, as Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrate, the power of myth might even define totalitarianism as such (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1990). In *The Inoperative Community,* Nancy specifies two aspects of the totalitarian or immanentist character of myth: on the one hand, with respect to form, the will to myth is "will" in a strictly Kantian sense, as the faculty of desiring determined according to reason such that the cause of representations coincides with the reality of these same representations. This involves not simply a representation of an ideal community as a fiction, but the realization of such a fiction as a community. Myth is a mimesis that is also a *poiesis.* In fact, myth is an *autopoietic* mimesis since, in Schelling's language, myth is tautegorical (self-referential, as opposed to allegorical), employing fictional and performative language to produce and accomplish itself: "communicating itself, [myth] brings into being what it says, it founds its fiction" (Nancy 1991, 55). In other words, mimetic performance constitutes, under the heading of myth, an original, pure past of which the performance is a continuation or an actualization (in any case a copy) of the lost originary community that it constitutes through this same performance. According to this definition, European modernity depends on myth every bit as much as the communities from which modernity seeks to differentiate itself when it tries to break with this supposedly mythical origin of community: the myth of European modernity is to be a purely self-engendered community, hence a community defined by the "myth of myth," that is, by the myth (the fiction) that there are communities that depend on foundational myths whereas European modernity does not, and it makes of this fiction its own foundational myth.

On the other hand, with respect to content, myth is totalitarian insofar as "its content is always communion, of man with nature, of man with God, of man with himself, of men among themselves" (Nancy 1991, 56). This will to communion is immanentist because it defines the identity of the community only with respect to itself, exclusive of any transcendence, of any external alterity that threatens the self-identity of the community. Sometimes this takes the form of the explicit exclusion of a *pharmakos* (sacrificial victim) or an enemy defined in any number of ways, often but not exclusively in terms of ethnicity or race. The concept of community that persists in all versions of communism to communitarianism is, for Nancy, still defined by myth as the will to community, where community can only be represented as the total fusion of individuals "as immanent to its own fiction, which gathers them together and gives them their common figure" (56). This self-accomplishment or fusion under a single body or around a leader presupposes, in turn, a certain concept of humanity, "of man, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence," which, Nancy argues, constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community (3).[10] At the same time, and carried to its extreme, immanentism is catastrophic because, predicated on the negation of everything that is unlike itself, it cannot but end in its own elimination: "Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it" (12).

The alternative to this immanentist account of community is not a transcendent (or transcendental) anchoring point—god(s), the nation-state, identity—but, Nancy specifies, an ecstasy that interrupts absolute immanence and which defines "the impossibility either of an

individuality, in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality" (6). Nancy thinks the being of a community that is neither transcendent nor immanent, emerging instead as the interruption of both these extremes, as an ecstasy in which both individual and community are exposed to their own finitude. Nancy calls the resulting being a singular-plural being *in* common. In this account, being emerges neither from the individualization of a previously given chaos nor from the fusion of pre-existent individuals. Rather, he argues, "a singular being *appears* as finitude itself," not as an appearance (as a specter that appears but lacks reality) but through a *compearance* (as a common apparition where "there is no singular being without another singular being") (28). The simultaneous appearance of singular beings exposes each being's finitude while affirming their multiplicity. As he further elaborates,

> Being *in* common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (*compareissent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This compearance (*comparution*) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it. (58)

Nancy postulates a plurality of finite, singular beings that are given together, and which share their mutual and constitutive separation, as the two senses of the French term *partager* indicate. Nancy elaborates this conceptual genealogy along with the consequences of thinking community from the starting point of this being that is given "*in* common" in subsequent chapters of *The Inoperative Community*, including the text that interests us here, "Myth Interrupted," which acts as a hinge between his critique of the humanist limitations of communism and his postulation of a "literary communism" that takes Bataille and Blanchot as its models (Lawtoo 2019a, 83–93).

The compearance of singular beings, Nancy argues, is an interruption of the will to fusion of the community that "keeps open a space […] within immanence" (58). As we have seen, the totalitarian or immanentist tendency of the traditional concept of community aims for a total fusion that would solve the alienation of atomized individuals which is posited as antithetical to the community. In contrast, the plural-singular being *in* common described by Nancy is characterized precisely by interrupting this will to fusion. Here, Nancy again evokes the language of mimesis, speaking of a propagation or contagion that "interrupts fusion and suspends communication, and this arrest or rupture once again leads back to the communication of community" (60). The important point is that this interruption is not a rejection or a denial of myth's founding fictionality, for it is precisely this rejection that defines the liberal-capitalist-Enlightened order of the West (and the affirmation of individualism that defines the current neoliberal regime is also predicated on the total rejection of the "myth of myth"). Rather, and here we reach the passage that opened this text, the interruption of myth makes something audible in and through this very interruption, "the voice or the music that have become in a way the voice or the music of their own interruption, a kind of echo, but one that does not repeat that of which it is the reverberation." An echo that repeats nothing that precedes it, a mimesis—if one can put it like this, echoing Lacoue-Labarthe (1989)— of nothing. The mimesis of the community that emerges after a voice or music are suddenly interrupted is not an image (an ideal) of a community that existed or that might exist but an

interruption that repeats or recalls something else, in the interstice masked by what is thus interrupted, namely the myth or the voice that calls for a unified community or a total communion.

Nancy's observation relies on an insightful phenomenological experience of listening I want to emphasize here, an experience that echoes Lacoue-Labarthe's own thinking around echo and resonance.[11] As Nancy notes, an interruption is not an absolute stop leading to pure and simple disappearance. In the instant a sound, or music, is interrupted, something else becomes audible. First, Nancy mentions an interstice or "in-between" (*entre-deux*), a mixture of various silences and noises that had been masked by a single, unifying voice. An interruption is an invocation of what is still audible in the interstitial instant. Because there is never pure silence, an interruption is not a destructive gesture but a means of articulating a relay between different voices: one voice is interrupted so that another becomes audible. But in this something else, Nancy goes on, one also hears the voice that has been interrupted *as* the voice of its interruption. The sound of the interruption is thus a kind of retention of what is not sounding anymore, an echo that is not a repetition but that "imprints the schema of its retreat in the murmur or the rustling to which the interruption gives rise" (1991, 62). The voice of myth is not heard any more in its unifying call to fusion but in the interruption of this call, as the voice of an exposed community of beings that share their finite singularity and this finite singularity only. But what is this voice?

> A name has been given to this voice of interruption: literature (or writing [*écriture*], if we adopt the acceptation of this word that coincides with literature). This name is no doubt unsuitable. But no name is suitable here. The place or the moment of interruption is without suitability […] What is unsuitable about literature is that it is not suited to the myth of community, nor to the community of myth. It is suited neither to the communion nor to communication. (63)

This is where I perform my intervention.

Why "literature"? Granted, no name is suitable here. But if no name is suitable, why literature? Literature, Nancy tells us, "is the beneficiary (or the echo) of myth, literature has itself in a sense been thought and no doubt should be thought as myth—as the myth of a mythless society" (63). Literature both continues and interrupts the work of myth as an echo that is not a repetition. Literature makes a work that contains both myth and its interruption as literature. Literature, then, names the being *in* common that holds nothing in reserve, that does not rely on transcendent entities such as god or the nation-state and which does not aim towards fusion or intoxication, all the while narrating, employing mimetic techniques, fictionality, even musicality, to create images of communities that interrupt themselves.

The key aspect, for Nancy, is that literature works by means of a relay of interruptions by which it never comes to an end. Literature passes from an author to another, from a reader to another; "it is nothing but communication itself" (65). Unlike myth's image of a community as a work of art that is closed and accomplished in itself, literature is ever shared through its interruption, it is an "unfinished work" that works through "unworking" (*desoeuvrément*), that is, by throwing into question the idea of community advanced in each individual work (67). Literature interrupts itself,

not to achieve a total synthesis of partial works but to continue an unending relay that consists of "an inaugural act that each work takes up and that each text retraces: in coming to the limit, in letting the limit appear, in interrupting the myth" (68). Thus understood, literature interrupts both the claim to history that comes along with myth and the authority of the writer as the fabulator or the teller of the myth as a singular voice that always speaks in common.

Nancy calls this a "literary communism." This expression invokes Blanchot just as much as it evokes the Republic of Letters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as the closely-knit community that Nancy created with Sarah Kofman and Derrida and especially with Lacoue-Labarthe and their respective partners in a *commune* that produced some of the most challenging work on literary theory in the late twentieth century (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988; for detailed account of their collaboration during this period, see McKeane 2015). But it also evokes the less starry-eyed reality of the predominantly white, male, European elite that dominated the academic and political field for decades under the name of "theory" and which today survives as a market of struggling publishing houses, critics, and journalists in search of new luminaries and within the (also increasingly struggling) literature departments of Western universities.[12] Thus, we might still ask, why insist today on "literature," *écriture,* as an alternative to philosophy, especially when the institution of theory has ceded much of its hegemony in academia to concerns that emphasize the embodied, performative, and affective dimensions of artistic practices that have already transformed our understanding of the term "literature"? And I do not mean this as a polemic between departments in universities whose very existence is threatened by the neoliberal demand of interdisciplinarity that seeks to maximize profits by diversifying (as investors "diversify" their portfolios) the research interests of its increasingly precarious faculty. I pose this question from a position closer to Nancy's own suspicion over closed or total communities and from my own suspicion that the choice of "literature" as a name for the interruption is not without its own genealogical complicities with myth. Thus, to pose the question in a way even closer to Nancy's terms, how can literature itself be interrupted, if literature imagines itself to be interruption itself?

Mousikē as a Performative Assemblage

And I am not alone with this suspicion. My question—*Why literature*?—also orients James Corby's intervention in the first issue of the *Performance Philosophy* journal*, as he shows how, unaware of its own genealogy, the new movement of performance philosophy risks repeating or re-citing the philosophical movements it seeks to interrupt (Corby 2015). Corby traces a genealogy that links the contemporary notion of performance—an autotelic, "unbound practice" defined by a certain irresponsibility towards established ideas of truth and artistic autonomy—to the concept of literature developed by Nancy through its sources in Jena Romanticism. More importantly, Corby extends his genealogy of performance and literature back to the critique of poetry deployed in Plato's *Republic.* In this foundational, sacrificial gesture, poetry is defined—criticized—according to its refusal to comply with strict regulations with respect to object, medium, and form; in other words, its irresponsibility (42). Yet, as Corby suggests, if performance philosophy assimilates itself

immediately with the literary practices rejected by Plato in the ancient quarrel, then all performance philosophy does is reverse the Platonic injunction without a true interruption.

Corby reminds us that while Plato's critique of mimesis refers to "poetry," which translates the Greek *poiētikē*, what is at stake in the critique is rather the broader practice of *mousikē*, namely the collective performance of music, poetry, dance, and theater in specific spaces and as part of rituals, celebrations, and competitions that are inseparable from the self-understanding of the polis as a cultural unity—that is, as a community (with all the mythical implications elaborated above). But, I wonder, does this gesture of grouping all the diverse forms of doing under "literature," however broadly construed, not ultimately define how each singular practice is understood, betraying, in a sense, their very singularity or the mode in which their being in common happens in each particular case?[13]

So, when I ask "why literature" I am also asking "why not music?" If Nancy's "literature" and Corby's "performance" are the two practices that result from the Platonic gesture of purification and control of the unbounded performativity of *mousikē*, then perhaps focusing on the larger experience of *mousikē*—and not its Platonic mimetological reduction as poetry or literature—can help us better understand this genealogy and the role that performance philosophy plays in it. Mimetological decisions such as choosing a paradigm—literature, poetry, music—to understand mimesis carry broad consequences. The gesture of subsuming music under other art forms that more easily adjust to the requirements of a mimetology of representation has been repeated by Aristotle, Nancy, Corby, and countless others. And in this case (if only in this case), the starting point, the origin of the repetitions, can be confidently located. Let us return, then, to Plato's *Republic,* the stage where the "ancient quarrel" between philosophy/literature and performance/*mousikē* first played out.

The first mention of both mimesis and music in the *Republic* occurs when Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus consider how a well-organized, "Spartan" city-state goes awry and turns into a luxurious or "feverish" one. The trio set blame on "all the hunters and imitators [*mimetai*], many concerned with figures and colors, many with music [*mousikē*]; and poets and their helpers, rhapsodes, actors, choral dancers, contractors, and craftsmen of all sorts of equipment" (*Rep*. 373b). Excessive mimesis, they fear, destroys the community it is supposed to constitute. Their reasons have been examined at length, including in the piece by Corby cited above. At this point, Socrates emphasizes the performative effects of "imitations" on the "plastic" bodies and souls of the citizens, the danger that through mimesis the body might imbibe something prejudicial to it: "or haven't you observed that imitations (*mimeseis*), if they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits (*ēthē*) and nature, in body and sounds and in thought?" (*Rep.* 395d). The fear, it is clear from the context, is not that contemplating false images will produce false ideas in the soul. The problem is that *mousikē*, as a form of performance or an enactment made by the poet, has effects on the constitution of the body of anyone who engages in mimetic practice, an affective communication that shapes and transforms the participant's soul and body.

Given the powerful effects of performative practice on citizens "from youth onwards," the interlocutors in the *Republic* set out to revise and legislate over the types of mimetic performance that are allowed in the city in a discussion that takes up most of books two and three. First, they regulate myths with respect to their content—the statements and representations about the gods and correct values (*Rep.* 376c–298b)—and further with respect to their form—the harmonic modes and rhythmic feet which bear a certain mimetic relation to content (*Rep.* 398b–403b). The point is that it is the models, and not their supposed imitations, that the founders of the city declare appropriate and inappropriate. When discussing the content of the myths, this legislation is carried without inconveniences. When it is a matter of harmony and rhythm, however, they become harder to regulate.[14] Indeed, the entire discussion on music is carried out in ironic mode, Socrates and Glaucon excusing themselves for their lack of training in musical concepts. "I don't know the modes," Socrates says to Glaucon apologetically, "just leave [those modes] which would appropriately imitate the sounds and accents" of wilful, moderate, and courageous men (*Rep*. 399b). With respect to metrical feet, Socrates again declares his ignorance, delegating their further regulation to the theorist Damon (*Rep.* 400a–c).

The constitutive incapacity of discussing musical modes and rhythms in the same terms as the content of the myths is one of the reasons why, when the interlocutors pass their definitive judgment over mimesis in book ten of the *Republic*, the discussion is carried out with respect to poetry (*poiētikē*) rather than *mousikē*, which does not reappear after the purge of book three. Indeed, when Plato refers to the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry (607b), there is no mention of *mousikē* at all. After mimesis has been defined as a type of pictorial copying, or more precisely as the unreal reflection produced by a mirror—a simulacrum—the entire performative dimension of *mousikē* that defined mimesis in book three is relegated to an inessential position in relation to the "philosophical" account of ontological deceit that emerges as the historically dominant definition from Plato onwards.[15] Yet, as we saw, it is not a concern with images and copies that worries the founders of this community but the educative and contagious effects of musical performance over the members of the *polis.*

Plato does not tell us much more about *mousikē* in the *Republic.*[16] With this foundational philosophical gesture, he judges mimesis to be an ontologically deceptive reproduction aiming to conjure away all its prejudicial aspects. As long as the defenders of poetry are not able to make an apology for their practice, Socrates says in a famous passage, "when we listen to it, we'll chant this argument we are making to ourselves as a counter-charm" (*Rep.* 608a). And Socrates' apotropaic song is truly effective: most ancient Greek references to *mousikē* inevitably pass through the Platonic critique, so that it becomes almost impossible to recuperate anything "original" of this earlier practice. Plato's strategy is part of philosophy's myth, of its self-conception as a rational, disembodied account of the true nature of things, of its need to define itself against and thus defend itself from *mousikē*—that is, against all that philosophy declares unthinking, *viz.* the performative practices that work by chanting and repeating stories (*muthos*) without questioning their truth.

Some scholars, however, have investigated in more profundity the performance practices associated with Homeric poetry as well as other forms of archaic *mousikē*, in particular Eric Havelock and Gregory Nagy (Havelock 1963; Nagy 1996). For Havelock, the critique of mimesis stems from Plato's reaction to the conflict between the culture of literacy in classic Greece and the archaic, oral practices, which relied on *mousikē* for the transmission of customs and laws across generations. All the diverse senses in which Plato uses terms related to the word "mimesis" in book three of the *Republic* refer to various experiences which have in common the oral transmission of poetry as *paideia* in Greek culture. These practices depend on rhythmic and formulaic repetitions that exploit rhyme, assonance, and echo to articulate ideas, clichés, and rhetorical figures with physical movements from the throat and mouth (singing) to hands and feet (dancing and instrument playing), enabling both the recollection of the formulas as well as the introduction of variations and changes in the ongoing composition of the poems.

Formalizing Havelock's arguments, we can say that *mousikē* is an acoustic assemblage of rhythmically-organized physiological, affective, linguistic, and sonorous performance aimed at the preservation and transmission of customs and laws, a performance or enactment that eliminates the difference between the poet and the poem, as well as that between the performer and the listener. For Havelock, the effectivity of oral-based poetry in ancient Greece depended on the capacity to identify with the poem, for example, by "becoming Achilles," by identifying with his grief, so that "thirty years later you could automatically quote what Achilles had said or what the poet had said about him" (Havelock 1963). Archaic mimesis, from Havelock's perspective, does not consist in copying or imitating the aspect, sound, or behavior of something else, but rather in sympathetic behavior, in the "power to make [the poet's] audience identify almost pathologically and certainly sympathetically with the content of what he is saying" (Havelock 1963, 45).

The mimetic identification by the audience with the poem's hero and the poet's narration is commonly understood as a form of de-subjectivation, as individual identity is given up enabling collective integration. This experience of Dionysian intoxication is what Nancy has in mind in his critique of an immanentist community defined by a will to fusion which literature must interrupt.[17] The problem, then, is that Nancy falls under Plato's spell, determining *mousikē* according to Plato's own condemnation of it—in opposition to both literature and philosophy, and hence according to Platonic ontomimetology in general—instead of the more multifarious experience that can still be heard in diverse contemporary performance practices. So how does *mousikē* differ from the myth that, from Herder to Nietzsche and Freud, links Dionysian intoxication to the spectacle of the *polis* that becomes a spectacle for itself? We can summarize the difference between myth and *mousikē* in five points:

1. *Mousikē* is mimesis, it exploits the many imitative capacities of *homo mimeticus*: affectivity, intoxication, becoming-other; but this mimesis is not entirely—or solely—the kind of *methexis* (participation or fusion) that annuls the individual. When, as Havelock puts it, "you yourself" become Achilles by identifying with his grief, you do not to cease being yourself. Instead, you attain an intimate, affective understanding of Achille's grief so that, thirty years later, you can "automatically quote" the story, or more importantly, recall the values or the

knowledge that the story transmits. The key term here is "quote," which implies that mimesis as *mousikē* is a matter of iterability, of the possibility of repeating, re-playing, or re-presenting the narrative before others, of inscribing it in the collective memory of the community. Instead of fusion of self-and-other, this involves an inscription of the other in the self through the affective force of the dramatic performance. If, to borrow a concept from Bernard Stiegler, we suggest that the inscription of the other in the self is a form of exteriorization of memory, then the act of quoting, of reviving this inscription of the other, is an act of differential remembrance (Stiegler 1998). *Mousikē* is a mimetic performance that enables remembrance and hence institutes the community as the collective body that does the remembering.

2. *Mousikē* is autotelic: to recall Corby's term, the performance is deliberate and directed towards itself, encouraging "the development of the *doing* of that act, a sense of care entwined with the practice" (Corby 2015, 42). However, what is at stake here is not simply play or the unbounded freedom of autonomous art. Rather, the repeated performance of *mousikē* constitutes the community, which is made in, by, or through the performance in an act of care that is linked to remembrance. To anticipate a point I develop below, the performativity of the community is its own institution.

3. *Mousikē* is relational: mimesis always involves more than one. Minimally, it involves one that imitates and one that is imitated. But when one imitates the other, neither the one nor the other remain the same: both become other, they become one another. This process is potentially infinite—echoing Bataille, we can call it mimetic excess. In some cases, it is not easy to tell who is imitating and who is being imitated (Taussig 1993). This situation must be considered not simply as an extreme case but as the condition of any mimetic relationship. The parts that take part (*partagent*) in the imitation are neither the same or different: they engage in difference, or their difference results from their mimetic engagement. From this mimetic relationship that is always at least double emerges a collectivity, a chorus.

4. The specifically performative aspect of this mimetic collectivity depends on repetition and iterability. *Mousikē* is, essentially, choreography—a tracing or inscribing the movements of the chorus produced by mimesis. As we saw, mimesis is an open loop. In mimetic excess, infinite transformation threatens to dissolve the community as soon as it constitutes it. Choreography, the inscription of dance, of choral movement, seeks to modulate the endless play of mimesis by means of rhythm and harmony, that is, by coordinating time and space (the spatialization of harmonic space in instruments, modes, etc. as well as the specific movements of dance in the body and the stage) in rhythm. This simple principle of variation or difference in sameness is an effect of iterability, where the repetition necessarily alters what is repeated, as in Amiri Baraka's "changing same" (Baraka 2010, 180–211).

5. As a performative inscription, *mousikē* operates across three levels. First, *mousikē* operates in bodies that are formed and joined through rhythmized movement, that is, spatialized and temporalized movement, in bodies that move in response to other bodies in mimetic coordination. Second, in the large-scale spacing of these movements across time: in ritual, understood as the repetition of an ordered series of movements, actions, gestures at

specific intervals in specific sites (temples, theaters, public spaces). The performance of ritual inscribes social time and space. Third, in the quasi-ideal or iterable structures that result from these repetitions: musical scales, meters, but also norms (*nomos*, which is also the name of a kind of ancient Greek musical genre), habits (*éthē*), rules of behavior, and values.[18] As a performative inscription, *mousikē* creates an assemblage between these three levels: bodies who remember and reenact; organizations of time and space that enable and determine the performances; and the iterable entities that constitute the "material" of the performances. Community, then, is performatively inscribed onto itself as iterable spacing. What is inscribed is, above all, the interval, in all the musical, temporal, and philosophical senses of the word—I return to this concept below.

But where is *mousikē* today? It clamors in *batucadas*, *carnavales*, *retretas,* second lines, festivals, and all the celebrations-performances where musicians and dancers are a spectacle to themselves; in funerals, wakes, and musical rituals—whether they belong to organized religions or not; it resonates in sound systems, *picós*, clubs, raves, and all spaces where recordings are transformed on the spot through performative iterations mediated by reproduction technology; in town festivals, *seisúns*, *toques,* jam sessions, bar and basement shows; in party collectives, scenes, family traditions; record, tape, and file sharing circles; it echoes still in some concert halls, audible in the ritualized clapping, the religious silence, and the faithful performance of works that come to life with each new iteration.

If, as we have seen, Nancy—after Plato—declares that myth is totalitarian or immanentist in form and content since it aims towards the total fusion of the community in itself and as itself, we can suggest that the mimetic excess of *mousikē* interrupts the community's will to fusion at the same time as it enacts it, according to a logic of the *pharmakon* that is never absent in the question of mimesis.[19] But what kind of interruption is this and how does it differ from the interruption that literature declares itself to be?

THE INTERVAL

It is clear, then, that *mousikē* is not fusion but another kind of interruption: the interruption of the interruption. Indeed, as Nancy says, the interruption is never total, there is always an interstice [*entre-deux*] of silence and noise. A total interruption, a radical rupture, is death—which as we saw, is already implied in immanentism's affirmation of closure. Thus, the interruption must itself be interrupted. This is a key aspect of literature, in Nancy's account: literature interrupts itself, as an unending relay of institutions that commence each time. The interruption of the interruption, a recommencement that is not a simple continuation, is an *interval*; and the interval is the minimal ontological unit or the basic mode of the compearance of *mousikē*.

Mousikē, as I suggested, is a collective assemblage of inscription. What is inscribed are the laws and *ēthē* of the community by means of the iterability of quasi-ideal entities such as harmonic modes, rhythmic feet, linguistic features such as rhyme and assonance, and so on. What these quasi-ideal elements have in common is an essential multiplicity—always at least double—whereby each

element depends on how it repeats another and differs from what is thus repeated. I name this relationship—an effect of iterability, in any case—the interval. A musical interval (an octave, a fifth, for example) always contains two sounds which are given simultaneously or successively. For an interval to be meaningful, both sounds need to be heard and understood in relation to each other. More precisely, the second sound determines the kind of interval with relation to the first one. A single sound, absolutely pure and unrelated to any other, is impossible.[20] But rhythm is also intervallic in this respect. A rhythm always requires two articulations and it is the second articulation that determines the length and the meaning of the first. So it is with rhyme and assonance, and at larger scale with form, with the relation between dancing bodies or the temporality of rituals that spatializes the performances across time, and so on. In a sounding, performative context, iterability is always given as intervallic multiplicity.[21]

The interval also exposes a constitutive aspect of iterability mentioned above, namely that the iteration—the second event—alters the first. Iteration is not the simple repetition of identical or similar units, but the constant modification of what is iterated by the iteration. Likewise, as an interruption of the interruption, the interval is neither mere recommencement nor pure beginning, but a new iteration that transforms what is previously given and remains open for future resignification in subsequent iterations.[22]

This is why, considered in all its performative dimensions, *mousikē* might not amount to the immanentist totalization of myth that Nancy describes. *Mousikē* is indifferent to content and it does not have a tendency towards total communion or a radical break with externality any more than literature does. The content of *mousikē* is not what is iterated (the *muthos* in the Aristotelean sense). Its "content" is iteration itself and this iteration always transforms the "content" as it is re-presented. With respect to form, especially, this aspect of iterability is precisely the interruption of any claim to a pure repetition of the origin. Iterability exploits the condition that no repetition is or can ever be the same, that nothing remains the same across repetitions.

Hence, *mousikē* constitutes the community by interrupting fusion without resulting, however, in atomized individuals that can never come together or which, because they repeat one another, are all the same. Thus conceived, this is not a community of fusion or confusion (panic), but rather of spacing, of intervals. An interval results from interrupting continuity as a rhythm results from a repetition, but rhythm is not simply uniformity just as an interval is not simply a harmonic proportion. What is essential to both rhythm and interval is differential spacing, iterable interruption, not a monotonous repetition that tends towards sameness. An interval is always constituted by more than one, in relation but not in fusion. The community, then, is constituted by interruption, by constant, mimetically rhythmized interruption.

This is not to say that communities of fusion do not emerge or are not imposed through *mousikē*—in fact, this is an ambition that sits at the core of Western music, paradigmatically opera, at least since its origins in the late Renaissance, where music is defined as *musica ficta*, to employ Lacoue-Labarthe's (1994) term. However, I suggest, the will to fusion of *mousikē* is always interrupted from

within—which is why the most ambitious attempts at actualizing this will to fusion, Wagner's *Parsifal* and the community in Bayreuth—are paradigmatic as failures of this program.

The mimesis of *mousikē* is not, as Nancy always says, without *methexis*, without participation. But participation here resonates with all the senses of *partager*, that is, to divide and take part at the same time: *partem capere*, to seize the parts and to take part in, or to be a part of, the performance. Participation as *methexis* is not fusion or confusion but the simultaneous, spatialized coming together of a singular plural being, of parts that remain separate together. The community is constituted by iterability—constant, mimetically rhythmized interruption—and it can only exist, persist, if it preserves these intervallic interruptions. If Nancy says that through these interruptions we hear the "voice" of the community, this voice is also not a personal, single voice but a choir, a chorus, the chorus of choreography, again a chorus constituted by more than one sounding interval.

But if the interval and *mousikē* are characterized by iterability, what distinguishes them, in the end, from literature, poetry, or especially from *écriture*? Why not keep the names "literature" or "poetry" as paleonyms and expand their meaning to encompass all the clamor of *mousikē*? After all, poetry is characterized—to remain close to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's conceptual repertory—by caesurae and syncopes, interruptions of various sorts that are employed as much in music just as they are in literature.[23] The short answer is, because that would be a repetition of that ancient quarrel where philosophy vanquished literature precisely as by determining the latter as either encompassing *mousikē* or as excluding it completely as a *pharmakos.* Arguing for a "proper" *mousikē* against a "proper" literature would, again, reinscribe their opposition to philosophy. The suggestion here is not to invert the gesture—to claim that *mousikē* contains all of literature and poetry—or to exclude literature to recover music, but to listen again to the interval between them, what resonates in their intersticial genealogies so as to open the possibility to think otherwise the affordances and dangers of the aesthetic concepts and practices that compose *homo mimeticus* today.

THE INSTANCE OF THE INSTITUTION

The final question, then, is what kind of community emerges from this performative assemblage that interrupts itself in rhythmized intervals. As we have seen, it is not necessarily a community of fusion and communion, closed in itself as an exclusive or "immunitarian" defense against alterity (Esposito 2011). Rather, this is a community that results from the process of repetition as transformation that takes place in re-presentation, in the iterability of the interval. The question that interests me now, however, is whether this community—defined by interrupted intervention—has the capacity to endure across interruptions. Is the rhythmical movement of the interruption simply an endless deferral? How does the deferral of closure—the constitutive openness that keeps the community from becoming totalitarian or immanentist—keep the community from interrupting itself absolutely? Or worse, from fading out and becoming irrelevant? How does it persist? Is this community, in other words, an institution?

The concept of "institution" belongs in a constellation of terms related to the words "*stasis*" and "*stele*," stemming from the root **sta*, meaning "to stand, set down, make or be firm," which includes the terms "stage," "stance," "pedestal," "stable," "installation," "*Aufstellung*," "*Herstellung*," "*Vorstellung*," "*Darstellung*," "*Gestalt*" and the Heideggerean concepts of "*Bestand*" and "*Gestell*." By tracing this network in Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe shows how one of the central concepts from the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art," the *stele* (column), is "in the West, the sense of Being itself. Being…means to stand" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 66-68). Being is what is erected, what rises and persists. The interpretation of Being as *stele* (heard in "*Ist*" "*es, estar*," "*être,*" i.e. "*estre*") is the interpretation that dominates the history of metaphysics, an "onto-steleology" of Being defined as erection (*Aufstellung*). In the "Origin" essay and "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger defines *Herstellung* (installation) as the proper essence of *technē* as *poiesis.* (Heidegger 2002, 1977; Derrida, "Introduction: Desistance" in Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 22-24; Malabou 2016).

Institution, as part of this constellation, is a mode of being. The institution is the result of an installation, of a *poietic* production or a setting in place that is established in order to endure. An institution, then, is not just a building that houses artworks or events but is itself a specific mode of being that results from *poietic* production, like the paradigmatic Greek temple in Heidegger's essay. The institution is not characterized by its history or its power; rather, these are the result of a more essential characteristic, its permanence, its lasting capacity that allows it to gather and house a community. If this is so, what is an interrupted institution?

By emphasizing *Herstellung* as the essence of art, Heidegger avoids engaging with the problem of *Darstellung* or (re)presentation, that is to say, with mimesis, which he conceives as a mode of secondary degradation or deviation, of unstable "dis-installation" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 80). In so doing, Heidegger obeys the Platonic determination of mimesis which, as I have shown, not only produces the expulsion of literature from the *Republic* but also the erasure of *mousikē* as a different form of community. That is to say, conceived as the result of *Herstellung*, the institution can only be defined as an immanentist institution that admits its others under specific regulations, since any other alternative is defined as a degradation of truth—as the result of unruly, Dionysian intoxication or as the agglomeration of atomized individuals, perhaps unified by the neoliberal principles of the free market. An institution that results from the iterative principle of the interruption of the interruption—an intervalic institution—is one which is always in transformation. In this kind of institution, the meaning of an event is always dependent on future events which might reaffirm, transform, or even interrupt its impact: there is always the possibility that each show, each performance, each meeting might be the last one. The end of one event announces—and is hence dependent on—a future event. This means that each event has the potential to end the institution as a whole—in this lies both its vulnerability and the principle of its resistance against immanentist closure. An intervallic institution is an institution that is always already intervened from within, in which each iteration implies decisions about its continuity. Its power issues neither from above nor from below but results from its self-deferring permanence; in other words, its power is its capacity to be interrupted and not to be completely interrupted.

This intervallic, intervened institution can be represented by means of a typographical prosthesis that responds to the invocation of the Performance Philosophy Biennial that motivated my intervention, in another performative way of doing things with words:

<div align="center">

Interruption

Institution? Intervention!   In(ter)stitution?   In—stitution!

Interval

</div>

The in—stitution emerges in the space or the stage of the performative, or rather in the non-space, in the interstice produced by the intervals of the performance. The interstice is represented in this grapheme by the dash that separates the in—stitution from itself, that inserts the interval as a spacing, undoing its stability without destroying it. The intervention of the interval, an iterated interruption, iterates the "inter" of "interruption," "intervention," and "interval," transforming the institution into an in—stitution that, arising from that very intervention, does not exist but "desists."

Notes

[1] http://www.homomimeticus.eu. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No 716181: HOM).

[2] https://performancephilosophy-amsterdam.nl/Conference. Accessed January 21, 2020

[3] And even if Wagner has been interrupted, the mistrust of the philosophical account of community that Nancy sketched in the 1980s has acquired today a new urgency in the rise of right-wing extremism and political regimes that veer towards what Nidesh Lawtoo (2019a) calls "(New) Fascism."

[4] A paradigmatic case of a community founded by a new myth, *Parsifal* has attracted and troubled philosophers from Nietzsche to Adorno and Badiou (Adorno 1981; Badiou 2010; Waltham-Smith 2013). See also Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis in "The Nazi Myth," especially in reference to Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler, A Film From Germany* (1977) (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1990, 300–303). This does not mean that the idea of community in *Parsifal,* "a work of enormous ambivalence," (Hyer and Minor 2006) can be easily dealt with—it can only be interrupted so that its choral multiplicity can be heard.

[5] The notion of mimesis as a human condition, which here supplements Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's interpretation, was first developed by Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf (1995) and forms the focus of the transdisciplinary research of the *HOM* Project; see above, footnote 1.

[6] The word *désistance*, which Derrida coins as an untranslatable concept, captures various strands in Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking of the subject of mimesis. For my purposes here, desistance introduces a semantic network that includes words like "institution," "substance," and "existence," suggesting a certain impossibility of 'consisting' when mimesis—the proper improper—is taken as "constitutive" of the subject. I return to this semantic network in the last section of this paper, on the question of the institution. Finally, as Derrida notes, 'to desist' implies, in English, a certain kind of interruption, one that is also (de)constitutive of the subject of mimesis. (See Jacques Derrida, "Introduction: Desistance" in Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 1–42.)

[7] For a diagnostic of *homo mimeticus* that emphasizes the role of myth in Plato and its connection to contemporary fascism and violent communities, see Lawtoo (2019b).

[8] To be sure, "literature" is an inclusive term that for Nancy means "writing, in a certain voice, in a singular music, but also in a painting, in a dance, and in the exercise of thought" (1991, 64). However, as I argue below, there is a

difference between thinking performance on the model of literature and thinking performance *and* literature on the model of the musical performance and performance arts. Nancy has written extensively about many art forms and the relations between them. See in particular Nancy (1997).

[9] For a helpful presentation of this text and its broader context, see James (2005).

[10] It is with respect to this critique of humanism that we advance the notion of a *homo mimeticus,* where the human is defined by its constitutive openness—a desistance—to an alterity that transforms the human and which creates a series of pathologies that seek to fend off such becomings.

[11] Nancy elaborates on the motifs of echo and resonance in his 2002 essay *À l'écoute*, where he links meaning as reference [*renvoi*] with *aisthesis* as a structure of referral [also *renvoi*] of the perceptible and the perceived. According to this model, which Nancy argues is paradigmatically present in listening, "one can say, at least, that meaning and sound share the space of a referral, in which at the same time they refer to each other, and that, in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a *self*, a subject" (Nancy 2007, 8).

[12] It remains to be established whether the contemporary rise of radical scholars from the global south, from the decolonial movements of Latin America and Africa through Black pessimism in the United States was enabled or blocked by the earlier dominance of French theory in Anglo-American academia. In that respect, it is also worth mentioning another image evoked by Nancy's "literary communism," namely Angel Rama's notion of the "Lettered City," which focuses on the role of writing in establishing practices of power across Colonial Latin America and its consequences for the persistence of colonial social hierarchies across the continent (Rama 1996; Ochoa Gautier 2014).

[13] I refer again to another question posed by Nancy, "why are there several arts and not just one?" (Nancy 1997).

[14] Musical modes and rhythms correspond to modes of life—violent, willful, lax, cowardly—but this correspondence is entirely opaque. This depends, on the one hand, on the "indistinction" between subject and object that Eric Havelock characterizes as an ontology of the "oral state of mind" (Havelock 1963 see below.). Further, as Séline Gülgönen argues, modes and rhythms are inseparable from the things they are presumed to be copies of. Gülgönen joins scholars like Anne Wersinger in arguing that Greek experience tends not to differentiate between the sense and the sensible that is used to perceive it, such that, for example, the term *akoè* means both the audible, the organ of hearing, and that which is heard (Gülgönen 2014; Wersinger 2001).

[15] Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of this passage, via Heidegger, in Lacoue-Labarthe (1989, 89–95).

[16] It comes up, to be sure, in other dialogues such as the *Statesman* and the *Symposium*, and especially in book II of the *Laws,* where the Athenian warns against "the peculiar difficulty about music, which is discussed much more than any other kind of artistic representation and needs much more careful handling than all the others" namely that there is a danger of music making us attracted to "evil dispositions" (*kaká ēthē*) since "it is extraordinarily difficult to know what the rhythm and harmony without speech are supposed to signify and what worthwhile object they imitate and represent" (*Laws*, 699b-e).

[17] Nancy's distrust of *mousikē* is again expressed in "'March in Spirit in Our Ranks,'" an essay added to the 2007 English translation of *À l'écoute*, where he traces the affective power of National Socialism to its harnessing of the "expressive, communicative, pulse-shaping, disseminating power" of music, "a force of communication and participation that all forms of secular, religious, or aesthetic power that have succeeded each other through our history have not failed to recognize since at least the time when the term *mousikē* designated the ensemble of forms and exercises of expression of a wider sense than the single sense signified by words" (Nancy 2007, 52).

[18] A collection of statements about ancient Greek medicine and musical practice that began to be compiled in the third century BCE and circulated widely during the Renaissance (when it was attributed to Aristotle, who possibly wrote some of them), clearly states the relation between the inscription of norms and habit through performance, playing on the double meaning of the word *nomos* as both a "law" and musical genre: "Why are the *nomoi* that people sing called by that name? Is it because before they learned writing they sang their laws, so as not to forget them, as is the custom even now among the *Agathyrsi*? And they therefore gave to the first of their later songs the

same name that they gave to their first songs" (Barker 1984).

[19] Indeed, mimetic *pathos* can always go both ways—fusion and interruption—and is perhaps defined by the oscillation between them. As Lawtoo (2013) argues, there is often a movement between mimetic pathologies (such as fusion and violence) and patho-*logies*, the *logos* or knowledge that emerges from a familiarity with mimetic practices.

[20] The majority of the extant texts of ancient Greek "music theory" concern intervals, defined as mathematical proportions with specific characteristics: perfect, harmonic or consonant intervals (*diapason* or octave in a proportion of 2:1; *diapente* or fifth, 3:2; *diatessaron* or fourth 4:3) against inharmonic or dissonant ones that are not "*epimoric*" (where the first term exceeds the second by a single unit), along with the potentially infinite multiplicity of subdivisions that make up the diatonic, chromatic, and enharmonic *genera* (Barker 2004). The important point is that the distinction between consonance and dissonance (and the entire system of values that results from the Pythagorean analysis of proportions since Plato's *Timaeus*) is second to the fact that sounds are always given as a multiplicity, as proportion, relation, interval.

[21] It is only slightly more difficult to argue for timbre as being essentially multiple or intervallic. For a possible approach that considers timbre as differential, see Villegas Vélez (2018).

[22] This notion of the interval could be read along Nancy's account of the constitution of a "listening subject" as a "sonorous place […] a place that becomes a subject insofar as sound resounds there," a subject that does not preexist the sonorous resonance that constitutes it as a listening subject (Nancy 2007, 17).

[23] Lacoue-Labarthe describes the caesura as "an empty articulation," a radical interruption that arrests the dialectic unfolding of the tragedy "such that what appears then is no longer the alternation of representations bur representation itself" (1989, 234). Nancy's motif of the syncope is, likewise, an uneven disruption of rhythm which can be positive (as in music) or negative (as in medicine) although it does not need to be unique. Both the caesura and the syncope, however, are in rigor kinds of (rhythmic) intervals.

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Biography

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A 'WHAT IF' EXERCISE:
ON THE INSTITUTION OF THE ART SCHOOL[1]

SILVA BOTTIROLI DAS THEATRE, AMSTERDAM

> Every time we speak of the 'institution' as other than 'us', we disavow our role in the creation and perpetration of its conditions [...]. It's not a question of being against the institution: we are the institution.
>
> Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique"
> (2005, 106)

This text attempts to organize my thoughts responding to a set of questions about how we can practice an art and specifically a theatre school, how we can do and undo it, taking into account how institutional structures have power over us, and how we have agency within them. Following Andrea Fraser's line of thought (Fraser 2005), I believe that we are the institution: we have agency within it and—no matter which position we speak from—we have a role in the creation, perpetration and also transformation of the conditions it provides. At the same time, while working within an institutional framework we all experience how much institutions have power over us. As a matter of fact, every institution allows certain things and not others, separates an inside from an outside to establish what and who is part of it and under which conditions, and dictates how people can and cannot behave within it.

With the risk of giving them a form of agency that is normally associated with human beings only, we may argue that institutions *perform* in the social realm, responding to their own specific way of *thinking*. Hence, understanding how institutions think is very important in order to exercise our agency within them effectively and, consequently, to be able to bend them, hybridize, challenge, betray or queer them. By approaching artistic institutions as "thinking entities," my reflection intends to contribute, offering a specific perspective on art schools and art education, to the discourse already opened, among others, by the collective book *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse* (O'Neill, Steeds, and Wilson 2017) that, taking the famous text by cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas as a starting point (Douglas 1986), collects various contributions about contemporary artistic institutions. In the performing arts field, a whole discourse recently started to open up about the institution as a "fictional entity," and about the possibility that fiction offers to approaching how an institution thinks and to rethinking it.[2]

This discourse is embedded in the field of curation, a set of practices and theoretical tools that is relatively new in the performing arts. Only in recent years, curation and curating started being discussed in the theatre field, initially bending the conceptual tools developed within the visual arts, and only later building new terms, framing particular practices, raising specific questions. The publication of the issue *Curating Performing Arts* of the Croatian magazine *Frackija* in 2010 and the international conference *Beyond Curating* at PACT in Essen in 2011 mark the moment that this conversation started developing in Europe, creating a new discourse and a different understanding of practices related, among the others, to institutions and instituting processes. More recently, the theatre field seems to be more intrigued than ever by institutions as a subject. The book *Turn Turtle! Re-enacting the Institute* (van Campenhout and Mestre 2016), the symposium and free school around *The Fantastic Institution* organized by BUDA arts center in Kortrijk in 2017 and 2018, and the Performance Philosophy conference in Amsterdam in 2019 are just some of the strongest indicators of this phenomenon.[3]

In fact, I am proposing to look at institutions from two complementary perspectives: how they *think*, and how they *perform*. These two layers are obviously intertwined in the life of institutions. We can of course move from the one to the other, sometimes blurring their borders, but I believe it is important to be aware that institutions can only *perform* according to the way they *think*. Understanding how they think is how we can anticipate how they can or cannot perform in the artistic and social realm. From there, I believe that it is at the intersection between their thinking and their performing that we can intervene effectively within institutions.

Artistic education as a field, and the art school as the main subject within it, have been present within the debate about artistic institutions since its beginning, as a crucial subject in a field that thinks itself as progressive, research-led, experimental and committed to the production of the future. Nevertheless, a specific line of thought about art education within contemporary performing arts is not implemented yet, although the school and the academy are, as Charles Esche suggested, "where it all begins" (Esche 2007, 1).

Institutions are always made to set conditions for something and always do something. In the arts field, the institution can, for example, serve to transmit a legacy or a tradition (the museum, the library, the repertory theatre...), produce new forms (the arts centre, the residency place...) or broaden the encounter between the arts and a public (the festival, the biennial...). Furthermore, all institutions are the result of a negotiation between different subjects and the discourses that inform them. This is also the case with the art school, which is positioned at the intersection of art production and education, and responds to many more systems (political, financial and so forth).

Like any other artistic institution, a school is shaped in order to frame, secure and support specific values. Approaching it from the perspective of what it sets conditions for and what it does is a way to deconstruct the idea of the art school, and to become able to think it anew, becoming aware of what it is, how it operates, what it makes possible or impossible. By creating a tension between the institution of the art school and the agency we as individuals have in thinking and rethinking it, I am trying to identify the space from which we can operate differently within the institution of the school, and possibly from which to practice the school otherwise. This process requires at the same time a critical exercise and imaginative bumps: I will start from the first, to then tap into the latter.

My experience within the theatre school and my knowledge about it is precisely situated within DAS Theatre, the former DasArts, founded in Amsterdam by artist Ritsaert ten Cate in 1994 as an independent organization and later becoming part of the Amsterdam University of the Arts in 2009. All my thinking—and the very motivation of rethinking the institute of the school—is rooted in this extraordinary place, in the deep transformation it experienced in the last decade, and in the desire to imagine it anew as a response to and as a provocation for the theatre field of today. However, some fundamental values are shared by all the theatre schools (academies and universities) that are attempting to reimagine or reinvent themselves in relation to an artistic and political framework radically different from the one that first produced the institution of the art school a couple of centuries ago.[4]

To tackle what the institution of the school is, it may be useful to go back to the original meaning of the word, although we must be aware that it has undergone many transformations over time. In ancient Greek, *skolè* (the word for school) denotes, first, "a time of leisure" (as opposite to other, more instrumentalized, times), and only consequently means "a place for learning" and "a forum for discussion." So, like any other institution, the school is defined by three vectors: time, space and forms of relationships oriented towards specific aims.

From the perspective of time, we can approach the school as a complex set of different temporalities, that cross each other. Time can be experienced at school not only as duration, but also in its density and in its speed. More often, several temporal dimensions intertwine and cut through the particular time of the school as an institution, one that is instituted in time and requires re-institution over time. Consequently, time operates within the school as a manifold entity, capable to affect profoundly the life and dynamics of the institution itself.

From the perspective of space, a school always needs or produces a *place*, a specific locality where its participants can come together. In that sense, we could say then that a school is always local, no matter how broadly international its population is, or how deeply networked the institution is.

The specific sets of relationships of the school seem to be, though, the most important vector defining its singularity. I will thus focus on them, and approach time and space from the perspective of relationships as well.

Nothing goes one way: Art schools as sites of agonistic pluralism

> Relationship among all things appears to be complex and reciprocal—always at least two ways, back and forth. It seems that nothing is single in this universe, and nothing goes one way.
>
> Ursula Le Guin, "Deep in Admiration" (2017, 15)

Schools produce a complex set of relationships, and these are always reciprocal. Art schools, in particular, are meant to be places where a new generation of practitioners can and must imagine themselves anew within the context of formal education. The school offers a support structure for artists to imagine themselves as individual and collective forces that can shape the art field and have an impact on other spheres. It offers a unique space where students can experience a structural safety, have time to focus on their work and can make use of facilities to explore, deepen and broaden aesthetic forms and research questions. Graduate and post-graduate institutions, in particular, offer conditions for an in-depth peer exchange and forms of encounters based on learning rather than on teaching.

Two main sets of relationship seem to be crucial in these environments: one articulates the peer exchange between participants as students and as artists, while the other is connected to the encounter between the students as individuals and as a collective body, on the one hand, and the school as an institution, on the other hand. This latter is normally informed by the assumption that the students are not part of the institution. This assumption, that *per se* is false of course, is actually fuelled by the fact that students often experience a perceived and factual lack of agency in the school, and tend to be seen, and therefore to become, sheer consumers of what the school can offer rather than co-authors of what it can generate.

Both these relationships are complicated further, in graduate and postgraduate education, by the fact that students are, in most cases, professional artists already. This means that their peer relationship is actually doubled: they are peer artists and peer students at the same time. But also their relationship with the teachers or tutors is of a double nature, since for their teachers they are not students only, but also (younger) peers.

Like many other institutions, the art school produces a complex community, traversed by a variety of different relationships. But, different to others, this is, per definition, a temporary community. People don't stay at the school forever, and the school is meant to be a place for transition, for

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moving from one state to another. Therefore, the time spent within the art school is very dense, and traversed by the particular demands that students have towards the school itself (to make them better artists, to broaden their professional networks, to consolidate their position within the field, to be a shelter and provide time and safety for them to stay in a research mode, for example).

All these are legitimate demands produced and reinforced by the current policies of art education, by the ways of operating undertaken by the institution of the academy and through its relationships with the professional field. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to deconstruct these demands and speculate on what the school could or should be there for, what it could or should set conditions for.

I believe that art schools exist to offer specific support structures for new generations of artists to explore and strengthen their means of engaging imaginatively with the complexity of the world. This is something they, as artists, are doing anyway. They don't need the school for that. The difference is that, at school, they are offered a particular environment that, on the one hand, is meant to be extremely safe and supportive and, on the other, by referring to the structures of formal education, confronts them with hierarchies, power structures, timelines and assessment policies. Are these two features compatible? How can one deal with this ambivalence?

One of the crucial purposes of the art school is, in my view, to produce this friction between imagination and rules, freedom to explore and pedagogical structure, research and artistic production. I am not sure how many artists are fully aware of that when they apply for a school, and I don't think that the friction the school as an institution is producing is always fruitful, but I am convinced that it can be positive and somewhat generative of conversations and adjustments of policy. Art schools can be a place of productive tensions and I believe that these tensions are actually one of the support structures that they can offer to artists, since they contribute to create a pluralistic and diverse environment. I am proposing here an agonistic view on the art school, suggesting that schools are sites of the political and that we should approach them as such.[5]

In fact, schools can be approached from an agonistic perspective because they are always pluralistic: different agencies cooperate in making the school, and different, often contradictory, agendas operate within them. The school as an institution is always a place where 'we are many' and where many singular perspectives are brought together. Moreover, this "many" is not to be misunderstood as a simple collective, because power relations and asymmetrical positions do exist within formal education. In this respect, we could look at the art school as a micro-society, a structured, political temporary community where we can experience ourselves as individual subjects co-creating a complex societal structure, continuously colliding with others' propositions and perspectives.

In her text *Institutions as Sites of Agonistic Intervention*, Chantal Mouffe advocates for the need for critical artistic practices to engage with institutions, and artistic institutions in particular, by "bringing about agonistic spaces" (Mouffe 2013a, 69) and thus making them what they could be: "agonistic public spaces where [the current] hegemony is openly contested" (Mouffe 2013a, 70). The question is how to use existing institutions to foster political forms of identification and, in

parallel, how to make existing conflicts productive. Both these perspectives apply to the idea and the practice of the art school that, like any other artistic institution, "by staging a confrontation between conflicting positions [...] could make a decisive contribution to the proliferation of new public spaces fomenting agonistic forms of participation where radical democratic alternatives to neoliberalism could be imagined and cultivated" (Mouffe 2012, 73–74).

The concept of agonism is introduced by Mouffe as opposite to the liberal understanding of negotiation, on one hand, and the call for consensus, on the other. Performing an art school as the agonistic space that it could be is not easy. It requires a constant deconstruction and reconstruction of the idea of the school itself, an openness to reconsider one's own positions and yet also a confidence that any political stance the institution takes and proposes, as well as any position embodied by any of its constituencies, can contribute to the production of a democratic pluralism. Although we can agree that creating spaces of agonistic pluralism is crucial in the current conditions set for art production in times of Post-Fordist capitalism and neoliberal ideologies, the exercise of engaging with it is not linear and requires a consideration of the sites where, in each institution, agonism can be found and cultivated.

One particular feature of schools that contributes to their political agency is the fact that even though they do choose their staff members and their students, and therefore they are not open to *everybody*, schools are per se open to *anybody*. Hopefully within any school you will find a community of people who, no matter what their positions within the institution are, are committing themselves to the difficult and necessary exercise of living together. We could look at schools as a very privileged place for the exercise of political negotiation, since they always require a constant negotiation rules and practices, mediating between different needs, making compromises, questioning one's own beliefs and values, exercising radical forms of listening.[6] The point is rather how negotiation can avoid becoming a neoliberal practice where everything can continuously be negotiated all over again, and how singular positions can get agency and collectively contribute to challenge the political hegemonies that the school itself, and the contexts in which it operates, have established.

Here, the collective dimension of the school comes into play, and offers some perspective. In fact, art schools are places where artists study, work and research alongside and with each other. The encounter between practitioners who research and work in different disciplines and relate to different socio-cultural frameworks is not immune to misunderstandings and frictions. But a school where this encounter occurs is a unique space where not only new art forms, but also new cultural practices can be researched and tested. If this is the case, then the impact that art schools can have on the art field at large is huge.

Maybe it is indeed thanks to the sets of tension that traverse it that the art school can, as the complex institution that it is, stand for its principles and resist the hegemonic view of art as an ongoing production and circulation of works and of art education as a set of tools for artists to improve their signature and therefore acquire greater value in the art market. By providing the possibility of thinking through practice, and therefore exploring art as a subject of reflection rather

than only as an object of reflection, the art schools value art practices in their capacity to formulate research questions and explore them within the specific means of art. One of the political stances of the school, we could argue, is indeed to support this capacity, and provide visibility to the specific form of thinking that is produced by the artists with their work, presenting it for what it actually is: a practice and a reflection, at the same time. One of the agonistic spaces that art schools can produce is indeed this space for rethinking art beyond any binary opposition between theory and practice, subject and object.

Such an agonistic dimension is in my view one of the fundamental features of art schools. The risk is that it evolves into antagonistic tensions that could find a fertile ground in the institution of the school. Being confronted with an existing structure, as in the school, can, and normally does, produce a form of discipline and obedience, on the one hand, and a form of rebellion, on the other. When this tension takes place across symmetrical and asymmetrical power relationships, the result—unwanted, but real—is that a school often produces forms of antagonism.

I have the impression that we are increasingly experiencing an antagonistic polarization within art schools. This polarization seems to reflect the contemporary socio-political atmosphere, ruled by inequalities and injustices, fuelled by a narrative of scarcity and competition and by a very broadly spread mistrust, if not aggression, towards the very idea of institutions. Institutional critique seems to have played an important role in shaping the behaviour patterns of the encounter, collaboration or coexistence, of artists and artistic institutions in particular, and obviously schools are not immune to that.

It is possible that the polarization within art schools can produce the same harmful process of simplification that is flattening perceptions of reality in other fields of our collective lives. This is a serious concern. But, if we push the concept of polarization further, it can turn into something else, something even desirable for the performing arts field in this very moment. As a matter of fact, schools are one of the few institutions in the arts field providing a space for such polarizing relationships. They provide a space for friction, for conflict even. No matter how progressive and open the program is, the school as such confronts all its constituencies with a clear hierarchical structure and with a set of rules that can be subject to negotiation but are already instituted.

In a working field that understands itself as a context where all relationships are fluid, everything is debatable and negotiable, collaboration is a key resource and affective labour is a reality, art schools can represent an exception, as their vision can be less friendly with contemporary policies. The contemporary theatre field is extremely critical toward current neoliberal policies, but at the same time it is perfectly reproducing, and even improving, them to the point that it is considered to be one of the fields where policies of self-exploitation are most successfully tested. The contemporary artistic field is characterized, as many more fields, by a dangerous liquidity, where all relationships are blurred and artists often end up being complicit with the structural procedures that exhaust them.[7] There is very little space in the artistic infrastructure to exercise conflict, to radically disagree, and even less space to disagree and still work together, from different and irreconcilable positions.

At school, on the contrary, this is to be possible, no matter what. I am not pretending that this is always the case, but the possibility of radical disagreement should be part of the fundamental, unnegotiable form of safety that a school must offer. A safety that goes way beyond the sense of physical and psychological safety of being respected and valued as individuals, without any form of discrimination due to class, race, colour, gender or sexual orientation. Once this basic safety is taken care of by the institution itself, then the structural safety that the art school is to provide to students is actually for them to be free to pursue their research and make their work, no matter what forms, aesthetics and politics they perform.

Not an individual affair: Art school as entangled subjects

> To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-reality.

> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007, ix)

An art school is never an independent subject. It is part of a wider environment. It operates at the intersection of art and education, depending on and contributing to both these fields. It is intertwined with the art infrastructure locally and globally, with the policies of its funding bodies, that are often public, and with the developments of the artistic and cultural field. These sets of relationships actually mean something more than just being intertwined with another: the art school is entangled because it lacks a self-contained existence. It operates and thinks with and within a complex environment, it is affected by it in ways that are not always predictable, and it affects its environment in many ways, connected to the concrete impacts that a school may have.

This entanglement has several dimensions. One is the broad socio-political framework in which art is questioned in its legitimacy as a cultural practice and in its capacity to strengthen citizenship and democracy, contributing to a progressive, liberal development of society. All over Europe, art's role is currently often undermined or dismissed, in favour of a very functional approach to social dynamics. Art schools have agency within this field, since they are one of the few institutions that can render visible the work of art, but are also heavily affected by it, and often seen as useless places where a privileged minority cultivates their hobbies. One possible way of becoming conscious of entanglement is, for art schools to combine their agendas with the agendas of other institutions and individuals, to propose themselves as allies and accomplices for other subjects that pursue different, but interconnected aims. A school's accountability, as any other institution's accountability, is always relational and reciprocal. We operate within a circulation of responsibilities and agencies, and it is our task to embrace them. Some examples in this sense come from self-organized and artist-run initiatives. *The Silent University* initiated by artist Ahmet Ögüt as a nomadic project, involves refugees and immigrants who are not able to share and transmit their knowledge in the countries where they relocated, thereby establishing a strong link between art, knowledge production and immigration policies. The *Unidee* project organized by

Cittadellarte in Biella, Italy connects artistic and curatorial research with the societal issues experienced by an area transitioning from a flourishing industry to a post-industrial economic system. The programmes created by Tania Bruguera in Cuba and by Chto Delat in St. Petersburg testify, in different ways, to the deep entanglements between art education and political frameworks, within and beyond the activist attitude of their founders.

The local dimension of the art school also contributes to complexify its entanglement, since the school operates locally and globally at the same time, as one of the subjects that can help shape artistic mobility and a transnational, moving artistic community, confronted with issues that include the psychological, social and environmental consequences of a model based on an exasperated mobility. When committed to engaging with its local dimension, the school as an institution, however, is to question its foundations: for whom does it exist, who can be part of it and have agency within it? How does it plan to preserve qualitative exchanges, and yet participate within a local context that is broader that its artistic discourse?[8]

It is often uneasy for art schools to engage with, and be relevant within, a specific local context. Nevertheless, the friction between the local and the global field that the art school is part of, is possibly very generative of necessary conversations that reframe the understanding of the local and the global. How can art schools relate to the particular forms of global community that are there in the arts field, with artists fleeing from many countries in search for better conditions in which to work and sustain their practices? What role can schools play, as transnational temporary communities of artists, within a field that considers mobility as a key resource?

I will not enter the complex social and cultural aspects of this situation, one that we should be particularly committed to in Western Europe where for several reasons many artists decide to relocate, hoping for a more sustainable, fair and friendly working field that they don't always find.[9] Rather, I would like to suggest that, in this context, art schools can and must become sites of an important transnational exchange, one that entails a potential impact on the ways people imagine and produce the art forms of the future. What is the potential of the transnational community of artists making research and working alongside each other in artistic institutions based on peer exchange and feedback culture? How can the potential of such communities be actualized? In these kinds of context, participants not only develop their artistic universe, deepen their practice and broaden their forms of expressions. The curriculum also invites them to collaborate with each other as performers, technicians, external eyes or dramaturgs, providing a collective environment based on support and facilitating mutual exchanges and influences.

As a matter of fact, very often art schools cherish a narrative of individual makers, designing programs that are based on the students' individual ownership, driven by their specific research questions and art practices, and meant to strengthen them as individual voices. What if, instead, we look at art schools as collective entities and unique environments that nourish a sense of multiplicity and a desire to undertake adventures together? What if, for example, students could graduate with collaborative or collective works, instead of with creations valorised as the product of an individual with a discernible set of pre-determined skills? What forms of empowerment could

this shift produce, and what would its consequences be within the broader art field, once students go back to it as makers, pursue their artistic practices, intervene in the existing institutions and establish the support structures that they have learned as being important for artistic research and practice?

When focussing on the cultivation of a transnational community of artists as students, schools are, much more than any other institution in the art field, places where different artistic idioms meet and develop alongside and with each other. They are sites of mutual influences, where the development of one's own artistic work unfolds in a form of commonality rather than in a splendid isolation. What this commonality can be about, and precisely which forms of togetherness can be fostered within the art school, are questions worth exploring, also in relation to how, from being a place for commonality, the art school can realize existing entanglements with other subjects.

All entanglements necessitate a form of interdependence, of non-homogeneity, and in the end of difference. Being entangled does not mean being or becoming identical to the other subjects one is intertwined with. On the contrary, cultivating one's coefficient of diversity, one's autonomy (to the extent to which autonomy is possible) is therefore as important for an art school as it is to be permeable and porous to the entities that it lives and thinks with. Moreover, this coefficient is needed to keep a distance from the current, ever-changing policies that rule the institution of the school, and from the political agendas imposed by the market and by the public and private powers that have influence on art education. It is from this position of slight distance, from this feeling of non-belonging and from this stubborn cultivation of its own difference, I believe, that an art school can transform the tensions that traverse it into productive ones. Still, questions remain. How to operate within a given set of conditions, infiltrating different discourses in it? How to pursue the values attached to a pluralist institution for art education and production, *no matter what* the current values are that are circulating in the fields of academia and art market? How not to emphasize the narrative of the individual artists competing for resources, but rather nurture a sense of collective endeavour to make the working field more equal and just?

A future the challenges of which we just cannot imagine: Art schools as an engagement with the present time

> We know that those who enter university today belong to the generation that will have to face a future the challenges of which we just cannot imagine. […] Can we claim that what we are proposing them meets, or even vaguely meets, this situation?
>
> Isabelle Stengers, "'Another science is possible!' A plea for slow science" (2011)

Graduate and Postgraduate artistic education uses to think in terms of knowledge generation and exchange rather than of knowledge transmission, but it is undeniable that each school has a particular legacy, and one of its core missions and key activities is to transmit it. In the best-case scenario, transmitting goes hand in hand with questioning or challenging this legacy, in the attempt

to keep it, and the school as such, permeable and porous to an ever-changing artistic, social, political environment that confronts us with philosophical, ethical and aesthetic issues.

If we look at them from the perspective of the legacy they carry, schools are "forces of the past" (Pasolini 1964). It is up to us to constantly explore what this past may mean today, how we can access it and use it as a force to shape the present and produce the future. I am not particularly keen on celebrating the past as such or its abstract values, but our commitment towards the production of the future risks to be a form of escapism in a present time that we may legitimately consider to be quite dark. In order to shift the focus from the future towards the present and engage with it, we cannot avoid considering the forces that have shaped it.

The supposed proximity between the past and the present should not only be understood in terms of continuity though. Every art school's function is to secure the transmission of knowledge. Every school is based upon a certain tradition and has a specific legacy that connects it to something that comes from the past. How can schools, and the forms of knowledge production and sharing operating within them, be not an *image* of the past, but rather a *force* of the past, meaning a force capable of moulding the present, coming from a different time and place but operating here and now?

Understanding the past as a force within the present time may help us to think the relation with the legacy not as a way of repeating the past, but, instead, as a means of producing cracks in the present, digging holes or making gaps through which other forces–e.g., potential pasts and potential futures– can access our present time and fertilize it.[10] I see this as another form of friction, another positive tension, that the art school can produce and sustain via the collision between its particular culture, vocabulary and system of values, and the students that enter it and rightly demand the school to make sense for them, and to change with them.

Isabelle Stenger's famous plea for slow science is of course a prominent reference in thinking slowness as a necessary asset of research and knowledge generation. Her plea speaks to a scientific community that is in many respects very far from the community of artistic research. Like philosophy, as opposed to "fast science," art is per definition committed to "take the time needed to formulate questions" (Stengers 2011). Art's and artists' legitimacy is often understood as related to their capacity to build a form of reflection that is barely achievable by any other field, including academic research. As a society, we support the arts and the artists because they do the job that we as individual citizens and communities can hardly do: the job of thinking, formulating questions and exploring them, not necessarily with the purpose of answering them.

What if we understand art as the set of human practices exploring what is unknown, not to make it known, but to maintain it unknown, obscure? What would the political potential be, of an activity that has no aim but to understand itself as a means with no ends?[11] In this respect, art does operate, likewise philosophy, as the slow science that Stengers is claiming for. Stenger's plea is actually meant to radically question the bonds between scientific research and capitalist markets, and obviously the nature of these bonds cannot be answered by art. Nevertheless, art and philosophy are the tools and the environments that, quoting Stengers, could "enable scientists to

accept what is messy not as a defect but as what we have to learn to live and think in and with" (Stengers 2011).

In order to accept the complexity that "we have to live and think in and with," it is necessary to create the conditions that allow us to fully engage, intellectually and imaginatively, with the real.[12] The first condition that is needed for such thinking is time, a continuity of time that encourages us to patiently sit and wait, to contemplate and to observe, until "the line of thought dip[s] deep into the stream" (Woolf 1929).

It may sound naïve to claim this kind of time in a working field ruled, as every other, by productivity and efficiency. Our current working conditions are meant to prevent us from thinking, in the sense of dipping deep and exercising imagination. But, as we know, "think we must" (Woolf 1938).

What if, then, we look at art schools as a site for such thinking? What kinds of temporality should they provide to allow artists to research and work outside or beyond the temporalities that rule the contemporary art field? In her article *The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making*, Bojana Kunst criticizes the "projective temporality" of today's art field, suggesting that within the regime of the project "we don't actually move anywhere, because [...] no difference is produced. In a project, an equilibrium between the present and future is set up, in the sense that whatever has yet to come is already projected in the present" (Kunst 2012). According to Kunst, "temporality is at the core of the production of difference. It is the material of social and aesthetic change [...]. Art production and creation must therefore rethink the relation between temporality and its production, and find new ways in which to push the time 'out of joint.'" If they should respond to the current temporalities that are available within the art field, in the perspective of complementing them, the art schools should definitely propose a temporality freed from projects and deadlines, a sort of continuity where the time of the present can be inhabited again and a relation with the future can be set, beyond "the speculative balance between that which is and that which has yet to come", always according to Kunst. Could we imagine such a school? An art school with no assignment, no writing of plans, reports and reflections? A school that does not only practice integral assessment, but also performs evaluation as a constant practice unfolding parallel to the students' learning trajectories? What would that kind of art school confront its students with, how would it represent a productive challenge for them and for the working field?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine an art school free from the logics and temporality of the project. Not only because of how the school itself operates, but also because of how being a student is often, for the artists, one of the many identities that they have to perform, juxtaposing or connecting them to each other, in order to maintain their professional position during the time of their studies. Nevertheless, the urge to create radically different temporalities for the art school is real, and the limits into which we bump once we try experimenting it is just a signal that deconstruction and reconstruction of the idea of the school are not sufficient, and imaginative bumps are needed to create a virtual space where other scenarios can be imagined.

To institute 'otherwise': Art schools as a 'what if' exercise

> I propose that instead of treating the interminable question of the capacity to act in terms of 'possible versus impossible', we examine what it might mean to institute 'otherwise', politically and performatively, 'as if it were possible.'
>
> Athena Athanasiou, "Performing the Institution 'As If It Were Possible'" (2016, 679)

Athena Athanasiou's proposal could be adopted as a manifesto and as a methodology, based on the tactic of the "otherwise" and the "as if," as opposite to the hopelessness of the "due to" and to the strategy of the "against." We must acknowledge that we depend upon the institutions, even when we claim to be outside of them or against them, when we don't practice them, leave them behind or try to build alternatives to them. But we don't only depend upon them. We also shape, affect, deconstruct and construct them over and over again. We think them, and we perform them. There is no outside of the institutions, and, despite how terrible this might sound for some of us, it is also a radical call to engagement to feel involved, to claim our agency and to practice it collectively, no matter how asymmetrical our relations and how different our positions are.

It is not the school's task to define what the theatre of the future will look like or, in other words, how theatre, performance or the arts in general can keep developing new aesthetics, new ways of making us sensitive to the world and of letting us experience and know the world. In this respect, the students are the ones who have, or rather the one who are building, the knowledge that the schools are supposed to be producing and transmitting. When involved in art schools, we are like the "ignorant schoolmaster" that Jacques Rancière writes about (Rancière 1991),teaching something that we don't know and that we can't know, or rather supporting new generations of artists to undertake their journey, to be bold enough to research into the unknown and strong enough to sustain their practices until they find something, and come back to share it. But how to transmit a knowledge that we don't have, how to support the generation and exchange of knowledge? How to serve a theatre whose aesthetics and languages we don't know yet? How to support forms of spectatorships and of togetherness that we feel emerging but can't recognize yet? How to improve practices of cities and of societies—practices of politics, too—that we can't even imagine yet?

A "what if" exercise is a good way to start exploring this set of questions, because it makes space to deconstruct the existing schools, and imaginatively construct other schools, acting beyond the speculative tension between the possible and the impossible. It is here that fiction comes to our aid as a way to suspend reality. The reality of what art schools are today is not what their real being is or can be, and we cannot access their realness via a critical analysis only. While reality separates us from the real, fiction allows us to access it, if we are willing to engage in a form of collective imagination.

Here we go back to time and to the particular qualities of time required by any form of imagination, by fiction as a suspension of disbelief and by the "as if" attitude that Athanasiou writes about. This

time is the present time, and cannot be anything else than the complex, thick present time in which we constantly struggle, negotiate, surrender, start again.

Some of the authors exploring the concept of the new and the conditions for its production suggest that the only time that we have to participate in the creation of another reality is the in-between time, the time hidden in the cracks of the present.[13] And as we know from the theorists of entanglement and cohabitation, we always think or work within given conditions, in precisely situated contexts and with other entities, human and other-than-human, that share and co-create the environment with us.[14] If the time in which the new can be produced is only the time in-between other times, and the space that we inhabit is always a shared space coming with specific conditions, then I believe that we can only rethink the art schools by engaging with what they currently are, with their present and their past, working within them and the particular sets of conditions that they provide yet remembering that what they are is not what their real being is, and that only tackling their realness we can affect and transform them.

So, the imaginative bump ends up being a very concrete engagement with what *is*, a commitment to what is already there and to the present time in which we experience it, rather than a more intriguing leap into the unknown. Perhaps this temporality, this form of *being present* of the school and to the school, is also where our possibility lies to generate a form of continuity. Not the continuity of an uninterrupted duration though, that seems to be highly utopian under the current conditions of education and of art making, but the continuity given by an intensity of presence that, claiming to be non-negotiable, institutes a locality and calls to an inhabitation of the present time. It is only in the present that we can be at the same time accountable and self-critical, and it is only from this position that the antagonistic tensions that traverse the art schools can be navigated, and an agonistic space can be cultivated that makes the school the democratic institution it could and should be.

Notes

[1] The text is an edited and expanded version of the lecture, Art Schools as Thinking Entities that I gave as a keynote at the Performance Philosophy Conference in Amsterdam, on March 15th, 2019. The original title of my contribution, Art Schools as Thinking Entities, comes from a public conversation I had with some friends and colleagues back in 2015, around Festivals as thinking entities. I would like to credit them—Judith Blackenberg, Daniel Blanga-Gubbay, Livia Andrea Piazza, and Berno Odo Polzer—for that title, and for our shared reflection.

All my thinking is actually built in conversation with others, and the collective effort and the ongoing exchanges that are behind it are very important to me. In particular, I owe some of the inputs for this text to Livia Andrea Piazza, Georg Docker, Barbara van Lindt, Miguel Angel Melgares, and Marijke Hoogenboom, and I would like to thank them for their generosity in exchanging thoughts.

My working is currently embedded within DAS Theatre, the master program of the Amsterdam University of the Arts that I have directed since September 2018. I spoke at the Performance Philosophy conference in Amsterdam, and am writing here, as a practitioner who is trying to better understand some ways of thinking and working, some dynamics and structures, some problems and potentialities of the art school, in order to improve the work that we are doing at DAS, in conversation with others who are engaging in similar questions in different places, within and beyond artistic education. So, all my thoughts are connected to the students, team members, tutors and collaborators of DAS Theatre, without whom I wouldn't have felt the urge to systematize my thoughts around artistic education and the institute of the art school.

[2] Among others, I have been influenced by Blanga, Gubbay, and Piazza (2016) and by Graziano (2016).

[3] Other important references in the discourse about curation in the performing arts are: Davida, Provonost, Hudon, and Gabriels (2018) and Malzacher and Warsza (2017).

[4] Among the others, important references about the institute of the school and the possibility to think of independent, often artist-run education platform are Franceschini (2018), Thorne (2017), Bergman, Salinas, and Boric (2016) and Pomarico (2018). Artistic institutions such as theatre and festivals seem to be more and more keen on reflecting about education, often by organizing free schools: some inspiring example are Santarcangelo Festival and Live Works in Italy, Homo Novus in Latvia, and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Belgium.

[5] The concept of agonism has been developed by Mouffe in several books about the political and its dimensions, and in particular about pluralism as a condition for any democratic construction. Among the others, see as references Mouffe (2005, 2013b). She also explored the concept of agonism in relation to artistic and activist practices, see Mouffe (2007). In her writings, Mouffe analyses agonism as a condition for pluralism and, in that sense, as a societal (and we could also say: interpersonal) structure capable of supporting the construction of diverse and democratic environment. It is on this note, that I am referring to this concept and its theoretical and empirical repercussions, in relation to the specific institution of the art school.

[6] This is always the case from the perspective of the directors, teachers or mentors and staff members, but in some cases students also experience it, being involved in decision making and in negotiation processes. In the case of DAS Theatre—the one I can refer to more closely—this mostly happens when some curriculum elements are to be designed by the students as a group. What is called the "Contextual", for example, is a participants-curated course or educational project, allowing participants to shape an environment for mutual learning themselves. Contextual projects can take any form relevant to the topic, theme, methodology or question that has been chosen and as a learning experience. An essential part of the Contextual is the decision-making process towards making a final proposal that is supported by the whole group. Together with a curated curriculum that is never designed in detail at the start of the year, so to keep room for the unexpected and, more precisely, to respond to what happens within the students community, this makes a space for students to (have to) make decisions, to be confronted with their own (conflicting) agendas and with group dynamics, and in the end to embrace disagreement and make effective negotiations in order to design and carry significant process.

[7] See among others Kunst (2014) and Han (2015).

[8] Among the attempts that DAS Theatre is making to connect to the socio-political conversation in Amsterdam, is the thematic block programme Broadcasting from Babylon mentored by Amal Alhaag and Maria Guggenbichler in January-March 2019. The block proposed to approach a curricula element of DAS Theatre as a public programme open to everybody in all its part, and took place in various locations within the city of Amsterdam, and particularly in independent, activist and/or artistic spaces where the current discourse around inclusivity is being built, and where practices are experimented and shared, to engage with the issues of race, colour and gender in a multicultural city that only recently started dealing with some aspect of its history and cultural, and in particular with its colonial past and, to a certain extent, present.

[9] An interesting example is the statement published by Ogutu Muraya on Facebook in July 2019. The Kenyan author and theatre maker recently decided, after several years spent in Europe after studying in Amsterdam, to move back to Kenya. His gesture is motivated in his public statement by a strong political stand:

> It became difficult, a real challenge for me to convince myself to go through with this periodic process of justifying my existence in order to gain temporary approval from a system that is undeniably discriminatory. A system whose biases and filters disproportionately affect people of colour. I know this decision has consequences for my work and mobility as an artist and person. I will learn to accept the price I have to pay. To reference a different image - it is absurd to always be put in a position where at regular intervals you have to wave your hands shouting - love me, love me - can't you see I am likable and desirable and loyal and faithful to your ways of being. (Muraya 2019)

10 The image of the holes is inspired by Sarah Vanhee's intervention at the symposium *The Fantastic Institution* about the art institution as a hole in the ground (Vanhee 2017).

11 The definition of "means with no end" comes from Agamben (1996). Many thinkers have been writing about the political potential of purposeless acts: among others, see Arendt (1958). About the relation between art and the unknown, see also the writings of Rebecca Solnit and in particular Solnit (2005).

12 I am using the term real with reference to the thought of Jacques Lacan, see in particular Lacan (1973).

13 See among others Schneider (2011) and Piazza (2018).

14 See among others Haraway (2016) and Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015).

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Biography

Silvia Bottiroli, PhD, is a curator, researcher, organizer and educator in the field of performing arts. Since 2018 she is the artistic director of DAS Theatre in Amsterdam. Between 2012 and 2016 she directed Santarcangelo Festival and in 2018 curated the programme 'The May Events' for KunstenFestivalDesArts in Brussels and Vooruit in Ghent. She is interested in the intersections between theoretical research, curatorial practices and education. In these fields she has written numerous articles, focusing in particular on the politics of performativity and spectatorship. She has (co)curated artistic, discursive and educational platforms, collaborating among others with Aleppo, in Brussels Homo Novus Festival in Riga, School of Visual Theatre in Jerusalem and Gent University. Since 2011 she teaches Methodology, Critique and Research in the Arts at Bocconi University in Milan.

FROM THE OPIUM OF THE MASSES TO ACID COMMUNISM: ON THE DIALECTICS OF CRITIQUE AND INTOXICATION

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Narcotic intoxication, in which the euphoric suspension of the self is expiated by deathlike sleep, is one of the oldest social transactions mediating between self-preservation and self-annihilation, an attempt by the self to survive itself. The fear of losing the self, and suspending with it the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment.

Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002, 26)

Introduction

There is a powerful and dominant tradition in western thought, reaching its peak in the age of enlightenment, that considers critique and intoxication as opposing forces.[1] Whoever is critical, is rational and 'sober', and whenever one is intoxicated, be it by love or other drugs, critical capacities tend to give way. On the other hand, Pliny the Elder already noted that there is 'wisdom in wine', and he is just one amongst an alternative, perhaps less powerful but equally persistent, strand of thought arguing that there is in fact a deeper, more profound enlightenment to be found in a state of intoxication. In this article I want to further investigate this tension between the concepts of critique and intoxication. Taking the German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin as my principle guide, I want to analyze the dialectics of critique and intoxication, and explore the possibilities of a critical intoxication, and/or an intoxicated critique. What would be the aesthetic and socio-political implications for such juxtaposition for both of these categories?

To do this, I will start by 1) analyzing the tension between (the concepts of) critique and intoxication in further detail, next I will 2) discuss Benjamin's concept of 'profane illumination' and his dialectical approach to this tension. I will continue 3) by focusing on the political implications of this concept on the basis of Jeremy Gilbert, and next 4) explore the possibility of a 'critical mass' by discussing Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, specifically looking at the latter's concept of 'common sense'. I will conclude 5) with some reflections on the notion of Acid Communism by the late cultural critic Mark Fisher, which I consider as a promising attempt to bring critique, intoxication, and revolutionary politics in line with each other.

1. Tension between critique and intoxication

So, what exactly is the tension I am talking about? We can go as go back as far as Homer's *Odyssey* to find the *urtext* of this mode of thought. Odysseus, who as Horkheimer and Adorno already argued in many ways epitomizes critical and rational thinking, has to challenge and fight intoxicating forces several times on his journey home. The first time is on the island of the Lotus-eaters, who eat nothing but the intoxicating flowers of the Lotus-plant, and as a result are in a continuous state of blissful lethargy. When some men of Odysseus' crew eat from the Lotus, they forget about their mission and have to be dragged back to the ship by force:

> They […] went about among the Lotus-eaters, who did them no hurt, but gave them to eat of the lotus, which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return; nevertheless, though they wept bitterly I forced them back to the ships and made them fast under the benches. (Homer 1999, book IX)

Another famous scene is when Odysseus' crew turns into pigs on the island of the sorceress Circe. Although here too, it concerns a specific toxic, namely poisoned wine, this scene obviously symbolizes first and foremost the intoxication caused by sexual arousal, with the traditional gender-stereotype of the irrational woman seducing the rational and goal-oriented man, and turning him into a mindless animal. Finally, and perhaps most famous, is the episode with the Sirens, wherein Odysseus lets himself be tied to the mast in order to listen to their otherwise destructive song. Although the Sirens too are female, the true seduction here is of course the song itself, in other words the idea of the intoxication of art, which is considered dangerous for man's critical capacities. Time and again, Odysseus fights intoxicating forces using his critical mind, sometimes even using these forces to his own benefit (such as the scene in which he liquors up the Cyclops).

Of this critical attitude towards intoxication we can find numerous examples in the history of western thought, from Plato's rejection of irrational art and the aesthetic experience as a form of madness in both *Ion* and the *Republic*, to Karl Marx's characterization of religion as 'opium of the masses'. Even those sympathetic to intoxication, like the French poet Charles Baudelaire in his

Artificial Paradises, writes that hashish "like all solitary pleasures, renders the individual useless to his fellow man, and society superfluous to the individual" (Baudelaire 1998, 74).

The final example of Odysseus is also telling because it shows us why intoxication would be harmful to critical thinking: it lacks the very distance required of critique. Indeed, whoever is critical puts himself at a distance. The very word *critique* comes from the Greek *krino* (κρῑ́νω), to separate, divide and distinguish, or to judge and decide. For Kant, critical judgment was precisely that, to separate, and hence put a distance between right and wrong, sense and nonsense, between beauty and ugliness, or between what can be known and what cannot be known. In the German *ur-teilen* (judging, deciding) there still resounds the separation of things, putting them apart (*teilen*). Odysseus also puts things apart: he places himself at safe distance from the threat of the Sirens, thus restraining himself and withholding himself from the object of his desire. After all, Odysseus survives because he is tied to the mast, and because the ears of his oarsmen are filled with wax so that they cannot hear his desperate pleas to untie him, or turn the ship towards the island. His survival, in other words, is possible because of his 'cunning' (the way Homer characterizes Odysseus throughout the *Odyssey*). His critical, rational self outsmarts his intoxicated self.

This image of Odysseus as the critical subject who is, however, also tied to the mast can also explain why, the other way around, there is a tradition of thinking that values intoxication precisely at the expense of critique. The distance that characterizes critique is then rejected, and opposed to the immersion, nearness, participation and affirmation that characterizes the intoxicated state. We can recognize this in Nietzsche's attempts to overcome the tradition of western thought, starting with Plato and dominant until Kant. The latter, Kant, the critical thinker *par excellence*, he called in a rant in the *Antichrist*, "a nihilist, with his bowels of Christian dogmatism" because he "regarded pleasure as an *objection*". "This is the very recipe for decadence", Nietzsche continues, "and no less for idiocy… Kant became an idiot" (Nietzsche 2006, aphorism 11). Philosophers up until Kant had divided the world into the sensuous and ephemeral world and an eternal, transcendent world that is more real, more true. This, after all, allowed the critical mind *not* to participate, *not* to be involved in the world, in the flesh, in the Dionysian ecstasy, to become member of a priestly caste that only judges, and thereby, in Nietzsche's view, becomes the ultimate enemy of life itself. The priestly caste, as he explains in *Genealogy of Morals*, praises what is weak and suffering, while deeming happiness, joy and strength sinful. In Nietzsche's view, this is the ultimate form of decadence, against which he mobilizes an entire counter-tradition that opposes critique with vitality and life-affirmation. According to him, we should play and dance, we should consider reality and our existence as something exciting and joyful. In other words: we should be drunk with life itself.

There is a clear resonance of this counter-critical tradition in contemporary philosophical and artistic critiques of critique, such as the one by Alain Badiou, although surely not a vitalist, who rejected the critical Kantian tradition in favor of affirmation and being 'true to the Event' (Badiou 1999); or by Bruno Latour who in a seminal article argued that 'critique has run out of steam' (Latour 2004); or in Derrida's deconstruction, which, as Bernard Stiegler notes, "claims that the nucleus of criticism shatters because it equates critical possibility with absolute autonomy, thereby excluding the possibility of a relational criticism" (Stiegler 2013, 44). We recognize it, finally, in

certain artistic practices such as community and participatory art, which as Claire Bishop has argued are often based on a negative view of 'spectatorship', of the one who merely watches or comments but remains uninvolved (Bishop 2012). Although there are of course great differences between these thinkers and arguments, what connects them is the rejection of the 'outsider' perspective and detached attitude of the critic, which is contrasted to an immersive, involved and engaged attitude.

To summarize: from the perspective of critique, intoxication is dangerous, maddening, irrational, and barbaric; from the perspective of intoxication, critique is detached, uninvolved, impotent, and life-negating. Now obviously, this is not simply a question of either/or, and indeed throughout western history intoxication has accompanied critical rationality as its bad consciousness, or as, in Horkheimer and Adorno's words quoted in the epitaph, "an attempt by the self to survive itself" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 26). It is precisely this interplay of critique and intoxication that we will explore in the following sections.

2. Profane Illumination

Perhaps the interplay of critique and intoxication reached its culmination, or its most explicit expression, in the nineteenth-century, at least in the popular imagination: each Dr. Jekyll must have its Mr. Hyde, the cunning mind of Sherlock Holmes is also addicted to cocaine, and Baudelaire, who warned for artificial paradises, also advised us to "always be drunk".

> Be drunk always. Nothing else matters; there are no other subjects. Not to feel the grim weight of Time breaking your backs and bending you double, you must get drunk and stay drunk. But drunk on what? Wine, poetry, virtue – the choice is yours. Just be drunk. (Baudelaire 2010, 73)

This brings us to the next question: are intoxication and critique just two souls in the chest of western thought, or is it possible to somehow reconcile the two, bring them together? For a possible answer I will turn to the philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin, who indeed clearly possessed these two souls: on the one hand he had the ambition to become the 'foremost critic' of Germany (Benjamin 1994, 359), and on the other hand he was also very interested in the phenomenon of intoxication. In a series of experiments, he used hashish and documented his thoughts and utterances, or let them be documented by others, the so-called *Hashish Protocols*. The results of these intoxicated experiments themselves were, moreover, ambiguous, in Benjamin's view. On the one hand, we can read him feeling fully at one with his body, even moving to music (which to a German bourgeois intellectual from an upper-middleclass milieu came as quite a shock). He writes about the "loosening of the I", and the unique time-space experience that makes "for anyone who has taken hashish, Versailles […] not too large, nor eternity too long" (Benjamin 1999a, 390). On the other hand, he also writes about "the unpleasant feeling of wanting simultaneously to be alone and to be with others":

> You have the feeling of needing to be alone, so as to give yourself over in deeper peace of mind to this ambiguous wink from Nirvana; and at the same time, you need the presence of others, like gently shifting relief-figures on the plinth of your own throne. (Benjamin 1999a, 86)

For Benjamin, intoxication was never an end in itself. Rather, what interested him was experience; indeed, his entire philosophy can be seen—much like Kant's for that matter—as a theory of the conditions of experience. Unlike Kant, however, Benjamin considered these conditions of experience to be profoundly historical. In his view the nineteenth century had witnessed a sudden transition from a structure of experience based on tradition and practice to one that was isolated and shock-like, from *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis*. The world became disenchanted, our experience alienated. Remnants of older forms of experience are still to be found in aesthetic experiences, such as Baudelaire's poetic expressions of what he calls *correspondances*,[2] or Marcel Proust's recollection of childhood experiences after eating the *madeleine* cake. These are well-known examples; but what they signify for Benjamin is precisely a relation of interdependence and reciprocity between world and man, between subject and object; what Benjamin called *mimesis* and what more recently the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa called *Resonanz* (Rosa 2016). In our modern society, however, the world has become silent. Throughout his oeuvre, Benjamin mentions several explanations for this, from the emergence of a scientific-rational worldview (what Horkheimer and Adorno later called instrumental reason) to the alienation caused by industrialization and urbanization.

Benjamin did not want to be nostalgic for an earlier time; rather the challenge was to 'redeem' and transform earlier modes of experience. For Benjamin, intoxication was the learning school for an alternative mode of experience, which in his essay on surrealism he called "profane illumination."

> But the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson. (Benjamin 1999a, 209)

Or later:

> the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic) as the profane illumination of thinking will teach us about the hashish trance. The reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the flaneur, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic. And more profane. (216)

What Benjamin is after in the essay on surrealism, and what he attempts with the notion of profane illumination, is no less than a *dialectics of intoxication*. He admires greatly the way the surrealists found intoxication in the profane—in old-fashioned or exotic objects, in everyday cityscapes, in word-play—he admired their radical understanding of freedom, as not merely political but also spiritual, mental and sexual liberation, and he fully condoned their attempt "to win the energies of

intoxication for the revolution" (Benjamin 1999a, 2015). Still, eventually they did not succeed in this, and in Benjamin's view, their failure had two reasons. First, in his view the surrealists remained in a dream-world, while the actual goal was, in his view, to wake up. On the *Arcades Project* he writes:

> Delimitation of the tendency of this project with respect to Aragon: whereas Aragon persists within the realm of dream, here the concern is to find the constellation of awakening. (Benjamin 1999b, 458)

Again, for Benjamin intoxication is no end in itself, but rather a learning school for a different mode of experience which is thoroughly materialist, not a return to the higher realms of the mind but rather, the reverse, a return to materiality, to the physical body, and a farewell of the abstractions of the mind.

Moreover, Benjamin's problem with the surrealist dream, as well as with synthetic intoxication, is that it remains a thoroughly *individual* experience, just like the *correspondances* of Baudelaire, or the childhood recollection of Proust. They may be remnants of an earlier mode, but on the individual level. Indeed, if the point is to "win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" we have to think of experience in a collective way.

3. The intoxicating crowd

This brings us to the next question, concerning the political implications of the dialectic of intoxication. Up until now I have not discussed one crucial source of intoxication, which is the collective. In his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin writes how the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the modern metropolis, and therewith of the big city masses. He quotes the famous poem *À une passante* in which the poet catches a glimpse of a woman, falls in love, only to lose sight of her immediately because they get pushed into opposite directions by the crowd: he calls this 'love at last sight', as the poet realizes that the chances of a second encounter in the metropolis are close to zero. Benjamin writes: "The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for people who have been abandoned" (Benjamin 2003, 31).

Considering the opposition between critique and intoxication that we started with, one can understand how the crowd can be seen as a narcotic or opiate, and indeed has been considered as such in a dominant strand of social psychology and philosophy. From the perspective of the critical individual, a mass can be a grey, anonymous, and dangerous entity, threatening his very existence, by either destroying him or, as The Borg in Star Trek used to say, assimilating him. Thinkers who reflected on the horrors of twentieth-century totalitarianism were rightfully suspicious of mass movements. Indeed, as Theodor W. Adorno writes in his essay 'Critique', "whoever criticizes violates the taboo of unity" (Adorno 2005, 283). On the other hand, everyone who has ever been in a crowd knows that being part of it can also be joyous, exhilarating, unexpected, stimulating; from the perspective of the crowd the critical individual can also be considered a passive bystander. Moreover, as Fredric Jameson has argued, the "'Enlightenment'-

type critiques and 'demystification' of belief and committed ideology" has served to clear the ground for capitalism's "unobstructed planning and 'development'" (Jameson 2007, 43).

In order to get out of this deadlock we require a different conception of masses, collectives, or communities. In his book *Common Ground* (2014), Jeremy Gilbert discusses the 'Leviathan Logic' that has been dominant in the modern understanding of collectives, which runs from Hobbes onwards, and later can be found in writings of several conservative thinkers, such as Gustave LeBon and Ortega Y Gasset. According to Gilbert, this Leviathan logic is characterized by the following four assumptions:

1) an ontological individualism, i.e. the "implicit belief that social relations are not constitutive of the person and their most fundamental forms of experience" (Gilbert 2014, 31–32).
2) a negative understanding of the social as limiting or constraining the freedom of the individual
3) a vertical understanding of the group, namely as constituted by singular relationships of each individual member with the (real or metaphorical) leader
4) a meta-individualist conception of collectives, which has the properties of and acts like an individual (as illustrated by the famous frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*)

Taken together, these assumptions lead to a conception of the collective as a mere aggregation of individuals, while at the same time considering it as essentially hostile to the individual's autonomy. For Gilbert, this logic prevails in contemporary neoliberalism, which takes the individual as "the basic unit of human experience" (Gilbert 2014, 38). It is even strategically deployed when neoliberal politics considers the individual's creativity as the main source of production, and individual responsibility as the legitimization for cutbacks and austerity. Interestingly, however, Gilbert argues that the same Leviathan Logic is in fact present in the left tradition as well, although it is of course valued in an entirely different way, such that the power of the group over the singular individual is indeed legitimized for the higher good. Soviet Communism too, considered the crowd as homogenous and with one will, represented by the party, and this logic still pervades in contemporary left-wing notions of populism of Laclau and Mouffe, where individuals gather under the 'empty signifier' that is 'the people' (Gilbert 2014, 57).

According to Gilbert, the main contemporary political challenge is to conceive of a different understanding of collectives, neither as disorganized rabble nor as totalitarian meta-individual, but rather "as a condition of dynamic multiplicity and complex creativity" (Gilbert 2014, x). This he finds in the concept of the Spinozean 'multitude', which has of course been further elaborated by Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The multitude, in this understanding is:

> a creative collectivity capable of exercising political agency; but [which] is neither composed of individuals nor itself constitutes a meta-individual. It is rather a potentially infinite network of singularities. (98)

The concept of the multitude—also in the work of Hardt and Negri—remains quite vague. It poses, most of all, a challenge, to think of the collective and the individual not as opposing and mutually

excluding forces, but rather to think in terms of a productive and fruitful interrelationship between the two. And, coming back to the issue of intoxication, can we think of a collective that is both powerful and productive, and at the same time critical, self-critical and open for dissenting voices. In other words: what would a 'critical mass' look like?

4. Towards a critical mass?

I want to emphasize that this is not a merely academic issue, but a social and political one. We are living in an era of mass movements and mass protests. Only during the last months, we've witnessed numerous climate marches, women's marches, worker's protests, and uprisings in Chile, Lebanon and Hong Kong. These are movements emerging from the assembly and aggregation of critical individuals, and they in turn raise awareness and a critical attitude amongst the rest of the population. At the same time, we hear critique of such protests: that they are disorganized, uninformed, misdirected, hysterical or irrational. And this is not only critique coming from right-wing or conservative commentators; think of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' critique of 'folk politics', their term for the bad and unproductive romanticization of immediate and direct action at the expense of long-term strategy, the critical study of new ideas, and 'the long march through the institutions' (Srnicek and Williams 2015).

Indeed, we should not step into the pitfall of romanticizing the mass *per se*. Next to all the protests just mentioned, and next to Occupy, Extinction Rebellion and Arab Springs, we have in recent years also witnessed white supremacists marching in Charlottesville, and Polish far-right nationalists, or collectives more difficult to position on either side of the political spectrum such as the yellow vests. Which again raises the question that, if we take the crowd as a form of intoxication, how should we think of its relation to critique, and to critical consciousness? Can we think of a critical intoxication, or an intoxicated critique?

For a hint of an answer, let us turn to Benjamin one last time. In the essay on surrealism, Benjamin concludes in the following way:

> The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organized for it in technology [*Technik*] can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the Communist Manifesto. (Benjamin 1999a, 217–218)

This is a rather enigmatic passage, so we should try to unpack it. Profane illumination, Benjamin says, creates an *image space*, which, if it comes together with the *body space* of the collective, can lead to the revolutionary discharge. What that means, in my view, is that the collective or mass can only become a proper *mass movement* at the moment that it recognizes itself as a collective. In other words: the mass always needs to *perform* itself, and this performance cannot be spontaneous but must be consciously prepared, indeed is a matter of 'technique' (*Technik*). The

'image space', is, in other words, the result of a critical strategy. This calls to mind Friedrich Engels' concept of 'class consciousness' (*Klassenbewusstsein*), though what Benjamin has in mind seems to be slightly different, or at least an addition to this concept; not merely a discursive practice, but also an aesthetic and bodily practice. Indeed, *Technik* here cannot simply be translated as 'technology', as the translators have it; the German word, at least in the way Benjamin uses it, also refers to artistic, or rather aesthetic techniques (Lijster 2017, 92). Referring back to some of the earlier mentioned examples, we can think of the yellow vests, or the umbrellas of the protesters in Hong Kong, or the 'pussy hats' of the participants in the Women's March. Indeed, the very gathering of bodies in the streets, turning into a collective body moving through the streets, already contributes to the self-recognition and thereby empowering of the collective.

However, this self-identification should never be total, if the mass is still to remain critical. Otherwise, we risk relapsing in traditional notions of 'the people' or 'the community', governed by the Leviathan Logic that Gilbert was talking about.[3] In contrast, what we here call 'critical mass' is precisely characterized by the possibility of self-criticism, dissensus, and the potential of transformation. In fact, as Benjamin also noted, the main characteristic of fascism is precisely that it creates a *merely* aesthetic image of the 'people', without changing anything in the relations of production.

For our question concerning a critical intoxication or intoxicated critique, this entails a double movement, wherein our understanding of both critique and intoxication are expanded and adjusted. The notion of critique discussed in the first part, as detached and distanced, needs to be rethought, namely as embodied and contextualized. Following Donna Haraway and other feminist scholars, we should think of critique as emerging from 'situated knowledge' (Haraway 1988). Indeed, critical and rational consciousness has long pretended to be a kind of view from nowhere, but as Haraway remarks, "knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted, and irrational" (Haraway 1988, 587). Critique, then, is always situated, but this does not mean that it necessarily resigns itself to this situation. Michel Foucault famously defined critique as "the art of not being governed like that'" that is not "in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (Foucault 2007, 44). The 'like that' in this phrase is crucial, for it excludes from the outset the very possibility of not being governed *at all*, and therefore radically situates and historicizes critique. For Foucault, critique is not something that was invented by philosophers in the eighteenth century, and does come out of nowhere, but is an *attitude* that exists and has existed everywhere and every time that people revolted against certain (historical and situated) modes of governmentality. Interestingly, Foucault mentions mysticism as one of the earliest forms of this revolt (namely against the authority of the church) in the West, which brings his understanding of critique in close proximity to Benjamin's 'profane illumination': both mobilize the power of *experience* against the rules of law and dogma. And like Benjamin, Foucault underlines the supra-individual side to critique; he talks about critique as "both an individual *and collective* attitude" with the ultimate aim to "get out of one's minority" (Foucault 2007, 67, emphasis mine).

So how does one 'get out of one's minority'? To answer that question, we should again consider critique in its relation to the collective. A good point of departure could be Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'common sense', which he defines as "the diffuse, uncoordinated features of a generic form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment" (Gramsci 1971, 330). While Marx argued that the ideological 'superstructure' emerges naturally from the class that ruled over the means of production, for Gramsci it was less one-dimensional than that. Common sense, for Gramsci, is rather an arena of continuously contested and contesting ideas about what the world is like, and what is considered possible, necessary, realistic, etcetera. Ideological rule does not follow automatically from economic rule, but is rather the outcome of a struggle in which the ruling classes eventually gain hegemony over the definition of reality. Thus, for Gramsci it will not suffice for the suppressed classes to cease the economic means of production; the struggle to create a different hegemonic order, that is to define what is 'common sense', is also fought through cultural, educational and media institutions. Each political struggle, then, has to start with challenging and altering common sense. The way to do this, Gramsci argues, is not to start from scratch, but rather exists in "making 'critical' an already existing activity" (Gramsci 1971, 331). This implies that one starts from values and beliefs already acknowledged by a collective (such as 'freedom', 'equality' or even 'the common' itself), only to slightly shift them into a different direction. Following Gramsci, Christian Höller thus talked about 'uncommon sense', and considered the task of critique twofold: "to acknowledge the un-common element in the common, and to start building a new common on the basis of such un-common elements" (Höller 2015, 107).

On the level of strategy, Gramsci urges his reader:

> To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element. This means working to produce élites of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset. (Gramsci 1971, 340)

Aside from the problematic metaphor, Gramsci's reference to 'elites' may seem to conflict with our concerns here. But although he suggests that "the culmination of this process can be a great individual philosopher" (Ibid.), we should keep in mind that in his view *all people* are potentially and principally philosophers and/or intellectuals, so that this process could indeed result in what I've called a *critical mass*.

Out of the preceding paragraphs an image emerges of a double dialectic, of intoxication and of critique. The first is the dialectic of intoxication we already discussed on the basis of Benjamin's critique of surrealism and his concept of profane illumination: a form of intoxication infused with a collective, and indeed critical element. Conversely, the second dialectic of critique entails the idea that critique should be 'situated', that is embodied, and if you will 'intoxicated', by the crowd, which however cannot mean that it puts itself entirely in the service of it. After all, that would be precisely the unjustified romanticizing of the 'wisdom of crowds', while the very purpose of critique is to acknowledge the uncommon in 'common sense', and to build further on it.

So finally, what would it mean for critique to be intoxicated, or itself be intoxicating. To start with the first, I believe the 'outsider'-perspective or position of the critic is indeed unattainable today, if it ever was possible in the first place. Still, one might think of this position as an as-if position, again as a *performance*: although we know there's no outside view, we might still act as if there is one. In that regard, one might compare philosophical critique with the famous artwork by Pierro Manzoni, of the pedestal of the world: not only does Manzoni make the entire world a ready-made artwork, but he also acts as if his pedestal is the only thing *not* belonging to that world (since a pedestal traditionally was not part of the artwork) (Lijster 2016). Only by imagining such a place beyond the world, such an imaginative place, one could start thinking of a different world, and indeed argue that in fact there are alternatives. This seems to contrast with the idea of working with and through the common sense; but what I have in mind is not some otherworldly utopia, but rather the simple act of imagining the world different than it is—moving from TINA (There Is No Alternative) to TAMARA (There Are Many And Real Alternatives). This is precisely what the hegemonic struggle over the creation a new 'common sense' is all about, and this struggle, as Gramsci already argued, does not and cannot only take place on the streets, but should also take place in schools, universities, media, and institutions.

Figure 1. Piero Manzoni, Socle du Monde *(1961). HEART, Herning Museum of Contemporary Art. Photograph: Ole Bagger*

On the other hand, this new common sense can only be built by questioning the current common sense. Thus understood, critique can indeed be seen as a 'toxin' injected in the body of the common, leading to an altered state of mind of the collective. This then, might precisely be what an intoxicated and intoxicating critique might look like: intoxicated by the collective and common will for change, critique needs to take a stance, to position, commit and engage itself. Thus, by starting to build a new common sense and by inventing new futures, it can intoxicate future generations with the belief that another world is possible.

5. Postscript on Acid Communism

Undoubtedly, the most damaging and dangerous toxic in our contemporary world is capitalism itself, which is harming and killing people across the globe, poisoning our minds, and is destroying the very planet we are living on. Indeed, as Slavoj Žižek notes, "the threat is that we will be reduced to abstract subjects devoid of all substantial content, dispossessed of our symbolic substance, our genetic base heavily manipulated, vegetating in an unlivable environment" (Žižek 2009, 92). In this situation, critique is a vital antidote, which is to be injected into the common sense. Or perhaps we should, following Bernard Stiegler, consider it as a *pharmakon*, namely something that can be both a remedy and a toxin (Stiegler 2013). After all, critique can also have an unforeseen negative effect, as was for instance argued by Boltanksi and Chiapello who showed how the 'new spirit of capitalism' emerged from a co-optation of the 'artistic critiques' of the 1960s (demanding more autonomy, flexibility and authenticity) at the expense of 'social critique' (revolving around equality and redistribution) (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). This is precisely what the dialectics of critique and intoxication described above entails: that both critique and intoxication have a subversive *and* a conformist potential. The point and the challenge is to bring them together in such a way that the subversive potential is fully actualized.

In the final texts written before his untimely death, cultural critic Mark Fisher coined the term Acid Communism. Inspired by the 'psychedelic socialism' of his friend Jeremy Gilbert, and returning to the countercultural utopian politics of the 1960s and 1970s, the adjective 'acid' obviously refers to psychedelic drugs. However, Fisher's point was not to romanticize the hippie-generation:

> The concept of acid communism is a provocation and a promise. It is a joke of sorts, but one with very serious purpose. It points to something that, at one point seemed inevitable, but which now appears impossible: the convergence of class consciousness, socialist-feminist consciousness-raising and psychedelic consciousness, the fusion of new social movements with a communist project, an unprecedented aestheticisation of everyday life. (Fisher 2018, 757–758)

Indeed, this promise of Acid Communism is one that has been forgotten, ignored or suppressed ever since. While the hippies themselves turned their backs on society in the course of the 1970s ('socialism in one person', as film maker Adam Curtis once waspishly called it), left politics turned into 'third way' social-democracy, which meant a shaking of ideological feathers and a capitulation to a neoliberal worldview. It led to what Fisher in one of his other seminal texts called 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009), the belief that there is no reasonable alternative to the neoliberal capitalist organization of society.

Acid Communism was Fisher's (unfortunately unfinished and thus not fully worked out) answer to capitalist realism. What would it mean to take serious once again the promises of the 1960s? Obviously, this would entail a head-on attack on neoliberalism. But clearly, acid communism is not merely directed at capitalism, but equally so at the several factions within the left, which today tend to either take in a conservative stance of romanticizing a pre-war or 1950s welfare state model (thereby neglecting the privileging of certain groups within that model) or one-sidedly focuses on

the cultural battle of suppressed minorities. The 'acid' in Acid Communism emphasizes that, in order to change things, it will neither suffice to redistribute the planet's resources in a more equal way, nor to grant equal rights within the existing economic system. An entirely different way of living, and hence of thinking, will be necessary, to depart from the individualist consumer model and the dictatorship of productivity that feed of our desires and wreaks havoc on earth.

This is where the subversive sides of critique and intoxication meet. Both of them denaturalize the world: critique by placing us at a distance from the present one, intoxication by immersing us in a different world. Both critique and intoxication point the individual beyond itself, towards something other or larger than itself. This is highly necessary in a world order that primarily addresses us as individuals, either as individual desiring consumers, or responsible and productive laborers. The dialectic of critique and intoxication is thus a first conceptual step towards a further alignment of consciousness-raising in both the spiritual and the social-political sense. Together, they can show, as Gilbert writes, "that the liberation of human consciousness from the norms of capitalist society is a desirable, achievable and pleasurable objective" (Gilbert 2017).

Notes

[1] I want to express my gratitude to the editorial board of *Performance Philosophy* and to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

[2] Such as in the poem with the same name: "Nature is a temple in which living pillars / Sometimes give voice to confused words; / Man passes there through forests of symbols / Which look at him with understanding eyes."

[3] Gilbert (2014) makes the useful distinction between 'community' and 'common'. While the first is "dependent upon a shared, but static and homogeneous identity, and that it is often evoked in order to neutralise any possible criticism of the power relations obtaining *within* 'communities'" (164), the latter "can be understood as that domain of creative potential which is constituted by, and constitutive of, sociality as such" (167). He continues: "In fact we might suggest that the common emerges precisely at the point where the preindividual becomes the transindividual, where the potentiality inherent in the sociality of social relations becomes the real creative potential of those relations as they are enacted and actualised in the present" (167).

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Biography

Thijs Lijster is assistant professor of philosophy of art and culture at the University of Groningen, and postdoc at the Culture Commons Quest Office of the University of Antwerp. He published *Benjamin and Adorno on Art and Art Criticism. Critique of Art* (2017), was editor of *The Future of the New. Artistic Innovation in Times of Social Acceleration* (2018) and co-edited *Spaces for Criticism. Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses* (2015). He also published several Dutch-language books and is a regular contributor to Dutch newspapers and periodicals.

ROOTED HAUNTOLOGY LAB:
ATTEMPTS AT VEGETAL CURATION

INGRID VRANKEN

We live in extractivist times. The Western way of living is based on taking and consuming without providing the elements for regeneration. Alberto Acosta gives as the most comprehensible definition of extractivism, "those activities which remove large quantities of natural resources that are not processed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export. Extractivism is not limited to minerals or oil. Extractivism is also present in farming, forestry and even fishing;" "a mechanism of colonial and neocolonial plunder and appropriation" (2013, 62–63). We are burning our way through fossil fuels, primary resources and humans. We are taking from the earth at a speed which does not allow for regeneration, with the well-known dramatic destructive consequences. As a curator I realize that the Western (performing) arts world is no exception to this way of functioning. Artists are making work that critiques neo-liberal capitalism, and institutions organise festivals on topics such as climate change, however often the politics, issues and utopias that are brought to the stage are not reflected in the conditions and context in which work is created and presented. Artists are working in increasingly precarious circumstances. Many of them feel that the financial and other stresses they are under are in contrast with the perceived wealth and stability of arts institutions, and these institutions are not sufficiently redistributing their resources towards a diverse group of artists. This growing gap in the arts field risks to leave the field divided and weak. In the past years, multiple stories of power abuse have come to light partly thanks to the power of the #MeToo movement, while the rates of burn-out within the art field keep increasing (De Meyer, 2017). On an ecological level, there is still very little awareness of the materials we use to produce our art, let alone a mature, in-depth discussion about the travel habits of our field. Thanks to the efforts of activists such as Fossil Free Culture, we are aware of the

continuous financing of the art world by fossil fuel companies. The art world participates in the neoliberal practices of power abuse where people are being squeezed for their time and talents and thrown aside when exhausted, and in the use of natural resources without taking responsibility for the renewal of the ecosystems and societies they are taken from. There is a gap between the politics performed on stage and those lived backstage, between strong ethical choices made in private lives and the lack thereof in professional lives.

Starting from the conviction that the context in which artistic work is created is defining the work itself, I began to co-work with plants because of their different relation to presence/absence, visibility, time and generosity, in order to shape a curatorial practice that tries to resist the (self-)exploitation of human and other-than-human resources. For this I needed to reconsider long-established hierarchies and practices through shaping relations and ethics differently. I turned towards plants and ghosts as my teachers and allies who could point me towards strategies of being-with, generosity and sympoiesis (Dempster 1995). *Rooted Hauntology Lab*, as an artistic-curatorial project, is both the result and ongoing practical playground for this experimentation. The Lab was created two years ago within the context of my Master's Studies at DAStheater in Amsterdam. The lab has currently produced two lecture performances in collaboration with different artists, workshops, writings, artist residencies and a séance as a public gathering. It is an ongoing project that, up until now, has been realized with minimal financial, material and institutional means. It is undeniable that the context of the Master's studies has strongly shaped the first iterations of the Lab, and as it will travel through collaborations with other organisations and institutions in the coming time, new insights will be gained and the practices of the lab will be further developed. This paper describes these personal attempts so far.

Rooting

I am fascinated by plants, these beings who have developed such diverse and successful ways of being on this planet, so different from humans. Plants are highly collaborative and generous, as research showed, both within their own species as well as through a multitude of collaborations with fungi, insects, and mammals (among others, see Simard 2013; Wohlleben 2015; Bieman and Tavarres 2014). How could I learn from plants? How could the knowledge of plants inform our workday, our collaborations, our organizations? What general plant strategies can we notice, and which specific plants can we call to our aid and provide with space to act? After some early explorations that involved taking audiences into the forest, it became clear that I needed to find a different strategy to engage with plants in a way that could truly challenge the automatic, anthropocentric and romanticised associations around working with plants. I was searching for a stronger uncanny and uncomfortable element, which could create a more powerful gesture towards the artistic institutional context and could also speak to the extractivist practices the project was trying to address. This brought me to the decision to work with potted plants, and mainly exotic species that are currently considered "trendy." Plants in pots appeared to me as a perfect illustration of the absurd perversion of our current societal and cultural state. The potted plant is to many a mere consumer object, in the worst case they are considered disposable. The

aesthetics of these plants are seen through the lens of fashion and trends. Witness of this are the countless monsteras and money trees that can be found on Instagram as well as in the garden centres. Their individual physical characteristics get homogenized and they are marketed on the bases of properties that are deemed "good" (read: a commodity) for the human consumer, such as their air-purifying qualities, or the fact that some of them do not need to be watered that often.

These exotic species are often connected to colonial pasts (Schiebinger 2007) and practices of selection and genetic modification. But the haunting that envelops the potted plant becomes even more apparent when we think of how plants sustain themselves and their relations. Research has shown that plants have intricate and lively systems of exchange and communication that for a large part happen through the root-system and mycorrhizal networks (among others, see Simard 2013, 2018). Through this fine network of fungal threads in the soil that intertwines with the roots of trees and plants, they exchange nutrients and information. In the pot, the plant is completely dependent on the care of their human "owner." They cannot grow in search of water and minerals as they would do outside of pots. In the pot, the plants are completely cut-off from their possibilities of communication, community, interaction, and support. The plants become prisoners. They are stripped of the possibility to care for themselves and each other. By acquiring and working with plants in pots I am obliged to acknowledge this perverse dynamic between us from the start. There is no innocence in our co-working. I am complicit in their mis/displacement and will have to find ways to deal with the innate oppressive nature of our relationship.

A recipe for infiltration by vegetal ghosts / Step 1

Rooted Hauntology Lab invites you to execute a recipe, developed in collaboration with Sepideh Ardalani, as an attempt to contaminate the institutional time of schedules and five-year funding plans, the human time, the time of labour, the unnoticed time. This is a recipe for a layered, more-than-human time. It will help us learn from plant-allies and allow us to dream, giving space to ghosts and non-extractivist future visions. Depending on the dosage the recipe can be a medicine, a poison, a placebo.

For our recipe we invoke 4 particular co-workers, or ghosts as you wish: Evening civil twilight, Stinging Nettle, Mugworth and Daisy. To execute the recipe gather the needed co-workers and a small paper or textile bag. The vegetal ghosts can be freshly picked or dried. They can be foraged or store bought.

We invoke evening civil twilight!

This is the instant when the geometric centre of the Sun is 6 degrees below the horizon. It occurs in the morning and in the evening. Evening civil twilight is a layered time: the 'civil' in civil twilight points at the light as experienced in the "civilized world," the world of "civilians" or those whose voices can be heard, those who can vote, those "who count." But twilight has many meanings. In German this translates to either "Dämmerung" or "Zwielicht." Zwielicht

can also be used as an adjective to describe someone suspicious. If something "dämmers" you, you are at the threshold of understanding something on a whole new level. This also exists in English: "It dawns on me," and in Dutch, "het begint me te dagen." (Wenner 2019, n.p.)

We invoke civil twilight to bring the dawn of a new understanding of the civil including other-than-human bodies.
We invoke civil twilight to leave behind the Eurocentric, anthropocentric and racist implications of the term civil.
We invoke this potent time of the evening to bring us new understandings of our times.

Ghosts

Thinking plants as ghosts emerged first as a way to counteract the romanticising of plants, but soon proved to be an unmissable tool to rethink relationships both with the human and other-than-human (Hallowell 1960). Hauntology gives us some handles to understand how seeming absences and invisibilities influence our experiences and understandings. I got inspired by Derrida (1994) who coined Hauntology as a term which points at the idea that everything that exists is also constructed through what it is not. Everything is defined by absence. To haunt is to be present through absence. Mark Fisher in his turn pointed me towards the importance of time when thinking about ghosts, proposing that hauntology points at a crack in time: the past and future are continuously influencing, haunting the present (2014, 18). Inspired by these readings I started to consider the relation between the human and the vegetal as ghostly in a variety of ways. Being amongst the plants, the diversity of possible temporal experiences becomes obvious. A plant sometimes takes hours or days to react to an external impulse. A tree grows throughout numerous human generations. I wonder if a cutting from a plant can be thought of as a new plant or as a continuation of the original plant, a moment where linear time branches out. Plants consist of dead parts, living parts and dying parts, often using their own decaying body as nutrients and by doing so bridging the seeming divide between life and death.

Plants in pots are haunting us with the absence of their ecosystem. Their communication systems are present, but inaccessible to us without technological intervention. Their lively internal dynamics remain invisible and inaudible for our senses. Thinking plants as ghosts asks us to add an extra dimension to hauntology and the agency of the virtual (Fisher 2014, 18). We need to branch further outside of no longer and not yet, breaking time and space, opening it up to understand the agency of that which is "unseen" to the human eye (and therefore could be considered "virtual") because it is other-than-human. I am not proposing plants as ghosts in a metaphysical, let alone supernatural, way. I am proposing that plants are ghosts because of their material and physical expression and because of their very material relation to time, life and death. Simultaneously, they are mainly ghosts in the limited and limiting experience of humans, who seem to have developed a "plant blindness" (Wandersee and Schussler 2001) and in doing so have outcasted plants to the realms of invisibility. This understanding of plants as ghosts is not related to folkloric beliefs or shamanistic practices including plant-spirits. In the worst scenarios, this could be an appropriation

and misinterpretation of various Indigenous cultural and medicinal practices. I would also want to stay away from any form of essentializing the plant, by suggesting it has a spirit which can be seen as its "core," its "essence" or most "pure expression of its Self." Thinking plants as ghosts allows me to create a broader and more experiential understanding of *relationality* and the various places plants take within relational frameworks. The figure of the ghost allows us to account for acts and agency that are visible or invisible, present past or future. In a haunted world, *all* relations matter and act.

Anna Tsing points at a similar potential of "seeing" ghosts, however more directed towards their power to counteract forgetting, in the introduction to *The Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*:

> Ghosts point to our forgetting, showing us how living landscapes are imbued with earlier tracks and traces. […] Ghosts remind us that we live in an impossible present – a time of rupture, a world haunted with the threat of extinction. Deep histories tumble in unruly graves that are bulldozed into gardens of Progress. (Tsing et al. 2017, 1:6)

In that sense, the ghosts of plants are diverse and multiple: from the stories they carry because they were gifted by loved ones, to the various complex histories they bring to light, or even to their most invisible gift of oxygen, which connects all that lives. Seeds, for example, are the ghosts of the many forms they could become, dependent on the conditions in which they will be planted. They are the ghost of the flower they once were part of, the ghost of the place they were harvested from, the ghost of the intercontinental travels in colonial pasts that brought their forefathers here, the ghosts of the extinct species that used to carry them across the land, the ghosts of the technological fertilizing methods that will multiply them in the future, the ghosts all of the conditions in which they will never grow. Through exploring plants as ghosts, I wanted to bring all our unseen relations into consciousness, hoping that this would make us able to respond to them and work with them towards other practices and futures, than those which are presented to us. A ghost as full potential and a tool for making change.

Step 2

We invoke the ghost Nettle, Netel, Ortie or Urtica dioica!

As common and abundant plant in Europe, it is often the first plant to appear on an abandoned plot. Their preference for polluted and nitrate rich soils makes them the ideal being to reseed the capitalist ruins of pollution and extraction and make space for new futures. Nettle metabolizes the pollution, which cannot be found back in the picked leaves. Its roots grow very deep and are rhizomatic. Nettles endure and persist. Clothes made from Nettles have traditionally been used to bury the dead. Their antibacterial and anti-fungal properties prevent quick decay of bodies. In that sense, Nettles are also archivers of the past. Their sting is a venom that heals. Nettle is widely used for culinary and medicinal purposes. They are known

as a purifier of the bloodstream and reliever of fatigue, and they are said to help people who are too nice and have difficulties in setting their boundaries wisely.

We invoke Nettle to set our boundaries within the capitalist demands for ever more extraction and production. Both of natural and human resources.

We invoke Nettle to reseed the exhausted space of burn-out and create a new perspective on time.

Take Nettle in your hands, crush the leaves in between your fingers.
Now spit in your hands. Our spit, and the enzymes in it, will allow Nettle to slowly ferment, activating their properties.
Add the mixture of Nettle and spit to your bag.

Being-with

Occupying a studio with the haunted and misplaced potted plants I gathered as my co-workers, I figured that in order to learn from them I had to start off my search by committing to a practice of being-with.

> Being-with involves allowing yourself to be touched by the joys and sorrows of another. To be touched by external circumstances, or as the Dutch so eloquently say, to be '*ontroerd*.' Thrown off-course by the sheer rawness of the moment, by your own inability to make things better, by our fragility, impermanence and mortality. (Kuzmanovic and Gaffney 2018, n.p.)

I want to open myself up to be thrown off-course by my vegetal co-workers and to stick to the ambivalence of our collaboration and what might sprout from that. I start my days in the studio with observing and caring. I attune myself to their presence, to photosynthesis, to the processes that transform CO_2 into oxygen, the slow sucking up of moisture by the roots, the drop of condensation rolling of the leaf. I increasingly do less and less. I slow down and try to observe details with full attention. An observation without judgement, without the desire to get something from the other, a radical noticing. Sometimes it feels as if I fold into the plant, my arms interlaced with their leaves as if I could slip through my own pores to feel the chlorophyll on their surface. They are starting to take over my thoughts. I focus on the silence that now, in between all of these plants, seems much denser. I look for ways to work with the plants: I put on music which is supposed to enhance their growth, I take pictures of details, move them around in the space according to my growing attention to their reactions to the light, I pluck away a dead leaf, or I speak to them. I am a West-European woman who is talking to plants, who expects them to answer her questions.

It is hard to collaborate with beings that seem so quiet to my limited human senses. I feel how loud and present I am and how I continuously try to control the situation through interpretation. Despite the fact that I talk a lot, I have very little to say. In my attempt to communicate, every observation

becomes wildly important. A leaf that folds or falls, the speed at which water is being absorbed. By myself, I have no tools to adequately comprehend the state of the plants. Does something like happiness exist for them? Is this an ambition I can hold for them? I catch myself in these melancholic, romantic and anthropomorphic thoughts, betraying my own research. A friend sends me an e-mail with a poem by Wisława Szymborska titled "The silence of plants," which captures my reflections perfectly.

> But how does someone answer questions
> which have never been posed,
> and when, on top of that
> the one who would answer
> is such an utter nobody to you?
>
> Undergrowth, shrubbery,
> meadows, and rushes...
> everything I say to you is a monologue,
> and it is not you who's listening.
>
> A conversation with you is necessary
> and impossible,
> urgent in a hurried life
> and postponed for never.

<div align="center">From Wisława Szymborska, 'The Silence of Plants' (1999, 269)</div>

The time together with my co-workers have made me overly attentive to the plants everywhere around me. Some majestic, others in a pitiful state. I develop the habit of watering dried-out plants wherever I go. I have the impression the plants are screaming at me from all sides. This has made me think how their seeming silence is an invitation to develop attitudes of listening. Listening is not passive, it is an action, engaged and committed. Listening requires patience, even if we don't fully understand right away what we are listening to and what for; it requires a suspension of one's own desires to dominate or push the other towards what they "should be" doing, thinking or saying. Listening is done with the whole body. Listening means "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016).

Being-with other humans

After almost a year of practicing co-working with plants on my own, the step was taken to broaden the practice of being-with to other humans. Three artists, Špela Petrič, Vinny Jones and Sepideh Ardalani were invited for a four-week residency within the buildings of DAS Graduate School in Amsterdam. In the selection of the artists, I focused on bringing different knowledges and disciplines around the table and mixing artists who already work with plants and artists who had never worked with plants before. Besides resonating with their artworks and the subjects they work with, I was mainly interested in how these artists were organizing their artistic processes with awareness for their productional context such as: how they work with collaborators, how they

strategize and collaborate with partners, their view on finances, use of materials, planning, the role of administration, etc. I also opted for an all-female group from different generations, since female artists are still systemically underrepresented in the arts field.

Špela Petrič is a well-known name in the bio-arts and critical plant studies field and has been working with plants and plant governance for many years already. I wanted to collaborate with her around the ethical questions that working with plants has raised over all those years, how the actual physical reality of her vegetal collaborators influences her work both aesthetically and productionally, and how or if her collaborating with plants has changed her view on the human in contemporary society. Vinny Jones is a light artist, working with methodologies of sensory scenography. I invited her to extend her research on surveillance, sensory marketing, and how light and space can create subtle behavioural manipulations to the plant-human relationship. Through the interactions with biofeedback from the plants (taking into account the limitations of our technical equipment), we investigated notions of agency, control, care and manipulation. Sepideh Ardalani plays with herbs as ways for her to relate to the vegetal entities whose lives are entangled with ours. Within the context or Rooted Hauntology Lab she worked on how to let humans' sensorial experiences of specific plants speak for themselves, looking for possibilities of bypassing (spoken) language and how it assigns, limits, divides and categorizes these experiences. The invitation extended to Špela, Vinny and Sepideh was to explore what being-with plants could provoke in their artistic practices, and to make an invisible relation visible through co-working with plants. The aim was not to come up with clever new ways of making plant life or plant agency visible through an artwork, but, rather, to question *ways* of working and meeting audiences drawn from the realizations of our co-working with plants.

Within the residencies, being-with meant suspending the desire to come to conclusions or agreements about the problems raised. Being-with plants brings to light the difficulties of power relationships that are always at play both in artworks themselves as well as in collaborations. Approaching plants as ghosts and committing to making the invisible relationalities visible meant that we had to find ways to make the power relations we experienced an explicit part of the work. Within the residency, our relating to plants still mainly happened through the use of plants or the projection of human attributes onto them and their wellbeing, while the experiences of the plants themselves remained absent, unable to be voiced, let alone "understood". In Sepideh's practice of picking, drying, tincturing and ingesting plants, she looked for answers to this relation of unidirectional use. She writes in the program note of the séance:

> In the case of phytofraction, the medicine lies in the imagination of vegetal transgression towards the human. When mutualising the agency to transgress—maybe the healing can be mutualised too. Re-channelling the healing capacity to not flow one-directionally from plant to human but to an interface between the vegetal and human. Maybe drinking an infusion of elder flowers can perform mutual healing? Maybe the potential for transgression acted out from the vegetal towards the human, could possibly help to imagine plant agency with plasticity? (Vranken et al. 2019)

Similarly, Špela questions the relational framing between herself, the plants, and the audience:

> Which one would plants approve of? Science? Paganism? Market economies? Wouldn't a verbal narrative go against my personal experience with plants, one that made me realise precisely the opposite: the semantics of our logos limit the understanding of their syncretic being? (Ibid.)

In Vinny's research, too, it is the human artist who makes choices and attributes values to the information she receives in the form of biofeedback, choosing which data is translated into a specific light or colour. She aims to equalize the hierarchies between humans and plants within her work by equally manipulating both, prompting her to state:

> It is a fascinating idea that light can be designed to elicit specific human responses, such as increased concentration, productivity or creativity. The optimising of these functions is now included in workplace light design, in public space and retail. Light is being used to promote specific behaviours and discourage others. It is not only plants that are being shaped in greenhouses. (Ibid.)

Despite our best intentions of care, the option we are left with is maybe a cautious humility, rather than the certitude of claiming that our acts are caring rather than oppressing. Staying with the uncertainty of the effects of our actions is possibly a first step in shifting the power dynamics that lie between us and the plants and between all of us as collaborators.

The experiences and problems of the residency were opened up to an audience during a 14-hour long "séance" at Zone2Source, an art space focusing on the intersections of art, science and nature in Amstelpark, Amsterdam. The word "séance" hints both at the summoning of ghosts, as well as at the common meaning of the word in French: a session. The term was chosen to emphasize that this was not an event, nor a service or entertainment; it was not created to be consumed. A ghostly séance needs its participants' commitment and conviction, it demands you to be-with every entity in it, even if we don't know what will appear. A séance asks us to suspend any disbelief we might hold. It is playful serious business, creating a ghostly loophole in reality that has the potential to haunt on for a longer time. We extended the invitation to be-with to the audience through proposing different economies of attention: the audience was not presented with "finished" art works ready for consumption, but various ways of entering into dialogue with the research of the Lab and all the entities (present, absent, human, other-than-human) that had been part of that research, including the necessary invisible labour such as cleaning and making food. The notion of time was of great importance: the 14-hour timeline allowed us to stretch the conventional economy and experience of time within an artistic encounter. Presentations, which included sound pieces, lectures, performances, installations and participatory exercises, were either durational or spaced at least two hours apart, leaving ample space for the audience to exchange, take a nap, leaf through the library, make copies of texts or engage with the human and vegetal co-workers. This approach also created the kinds of tensions that come with being-with: some audience members were confused about "what was happening now" or "where the exhibition was." Audience

members were invited to sign a commitment to be-with all entities present, offering people the space to attune to the multitude of things happening, that seemed invisible at first.

As the day went on, more and more audience members appeared to become co-hosts by making time for conversation with newly arriving guests, or by reading together. On a foraging walk in the park, everyone was invited to bring their knowledge of edible plants (or lack thereof). As we were walking through the park, enjoying the green surroundings and focusing in on the plants that would later become part of our collective dinner, we contemplated how our relationship with plants is not self-evident. The park had designated "wild spots" where nettles and wild garlic were "allowed" to take over, but these attempts at "wilderness" were in fact highly curated within the context of a manicured park built for the Floriade in 1972, the biggest international garden architecture exposition. Being in the midst of these plants, enjoying their presence and being attuned to them also made the act of eating into a more conscious confrontation with our day-to-day exchanges with the vegetal: plants are building us on the most basic level, through their deaths they are being transformed into us and we into them. In the act of eating itself, the binary opposition between the human and plant that seems almost unavoidable when using language starts to dissolve.

Step 3

We invoke the ghost Mugworth, Bijvoet, Puju!
Artemisia Vulgaris is considered a protector of woman and forest creatures. For people who farm or garden, they are an enemy since they survive any herbicide you spray at them. The oils of the plant are toxic when taken in, in large amounts over a long period of time. But in small dosages they are considered to assist with dreaming, imagining and visioning. Those who use Mugworth are said to be able to live in several worlds at once.

We invoke Mugworth to expand our gaze to past and future.
We invoke Mugworth to make the invisible visible.
We invoke Mugworth to help us stay with the trouble and live in complexity.
We invoke Mugworth to resist the tyranny of linear time and the constant now.

Take some Mugworth in your hands and warm them up by rubbing your hands together. The warmth will activate the chemicals inside Mugworth, so they become more volatile.
Now inhale the smell for 7 long breaths.
Put Mugworth in your bag and sweep your hands across your forehead to allow the left-over oils of the plants to seep through the skin, into our brains, where they can do their work.

Attuning with generosity

In terms of thinking about the curatorial position in general, I worked with the idea of vegetal generosity. Michael Marder proposes that plants are ontologically generous (Marder 2018, p.22). Generosity is how and what they are; in their act of growing they produce excess, the conditions for both themselves and other entities to thrive. In collaboration with micro-organisms and mycelium, plants have created the foundations for other life on earth to emerge; without plants, no oxygen rich atmosphere for mammals to breathe. I would like to imagine a vegetal generous mode of (performance) curating, producing excess and providing the conditions for both artists and audiences to thrive, to connect and exchange. A practice not only concerned with its own life forms, but making life possible for others—human and other-than-human alike. However, the desire for generosity also brings vulnerability. What can be a generous attitude in the face of possible exploitations? What kinds of generosity can we foster from situations of precarity?

This inspiration from the vegetal generosity translated itself towards the artists by first of all allocating 80% of the budget towards artist fees. Even though in this case we are talking about the very small production budget that was provided by the graduate school, this was symbolically of great importance since artists are often left unpaid. Secondly, generosity could be found in how time and attention were distributed during the residencies, while resisting extractivist and precarious practices of offering more time and energy than we could actually give. It became a matter of what we spent our time and attention on: being generous to the process and its questions rather than focusing and putting pressure on the "outcome." Through organizing feedback sessions for each other and sharing references and information, but also collectively sewing the curtains needed for Sepideh's installation.

Within the séance this generosity became an invitation to the audience to approach all elements present, visible and invisible, as a commons. This invitation was also woven into the details of hosting and in the overarching scenography of the space. There was a library consisting of all the books and texts that had made up the research. The various notes and mappings from the whole process were present for people to browse through and use. A copy machine and office supplies made it possible for people to make their own reader. Nothing of the process was hidden, all was offered up to become oxygen or humus. This open source approach was mirrored in the space which had no "backstage" or invisible organisational labour: the chairs, tables and cushions could be moved around by the audience to fit the needs of the different presentations taking place, and cleaning and care tasks were shared. In the program, generosity was present in the brief for the various lectures, making sure they were understandable to the different levels of knowledge and expertise present, and offering time for discussion and collective exercises that could translate the philosophical or scientific concepts presented into everyday life. Sepideh Ardalani was available for audience members to consult for more information on herb practices and the herbal drinks and herb-rooms she had set up. All of these curatorial choices were small gestures aimed at shifting habits of consumption into practices of commoning. The space, the time, the artworks, artists, plants, books, other audience members, etc. became something we collectively benefit from and care for.

Sympoiesis and distributed authorship

Donna Haraway describes sympoiesis as

> a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing [...] earthlings are never alone. That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it. (Haraway 2016, 58)

The invitation to co-work with plants in order to make an invisible relation visible is an attempt at a conscious and specific sympoiesis. Plants make our sympoietic reality, our becoming-with our environment visible and tangible. The plants' living form is a constant interpretation, evaluation and exploration of their surroundings (Marder 2016, 20). Within the residency process, the artistic researches and the séance we attempted to be as conscious and acknowledging as we could towards what was creating (with) us. Through the act of inviting the artists with a very specific question, the creation of a peer space in which the individual artistic practices could take place and the attention for sympoiesis, we could see a different possibility of authorship emerge between us that I would for now describe as a variety of distributed authorship (Ascott 2005, 282). Vinny worked on a light installation, operated by biofeedback from the vegetal co-workers that provided the light environment for the whole duration of the séance. The light frequencies we used varied between those seen as most beneficial for plant health and those considered most beneficial for human well-being. The light installation also communicated with the light coming from outside, since the Glass House in which Zone2Source is operating has three full glass walls opening out to the surrounding park. Sepideh proposed "herb rooms" inside and outside of the space, in which audience members were invited to encounter specific vegetal beings through the different senses of taste, touch, smell, sight. The audience was asked to contemplate the naming of the encounter through the information they got from these sensorial interactions. Špela proposed a meditative exercise followed by a lecture on Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* and guiding us to her conclusion and provocation that in the eyes of the algorithm, we are all plants. We, humans and other-than-humans alike are 'the vegetariat'—a new precariat: raw material to be mined by the algorithm, generously giving away this "excess" of data.

The invited artists proposed three distinct approaches to the question to make something invisible visible; Their autonomous artistic processes were made porous through consciously acknowledging the multiple influences which make a work, in this case in specific the vegetal co-workers and each other. This is something very different than a simple co-authorship or co-creation. Each of the invited artists came with their own autonomous artistic proposal, but their processes were opened up, influenced and contaminated by each other. They all testified afterwards that what they created within the context of Rooted Hauntology Lab was something very different than what they would make otherwise. The curatorial work, then, was not to weave these distinct artworks together into a single narrative, but rather the opposite: to create the

conditions for works to emerge together and speak to each other through their rooting in a common soil. This distributed authorship was further emphasized by mentioning our distinct vegetal co-workers in the credits, as well as writers who have been significant to the project. The presence of the library made the influences and research of the project visible and accessible to all. Also, the audience was encouraged to become an author of the séance, by leaving traces in the space, adding questions and making proposals.

On a more subtle level, the dramaturgy and rhythm of the whole séance was based on the positioning of the sun. In reality the séance had already started the evening before, through the means of a lecture performance sharing a recipe for vegetal infiltration with the audience. By starting off the séance in the late evening before, the night and time of dreams were taken along into the dramaturgy of the whole. The timing of the different interventions was made with the specific location of the sun during the day and the energy it gives or takes in mind. The séance wanted to be more than the sum of its parts; it aimed to be a temporary ecosystem where the different curatorial, artistic and social elements were clearly distinguishable but their relations to each other were also clear and celebrated. Through all of these subtle interventions and experimental practices the séance proposed the audience encounter as an opportunity to create together, to create with those who are recognized as present and with the ghosts. Invisible to the audience, a different kind of writing together was happening on the administrative level. In an attempt to be conscious about relationality within all the aspects of how we were organizing ourselves (and were being organized by what surrounded us of course!) we attempted to make contracts that could describe all of our relations and (temporary) agreements within the process, rather than the contract being a dry description of a financial transaction. Where a normal residency or coproduction contract focuses on the financial and legal obligations towards each other, we started to compile the different human needs and desires that we held for our collaboration, as well as the unsolved issues and the ideas that we did not manage to develop. The contract was continuously adapted and became a trace of the collaboration itself.

Rooted Hauntology Lab, as an ongoing project, is a cautious and humble attempt at rehearsing different ways of relating in a time and place where relating can no longer be claimed as innocent. Rooted Hauntology Lab is bound to fail. These first experiments have also pointed out the blind spots, such as the difficulty to find alternatives to the anthropomorphising of other-than-humans and the lack of ways to deal with the power relations in which we are entangled. Time and time again we would notice there was use of human and other-than-human resources without the certainty of consent, there were expectations placed on each other, there was not enough money or time, there were audience members who might have needed more information or more food, there were plants who died, roots that rotted, soil that dried out, bugs that were squashed, Facebook that was used, a plane that was taken, an intern who was put under pressure. Thinking ourselves, our work, our responsibilities through all the relations is overwhelming and confronting. There is no easy way of navigating the haunted world we find ourselves in. But we may create spaces to exercise our attention to ghostly relations; we may exercise what it means to act on them and to shift how we live and work. For this we may find allies in the vegetal world.

Step 4

We invoke the ghost Daisy, Marjetica, Gänseblümchen!
Bellis Perennis is a well know garden guest of springtime. Historically, Daisy has been commonly known in English as Bruisewort and occasionally Woundwort, revealing that they can help with bruises and close wounds. Timetravel and future prehearsal is not without its dangers.

We invoke Daisy to teach us to cultivate softness, and receive softness as well.
We invoke Daisy to teach us the continuing possibility for joy, even in uncertainty.

Take Daisy and stroke them across your face—very gently. Give them the softness of your skin, and receive the softness of their petals in turn.
When you feel you are ready, add Daisy to your bag.

Close your bag tightly.
Press it against your right temple.
Put it in your agenda or in your laptop bag. Somewhere where you will find them, the next time you enter an institution or you start your work.
Take the time to get to know these vegetal ghosts, know that you have the potential to make space for them, open the door for them to infiltrate, to take over. Allow yourself to be influenced by their potential for change and the creation of other timescales and practices.

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Rooted Hauntology Lab – credits

Rooted Hauntology Lab / Séance #1 is *Vinny Jones, Sepideh Ardelani, Špela Petrič, Bryana Fritz, Ingrid Vranken, Evelien Geerts, Maja Kuzmanovic, Nik Gaffney, Ieva Pranckunaite, Saracenia, Monstera, Mimosa, Nettle, Mugwort, Money tree, Aloë Vera, Calathea, Blue fern, Lepelplant.*

Advised by *Stefanie Wenner and Arthur Kneepkens*

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Biography

Ingrid Vranken completed an MA in Theatre Studies at the University of Antwerp and Freie Universität Berlin as well as a Master in the Arts at DAStheatre in Amsterdam. She works as a dramaturg, producer and curator for multiple artists and arts organizations in Flanders. (a.o. SPIN, David Weber Krebs, Walter Verdin, Maria Lucia Cruz, Rosa Omarsdottir, Luce Goutelle, Helena Dietrich, Bâtard Festival). She is a member of FoAm, a transdisciplinary laboratory at the interstices of art, science, nature and everyday life. Her work focuses on connecting the arts and ecology, not only as a theme of artistic work, but also as a way to transform artistic processes and practices. Her research focusses on new collaborative, curatorial and dramaturgical models, and a wider ecological and post-capitalist transition, that include other-than-humans.

TOXIC CLIMATES: EARTH, PEOPLE, MOVEMENT, MEDIA (TRANSCRIPT AND DRAMATURGY)

MICHAEL HALDRUP ROSKILDE UNIVERSITY
KRISTINE SAMSON ROSKILDE UNIVERSITY
MADELEINE KATE MCGOWAN OTHER STORY, COPENHAGEN

📹 https://vimeo.com/performancephilosophy/toxic-climates

[Nørrebro Station, Copenhagen]

The first scene is set at Nørrebro Station in Copenhagen, an urban everyday setting and a place of mobility in which diverse groups of people pass each other. In this mobile environment, the speaker addresses definitions of citizenship as more than peoples' acts but also how they are being acted upon. This in particular refers to how Nation states increasingly act upon mobile citizens, refugees and the increasing number of urban minorities being discriminated against and made invisible in urban public spaces. While this is the written discourse of the text, the posture of the speaker and her lack of acts and gestures towards the citizens passing by her point to the alienated position of the academic. As the speaker is doubled behind her and then suddenly disappears, an instant of manipulation and interference is articulated, and the scene ends with an off-screen voice, presumably the photographer or director of the film, giving the speaker instructions on to how to exit the scene. Both incidents work to further the sensation of alienation and split between words and acts.

As noted by political theorist Engin Isin, the making of a people consists of historically invented descriptions through which people constitute themselves as acting beings. These descriptions provide the ways of acting and being in the world. They are not only descriptions in which people will act, but also how people will be acted upon. "Today, mobile peoples are a norm rather than an exception" Isin states – and perhaps always so. Taking off from this notion of the mobile peoples, we explore acts of citizenship as a plethora of practices performed beyond and across mental and geographical borders. We wish to regard human life in its own value, not as a face and identity defined by nation states, borders, institutions or disciplines.

[Sjælsmark Deportation Camp, North Zealand]

In the second scene, we encounter the same set up with a speaker situated in front of Sjælsmark, a deportation camp for asylum seekers in north Zealand in Denmark. The observing camera is set on a distance, and the voice of the speaker is a distant murmur competing with the diegetic sounds of the wind and the birds. Despite the distance, the speaker very directly addresses toxic climates as a condition; an effect of the intersectionality of vicious feedback loops between the urbanization crisis, the climate crisis and the migration crisis. The speaker ends by asking how we encounter others who live through the crisis and how we explore with them potentials for emerging and shared sensibilities that affect our own embodied citizenships. He then turns and gazes hesitantly into the entrance of the deportation camp.

Toxic climates are a symptom rather than a cause. A symptom that does not have a single cause. According to mobility theorist Mimi Sheller, the unbreathable atmosphere stems from the systemic and interdependent workings of three vicious feedback loops each reinforcing the other (Sheller 2018 3–9): The Climate Crisis, The Urbanization Crisis, The Migration Crisis. Together these three feedback loops create a condition of "intersectional (im)mobilities" in which the struggle over space and the right to movement becomes central to ethics and politics. Mobility justice is *the* central ethical issue. Desires for cheap and easy travel, urban transport and housing clutters our cities and poisons the air. Desire for oils and resources destroy living conditions and triggers war. The desire for continuous enjoyment of privileges for the people inhabiting urban center regions of current spatio-political hegemony stirs xenophobia and hostility when confronted with an influx of people put on the move by the degradation of livable environments and war. Toxic substances infiltrate earth, people's movement and media. "Mobility justice is not just about transportation, but also about the micro-mobilities at the bodily scale that are inflicted by racial and classed processes,

gendered practices, and the social shaping of disabilities and sexualities. And it is about the extended urban and infrastructural spaces that shape larger macro-mobilities at a planetary scale, such as access to water and food and the circulations of energy through pipelines and cables," as Sheller observes. But knowing the systemic workings of the triple crisis does not guide our action. How do we encounter others who live through this, through current planetary change? How do we explore with them potentials for emerging and shared sensibilities that affect our own embodied citizenships in in these toxic climates.

It is so beautiful!

[Nørrebro Station, Copenhagen]

Back at Nørrebro station we overhear an off-screen conversation between the speaker and the director. They discuss the scenography of the site, the columns and the lively urban environment. "It is so beautiful!", the director proclaims while directing the speaker into the position we now recognize from the first scene. The scene points to the mediated and staged aspects in both academic thinking and mediatized activism in which the aesthetic, scenic and choreographic components perform.

[Sjælsmark Deportation Camp, North Zealand]

Back at Sjælsmark deportation camp, we have now come closer to the speaker, who is placed in front of the fence with the sign saying "Close the gate" in Danish. He performs the text addressing intoxication and the dehumanizing forces of exclusion that is strengthened and spread by media representations. The speaker calls for a contamination of thought with action. While talking about how we could possibly contaminate media representations, the speaker is directed to walk back and forth in front of the camera. He complies, and while he walks back and forth, a similar scene from Nørrebro Station emerges, in which the female speaker is instructed to look to the side. Continuing the talk on toxic climates and the contamination of the similar toxic media representations, the male speaker continues urging listeners to contaminate thought with action; activism with thought. The statement is followed by a long pause, and the director contemplating in a calm voice: "very nice, I think it is a really strong text...I feel I want to do something now."

Planet Earth is toxic. Its atmosphere unbreathable. Its environments intoxicated by the dehumanizing forces of xenophobia, environmental degradation and violence. As its peoples are increasingly on the move to make a worthy living, exclusion borders and conflict is a norm rather than an exception. And – as toxic substances dissipate and spreads through media and circulating representations, they cloud the sight to the human beings in front of us. In the face of the intoxicating and dehumanizing forces at play we need remedies for sobering up rather than intoxication. Remedies for living with contamination rather than altering these states. For Anna Tsing "contamination" can be a catalyst from which future" world-making projects, mutual projects and new directions – may emerge" (2015: 27). But how can we think-act contamination as potential? Contaminate media representations with testimonies from people living the change? Contaminate thought with action; activism with thought.

The capacity of a body

[Nørrebro Station, Copenhagen]

The last scene is set at Nørrebro Station with reflections on the capacities of a body and how it relates to its surroundings and its conditioning factors. While the scene is still directed from the outside of the screen by the directing voice, it is stated that bodies are capable of differentiating themselves from its conditions and that the urban realm constantly transforms according to the expressivity of its various bodies. By this it is suggested that gestures, expressivity and the way we as bodies and citizens relate to one another might open the field of cultural. and political production and transform it from within.

The capacity to extend, to surpass and to multiply pre-given descriptions relates to the body's capacity to affect and to be affected. Through affective relations—whether violent or joyful—the body has a capacity to transform and redirect the power imposed upon it. The body holds the capacity to change the values of a field through sensations and the powers unfolding in the field. However, from a pessimistic point of view, it can also be said to have the opposite consequences: that immanence, and the fact that we are part of the environment and culture we want to change, makes any acts of direct opposition and resistance impossible. Impossible because the body can never escape the definitions and pre-given roles of the field entirely. In relation to the field of urbanism, it is true that urban environments constantly transform according to the expressivity of its various bodies, the different bodies being immanent to the urban field. While urban bodies are capable of differentiating themselves from their conditioning factors, let's say for instance the spatial politics and planning ideals, they can never be regarded autonomous or separate, but is in a constant process of becoming that potentially holds the capacity for transformation. One might argue that change rarely happens beyond micro-perceptions and micro-realizations happening between bodies. However minor, these micro-perceptions and micro-realizations can also be seen as valuable because they operate as a starting point for relationality and affections. They are open

towards the virtual. So what I point to with this is maybe simply that there is an immanent power in suffering that can be redirected from a passive mode of affection into active affections thereby diminishing toxicity and suffering. In relation to surpassing the toxic climates of today, active affections understood as embodied and sensory expressions hold the capacity to empower the body from its passive modes of suffering into its active expressivity. Expressions and gestures that hold the capacity to transform the field from within.

Epilogue

Despite the fact that no direct actions take place in the last two scenes, it is suggested that the mediated and expressive gestures that in the video have been directed from the outside can potentially be redirected towards gestures changing the relations among citizens and environment in the toxic climates of today. While media representation can indeed be spread and further intoxicate our human capacity to act, they might also be directed otherwise to engage with people living the change, to situate and embody academic thought and to ethically relate to subject matters and actions outside of normative and discursive space. While aesthetics, staging and choreographic actions can serve the interests of mediated performances, they also hold the capacity for ethical relations to embodied others.

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Biographies

Michael Haldrup, Professor (WSR) in Visual Culture and Performance Design, Roskilde University. Numerous publications on visual methodologies, mobilities and performance among others the co-authored books *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday* (Routledge 2010) and *Performing Tourist Places* (Ashgate 2003). Recent work includes research on materiality and visual culture as well as cultural institutions and citizenship (see www.ourmuseum.dk). Visiting Scholar at *Centre for Mobilities Research,* Lancaster University, 2007. Currently working on various "speculative" approaches to performance and design including the project on *Queering Mythographies* (with D. Makisimov) consisting of performance interventions relating to the material heritage of antiquity (e. g. "Queering the Museum, Copenhagen, August 2019), speculative explorations of 'dark ecologies' as well as research into acts of citizenship.

Kristine Samson, PhD. Ass. Professor in Visual Culture and Performance Design, Roskilde University. Renowned urbanist and recurrent participant in the public debate on urban planning and transformation. Has written extensively on informal and tactical urbanism, spatially performed citizenship and performative urban cultures. Visiting scholar at Columbia School of Architecture and Planning 2009, and Performative Urbanism, Lab for Spatial, Social, and Scenographic Experimentation, Concordia University, Montreal, 2018. She is engaged in the cross-disciplinary research project, Affects, Interfaces, Events with a subproject on Evental Urbanism and is currently working on ecology, coexistence and 'reparative futures'. Her curatorial work includes several performative events including Fluid Sounds for PSi – Performance Studies International, Copenhagen, 2015.

Madeleine Kate McGowan (DK / IE) Cand. IT, (ITU), BA in Visual Culture (KU) & Performance Design, RU. Lecturer, filmmaker and performance artist. Founder of Other Stor*y* (2015), a prizewinning ongoing documentary project, comprised of short films presenting personal stories in a world of monumental change. Through McGowan's filmwork and performance work, she seeks to open encounters with the more-than-human and the complexities of the climate crisis. She is an active public speaker in several countries and her films and performance work has been widely featured across the world, such as ARoS - Aarhus Kunstmuseum (DK), Kunsthal Charlottenborg (DK), Danish House in Palestine, Nikolaj Kunsthal (DK), BFI - British Film Institute (UK), Oaxaca Filmfest (MEX), HAL Atelierhaus Leipzig (D), Souriyat Centre (Jordan), Nivaagaards Malerisamling (DK), The Royal Danish Theatre and the National Museum of Denmark.

THE PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCE TO KNOWING:
A SPECULATIVE REPORT

PAVLEHEIDLER FREELANCE DANCER, WRITER, AND DANCE SCHOLAR

Reality does not depend on the prior existence of human beings; rather, the point is to understand that 'humans' are themselves natural phenomena.

Karen Barad (2007, 336)

Even within the women's movement, we have had to fight and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our Blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson––that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which is also the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid.

Audre Lorde ([1977] 2017, 3–4)

And I suppose that the saddest thing for me, thinking about the cover version that is Oranges, is that I wrote a story I could live with. The other one was too painful. I could not survive it.

Jeanette Winterson (2012, 6)

the physical

consequence

to knowing,

a

speculative

report

I dance for a living. I have danced in some shape or form since I was born. I've danced before I could walk. This is evidenced by a home-video which pictures me dancing in diapers whilst holding on to the couch because, and you can see this clearly, I can barely stand on my own.

I've earned my first salary dancing at the age of eight. My first job was in the show-dance circuit, I specialised in stage and television. I left this circuit after five years for what I perceived to be a lack of content. The general consent was that what you could do once, you did again, day in and day out, you were compensated and celebrated for your service, and that was that. In other words, that you could do something impressive reliably and on request was probably the reason why you were given another chance. And another. And another. Meanwhile, all the repetition didn't mean that we were encouraged to engage with the form in the fashion of a martial art, or anything like that. The work was earning me money at an age when one is not expected to have access to anything more than a weekly allowance with which to buy a magazine and some gum and yet all I could think of was how cheap earning money in the context I was earning money in made me feel.

At the age of thirteen I left the show-biz circuit and joined the youth dance program at the Zagreb Youth Theatre. I started learning about dance history, started dancing in theatre and dance performances for children and adults; my first role was in the 40-minute-long dance rendition of Mozart's The Magic Flute choreographed by Desanka Virant. Following, I was playing characters and not, I was telling stories and not. I danced in original works and in repertory pieces. At the age of 15, I started training with Studio, Contemporary Dance Company. My first professional gig, later that same year, was in Matjaž Farič's rendition of *The Rite of Spring*. That same Rite of Spring, I was learning, which in 1913 was said to have disturbed the Parisian audiences to the extent that was still worth talking about. That we were working on a historically relevant piece meant the world to me.

Having found access to a continual influx of information, dancing started feeling purposeful again. In comparison to show, art felt investigative, negotiable, radical. In comparison to getting applause every time, mixed reactions felt relevant, asked for my attention, made me think twice about what I was doing: before and after I did it. This kind of investigative approach to working as a dancer made sense to me. It still does.

At the age of seventeen I left my home country because, at the time, there was no higher education for dance and choreography in Croatia. People, professionals and non-professionals alike, asked why it was that I wanted to "go back to school." I didn't know how to respond to that question for I hadn't had the feeling I was "going back." If anything, I was going forwards, I was going north and I was going west, I was leaving home, I was looking for ever more information. I was driven by curiosity, a thirst for knowledge, and a thirst for experiencing.

Dancing has always been the reason I made what other people called bold choices in life. Personally, however, I didn't think much about any of it. I did what I had to do to learn as much as I could about this field I was navigating. I went where information could be found. Dancing being an oral tradition and a practical one, I went to where the people "who knew" were; where they lived, taught, and created. I left Croatia for Austria, where I spent two years studying at the Salzburg

Experimental Academy of Dance. I left Austria for Belgium, where I spent four years studying at the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios. I eventually moved to Sweden, where I still live and work. It is here that I took the Master Program in Fine Arts entitled New Performative Practices. After eight years studying dancing and choreography in prestigious dance schools, I decided that what I was studying was not so much dancing as it was *studying dancing*. This report draws heavily from my experience studying dancing in these schools. I also draw from my experience teaching dancing and working as a dancer in Croatia, Austria, Germany, Belgium, the US, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand since approximately 2005 until today.

Years into traveling, dancing, making dancing, teaching dancing, studying dancing, and writing dancing, years into watching repertory and original work, participating in making of original work and studying of repertory, years into studying the European theatrical dance circuit, of both dance production and dance education, I started noticing patterns. What I thought was a radical art from, this art of embodiment of thought was, I was learning, mostly not radical at all. It was also mostly not studying embodiment, in the sense of the word I will attempt to argue for. For the largest part the art of stage and theatre dancing and making was and is, in fact, an artform of **obedience**.
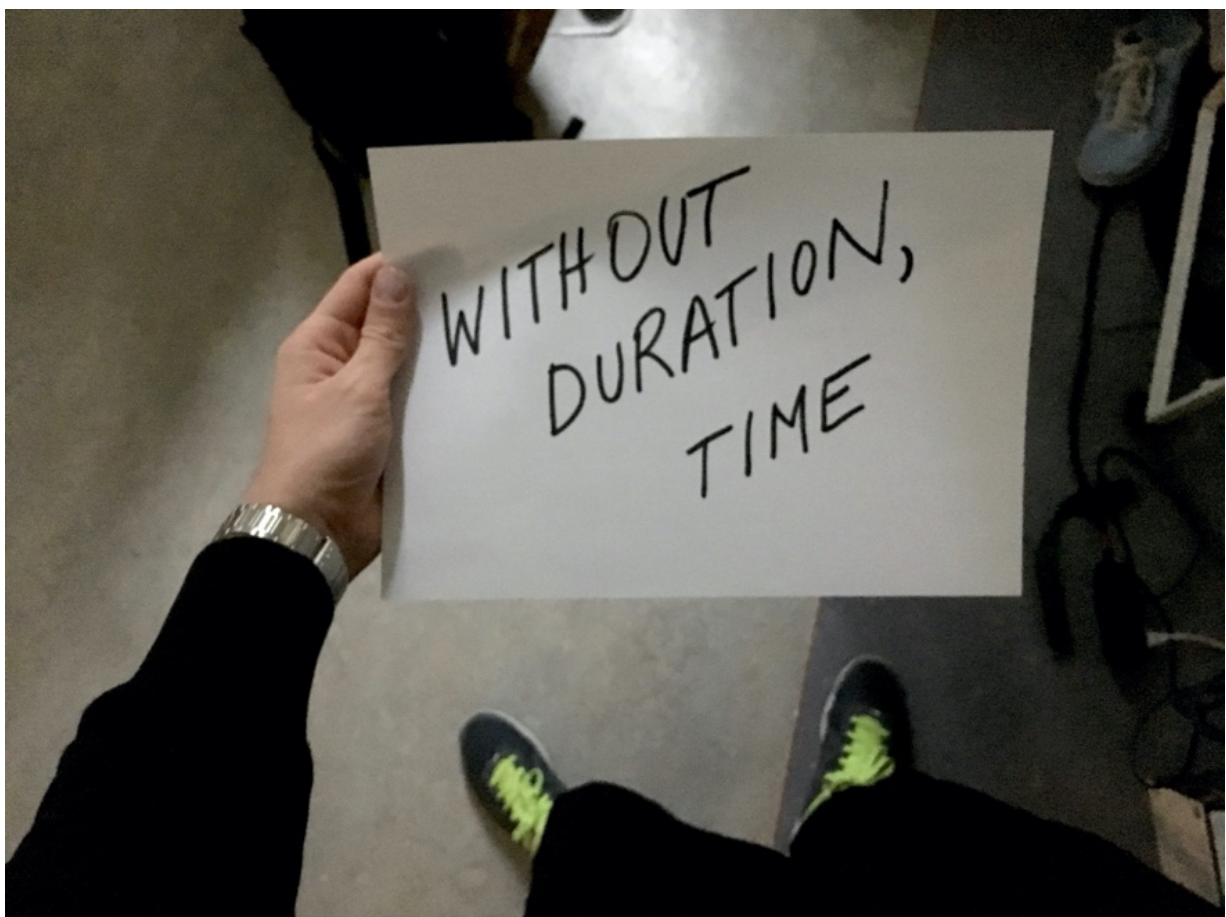
Stockholm, 2017.

When a 19 year old person came to the university I teach at to study dance performance and, upon being asked to share their opinion in front of class, started crying because of how stressed they were––having never before been asked to share their opinion in public––I got distracted from teaching, I stopped the class. I stopped the class because: (1) I had to investigate: could it have been that a dance school taught their students dance at high-school level in 2016 in silence; and (2) I had to make sure this person's personhood got acknowledged and––for once, perhaps––became a priority before all else institutional, social, and politically correct.[1]

We stood together, in front of class, the person and I, hand in hand for minutes on end, until tears transformed into a soft giggle, and until they said––out loud, calmly, and in public––the word: "Soup." Their peers followed in a procession, one by one they took the imagined spotlight to say random words. "Banana." "Shoe." "Airplane." To growing comfort and growing confidence I responded by raising the stakes. Random words were followed by the word "artist," then "I." Then "I am." "I am" was difficult, it raised a lot of questions. "I am?" We waited. Repeated. "I am?" transformed into "I am." and was conquered. And then finally, after a couple of hours we were going to spend dancing, the person who inspired the becoming ritual took the spotlight and said––confidently and loudly, undoubtedly––the statement: "I AM AN ARTIST."

observation

reflection

speculation

reference

experience

document

(n) -ation

Dance programs, by and large, do not prioritise theoretical and critical practices. If theory stands represented in the curriculum, rarely is any time scheduled for reading and writing. Reading and writing, as it were, are meant to be engaged with after hours, in the evenings or during the weekends: i.e., after the dancer has already spent a minimum of 40 hours a week engaged in self-reflective physical labour.

It is questionable, however, if the time for reading and writing is, in fact, considered by those responsible for putting curricula together. Because how do you argue the lack of scheduled time? Either by saying that students, whilst meant to develop a theoretical practice, are not actually meant to be able to do so within the framework of a 40-hour week? Or else by saying that the students are expected to engage a massive professional undertaking as private individuals, or else be expected to fail as professionals?

Meanwhile, most people who teach theory to dancers in my experience are professional academics who do not necessarily know what it's like to be spending the majority of your scheduled time in the dance studio engaging in heavy physical labour. Most people who teach theory to dancers are people who've, in the process of studying theory, studied reading and writing, much in the same way dancers have, in the process of studying dancing, studied dancing: without having to explain what it takes to engage in the act of reading or dancing over an extended period of time, without having to make the practice interesting or accessible to someone who doesn't already have the interest or the access. The practice of reading, as is the practice of dancing, is so discovered to be assumed to be self-evident and is discovered to be assumed to be something a student has already accomplished, so to speak, for how else did they manage to qualify to enter a BA program in the first place? For example. I wonder, however, if the tables were turned, would we expect students of philosophy to be able to dance in the way we expect students of dance to be able to read?

In the context of studio practice in general dancers are mostly working in groups, are mostly learning by imitating (if not the teacher than the [over-romanticised aesthetic] dream) and are, crucially, mostly spoken to. Speaking, in general and coming from a dancer, is widely considered to be inappropriate in the context of a dance class. This is not evidenced only in a teacher's behaviour, which I will not be bringing up as an example because I do not wish to, at present, problematise individual choice making. More importantly, then, I am interested in the fact that the inappropriateness of a dancer to speak in a dance class is evidenced in the general structure of a dance class, the flow of which is based on its uninterrupted ongoingness. Uninterrupted ongoingness is often what makes a class good, and a teacher who is able to maintain the status quo—a guru.

Intra-action.[2]

In that they are spoken to, dancers are given access to information. In that they are rarely asked to speak, their reflective process––assuming that they, indeed, engage in one––remains unwitnessed. I say "assuming that they, indeed, engage in one" not to question dancer's capacities and/or interest in engaging in a reflective process, but rather to point out (1) that dancers are rarely given the opportunity to share their reflective process in public; and (2) that dancers are rarely given the opportunity to spend time reflecting in any documentable way. What you will often see is a teacher speaking to a dancer then immediately shifting attention to another dancer, in which case the first dancer carries off on their own; or else you will see a teacher speaking to a dancer then immediately asking the dancer to demonstrate *in action* that they've processed the information, in which case the dancer has no time to reflect on their own, no time to engage in a

process of trial and error, no time to study between the reception of information and the demonstration of its implementation.

But even if a dancer is given the time to study, what remains is the following assumption: that whenever a dancer demonstrates that they've implemented given information––the teacher will be able to tell. A dance teacher may be able to perceive a dancer's performance as knowledgeable in a specific way, no doubt about it. My point is the following: if there is no dialogue; if the dancer never *speaks*, i.e., reports on their internal process, and if the teacher never explains what of what they've seen, felt, intuited is informing their evaluation, then we not only risk not knowing that the dancer actually engaged in a reflective process (in which case we're risking not acknowledging the dancer's agential efforts), but we also risk not knowing what conclusions the teacher has come to, how they have come to them, and in order to achieve what purpose. We risk not exposing the thinking process in mediums other than the unspoken ones, and so fail to develop a shareable and teachable methodology. In other words, we risk not learning how to engage in a critical study of embodiment, and we risk not learning how to engage in a critical study of performativity––a study of that which is interlinked with yet separate from itself.

The point, you could argue, is, of course, not that we *are risking*, but that we have, in fact, already *risked*. We have already created and embodied the culture of silence within the context of European dance making and teaching.
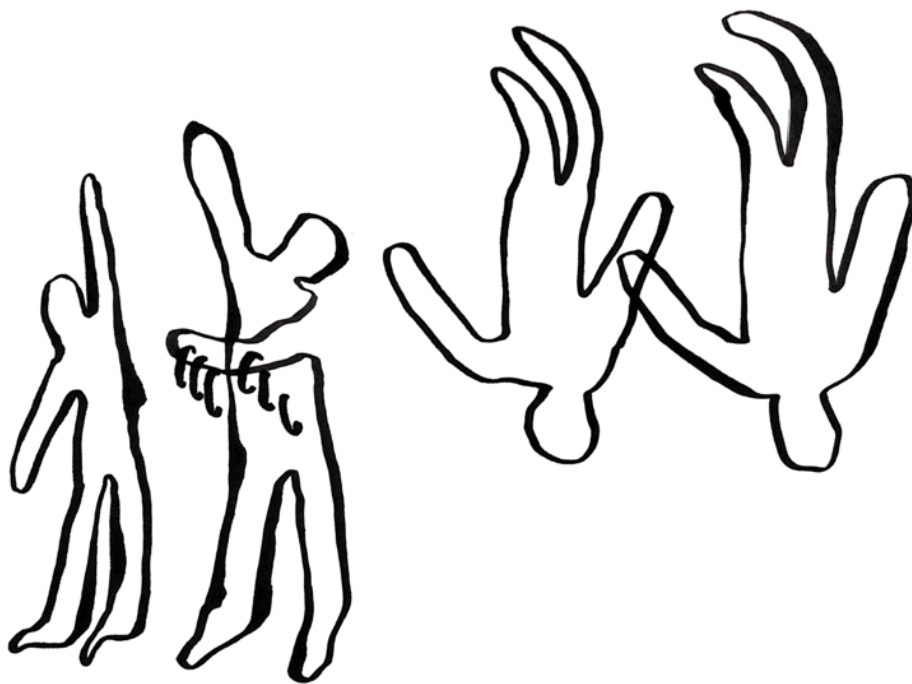
On Talent, the notion of

I witness (repeatedly) the word "talent" used when describing the *indescribable*; when describing something that comes easy, looks effortless, and is perceived as virtuosic––all at the same time. I also witness the word talent used when the talent does one of the two: (1) doesn't speak about itself publicly (unsurprisingly); or: (2) does speak about itself publicly, but in such a way that does little more than reproduce a stereotype, i.e., fits within the framework of the dominant narrative of how talent comes about and why its existence is admirable.

Artists who speak and speak in complex ways about the work that they're doing are often spoken about in reference to the words "experiment," "activism," and/or "research" art, but only if an "expanded" notion exists and "we" are familiar with it, such as "choreography as an expanded practice." Artists and works of the sort are often assumed to be not interesting to the general population, or to be belonging to a niche.

Notions like talent, I dare say, have, traditionally speaking, made it possible for skilled individuals to forgo developing a critical understanding of their skills. Notions like talent have also made it possible for people in power to make decisions without having to justify their process more than by saying that they *recognised* or *did not recognise* talent. Notions like talent have made it possible for teachers to favour students, for audiences to favour dancers or choreographers––without anyone being the wiser for it.

Note: My aim is not to abolish talent, which has, like the word beauty, named wonderful things in the past. Instead, I'd like to see such a word examined on a cultural and a personal basis, I would like to see it used with more care, I would like to see it used with more purpose, and I would like to hear it defined more often. Yes, talent, but what does that word mean? When in use, why is it being used, specifically?

The order described above is not only found in the educational environment. It is also found in the professional environment. The dancer-teacher dynamic is reflected in professional relationships established between dancers and rehearsal directors, dancers and artistic directors, and dancers and choreographers. The consequences of this order are innumerable.

In my experience of navigating the European professional field of dance and choreography, a field that seems to think itself post-modern in every way imaginable, what I seem to be meeting is a culture and a tradition of knowledge production that, at least where I live and work *still* largely assumes, amongst other things, the dominance of the (Elightened) mind over the (sacrilegious) body. My goal with this essay is to account for some of the ways in which I think I recognise how this assumption has been institutionalised, and as such frames what is possible to perceive and argue as knowledge. I will also try to articulate why embodied practices are especially vulnerable within this context.

*

In the Western tradition, a consensus-of-sorts has been made, historically speaking, due to which learning and consequently knowledge are assumed to be an objective process related to thinking, which, in turn, is commonly understood to be taking place in the thinking mind, i.e., to be a capacity of the central nervous system. Descartes, who is arguably the primary reason this consensus exists, banished thinking from all bodily systems that are not the brain, including all the capacities of the nervous system that are not oriented towards thought calibrated through language, when he said that he "decided to suppose that nothing was such as they [the senses] lead us to imagine to be" "because our senses sometimes deceive us" ([1637] 2006, 28).

This is to argue that what Descartes did was not only to create the infamous split. He created a system that stigmatises any order of thought other than doubtful (objective) and documentable (written) thought (language). A system that, it is needless to argue, subordinates any and every system that is oral or non-verbal, that is possibly intuitive, any and every academically undocumented study, no matter its longevity or otherwise recognised credibility. Furthermore, and this in contradiction to what I am about to explore in this text, Descartes created *the second brain*, one that is not, in fact, an organ at all, but lives, as an actor, in language alone.

> Traditionally, in our culture, learning is considered to be a function of the nervous system. It is my experience that the nervous system is only one aspect of learning––that it is first a recording system and therefore the last system to "know." It records and stores patterns of movement and behaviours and, once stored, it can retrieve them and thereby control experience through habit, memory, and projection. [...] For new experience to be obtained, release of the nervous system control is necessary so that old habits are no longer directing the outcome and new cellular experience can come into being. (Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen 2012, 161)

> Embodied practice is epistemic. It is structured by and productive of knowledge. Accordingly, an epistemological account of embodied practice is one according to which such practice actively encounters and comes to know reality through technique, rather than simply producing or constructing it. Social epistemologies allow us to analyse the development and circulation of embodied knowledge––in the form of technique––through processes that are both socially enabled and materially engaged. (Ben Spatz 2015, 27)

I turn to Body-Mind Centering®, the school of embodied anatomy initiated by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen that takes an embodied approach to studying and affirms the person's experience as the paradigm within which to think. The kind of pedagogy the school stands for prioritises––without deviation, I'd like to argue––the embodied understanding and builds a theoretical and critical knowledge upon it. Here is an example of a methodology that reverses the Cartesian paradigm, revolts its hierarchy of priorities, in practice as it starts from the body, and works its way to the brain, all the while questioning its assumed supremacy.

A student of Body-Mind Centering® studies always at their own pace, even when studying in a group. This means that the flow, the "uninterrupted ongoingness" a dance class will be celebrated for, is––depending how you choose to look at it––either non-existent in the context of a BMC® class or else exists but is defined by a set of parameters unimaginable from the point of view of a tradition whose primary focus is, perhaps, obedience.

It is customary, in a BMC® class, for the class to be interrupted. It is customary for questions to arise, for people's workflow to be interrupted, and for books to be put down. It is customary for the exercises to take more time than anticipated and it is customary for the teacher to be renegotiating their plans in real time. Meanwhile, you will frequently find a student of BMC® taking a nap in class or interrupting their day to write an entry in their journal or take a walk. This is the kind of behaviour, namely, a dance student might be disciplined and even expelled for. This is also the kind of behaviour that an adult who ordinarily subscribes to a normative lifestyle will find disturbing, or at least dissatisfyingly unfamiliar. In short, it's the kind of behaviour that requires time for adjustment, it requires getting used to. It is one thing to know, after all, that napping is allowed when necessary. It is an entirely other thing for the individual to actually know themselves well enough to know when it's time to take a nap, then take it; and for the community to embrace the presence of napping bodies within the educational context without having to justify, evaluate, or pass judgement.

What this pedagogical methodology proposes is an educational order in which a group will never accomplish anything that isn't first accomplished by all its members. It proposes a standard that reverses currently dominant evaluative criteria, as it denies the teacher the capacity to decide what the student is to perform without negotiation. Each step in this order is a matter of negotiation of each member of the group in relation to each other member, no matter their rank.

calibration

jurisdiction

or how to reverse the mind-body split

In terms of Body-Mind Centering®––and I'm developing and reporting on my own understanding of the embodied knowledge I am tending to in the context of my ongoing study––every cell of the human body has "a mind of its own." One way of understanding "the mind of a cell" is not metaphorical, but literal. Namely, every cell has a nucleus, and in that nucleus the information from which it recognises or draws its purpose. Were I opposed to personification, I could say the same thing differently: Every cell has a nucleus in which is stored the information that corresponds to or aligns with the cell's function. I am, of course, at this instance talking about the programming, I am talking about the code, I am talking about the DNA.

In that a cell has the information it needs to be able to know its purpose *under its own jurisdiction*––is how I started thinking about it––a cell is independent. It governs itself, and only reports to the central nervous system, which is, in turn, dependent on the input provided by cellular life external to itself. This implies a reversal of the dominant narrative by which the only experience of value is that had when the mind governs the body.

The Central nervous system, contrary to the popular opinion, is not *in charge*. Its primary functions include, according to my understanding of BMC®, recording, organising, and storing. According to the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology at UC Berkeley's online resource, the primary functions of the central nervous system are "integrating the sensory information and directing any necessary response."

Experiencing, by which I mean gathering of new information, happens where body and environment meet. In that it happens through interaction, experiencing happens through sensory perception, which means that it necessarily happens at a cellular level. According to UC Berkeley's online resource, "afferent or sensory neurons collect stimuli received by receptors throughout the body, including the skin, eyes, ears, nose, tongue as well as pain and other receptors in the internal organs." In that experiencing of the world happens at a cellular level, the experiencing of the world happens, and this is a very important point for me to make, outside of *the jurisdiction* of the nervous system. More importantly, the experiencing of the world happens "outside" of the jurisdiction of that bodily system that we've, culturally speaking, learned to associate with control and... identity, I suppose, is what's at stake here, isn't it? The other implication here is that *to learn something new* one, quite literally, needs not to rely on the capacities of the Cartesian mind––which is, without the interference of the interactive thus sacrilegious body, as it's suggested here, confined to the world of information that was collected sometime in the past, possibly under uncontrolled circumstances (what about: bias).

A cell, any cell, may be sensitive to the nervous system. A cell might also be sensitive to its cluster. A cell might also be sensitive to its cluster only, and it could be that it's the cluster, but not the cell itself, that is sensitive to the nervous system.

Wherever there's a cell sensitive to a cell, a cluster, or the nervous system, the nervous system, a cluster, or a cell is, in turn, sensitive to the cell.

This is my first attempt at approaching the notion of agency as a practice. I am looking for a way of releasing bodily capacities from the jurisdiction of the mind, as understood within European paradigms. I start by affirming the mind-body split as most people I have the chance to work with and teach exhibit in one way or another proof of the fact they've embodied the concept. All the while, I am considering philosophical texts, anatomical texts, and (science) fiction; I am taking into account my bodily experience, I am dancing and I am writing, I am teaching, conversing, occasionally making progress, occasionally falling back on old habits, making unnecessary assumptions, and failing. My strategy includes not trying to fix anything but to study every step I am taking; every achievement, every set-back. I assume my learning curve to be cyclical, as I continue to practice in public, always vulnerable but available to receiving feedback.

A possible consequence of thinking one cell a complete living organism is thinking all cells as complete living organisms is thinking *human* as a conglomerate made up of trillions of living organisms. A possible consequence of thinking one cell a complete living organism is thinking human as a conglomerate made up of trillions of living organisms whose lifespans are, in most cases, significantly shorter than the human's; organisms that are born and that die how many times during a human life cycle––much to the human's personal satisfaction, right? A possible consequence of thinking one cell a complete living organism is thinking human a result of *labour* the human needs not be aware of even, even though every decision the human makes for themselves has an immediate effect on the conditions that govern cellular life, as cells depend on the human breathing, eating, sleeping for all kinds of reasons, including nourishment––all of which, the breathing, the eating, the sleeping, the human, in turn, needs to be able to afford.

> *I am talking politics here. I am talking about an opportunity to think global politics on the scale of a single human individual. To do this, I don't even need to develop a metaphor. I only need to study anatomy, is my proposal. And not just study, objectively speaking, but study, subjectively speaking.*

Meanwhile, humans, in their blissful state of ignorance, assume life as a given, and death as something to avoid––both experientially and in conversation––the consequences of which are, at least partially, devastating. But I digress.

Karen Barad, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, offers an invaluable contribution to this thought process contained within the definition of intra-action. Intra-action "recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (Barad 2007, 33). Interaction, in comparison, "assumes the prior existence of distinct entities" (197). Two significant details. One is temporal. The idea that, let's call it an entity, cannot know itself until it intra-acts with another entity. To know itself, an entity needs a context within which to recognise its significance. To know itself, an entity needs feedback. *The knowing of itself, ergo does not emerge through division (doubt). Instead, it emerges through amalgamation.*

The second is relational. The idea that meaning––value, purpose, you name it––emerges from intra-action. For meaning to emerge though intra-action, amalgamation, then, meaning must always emerge in hindsight.

Imagine the consequences of (not just) thinking intra-action instead of interaction between world and body,

body and body, cell and cluster and peripheral nervous system. Imagine intra-action at every point of contact touched upon earlier in the text.

In other words.

Always.

In other words.

performativity

As a child I was taught to think of myself as weird and to expect my behaviour to be frowned upon. As a young teenager, I was taught to identify myself as flamboyant. My behaviour was decidedly girly, and obviously inappropriate for a boy (the 00s). Later on, I was taught to identify myself as a gay man (if I was lucky). I say "I was taught to think of myself as" because prior to having the experiences I am calling upon here I didn't relate to any of those terms; I didn't know that there is such a thing as "weird," or "flamboyant," or "gay." I didn't even know that sex and gender must be unnegotiably linked to one another. When I'm lucky these days, I am identified as a queer by some communities. A bisexual pansexual polyamorist and activist by others.

I stepped into this world and felt "wow, you can paint cartilage with colour," or "wow, there's a person that's really nice and attractive." It never occurred to me, until I received feedback, that there was "meaning" in these things. As I start from the point of naïveté and am being taught into a system that is unforgiving.

[...] words [...] made me realise something about intuition: that when something makes sense intuitively, especially at an early age, one can afford to not develop a critical understanding of whatever that thing that makes sense is. which is not noticeable, if what makes sense intuitively is the same thing that makes sense intuitively to most people around you.

growing up queer, the way i learned that my intuitive understanding was "out of tune," culturally speaking, was through violence: i found myself bullied, made fun of, told that the things that made sense to me "made no sense," that i should sort myself out, stop philosophising, making things complicated that supposedly aren't, that i should grow up or grow out of it. and so i started to develop a critical understanding of things i never considered thinking critically about or studying because i needed to survive, and because i needed to convince myself that i was not crazy.

by learning words and what they stand for, you learn that a discourse exists, that language exists, and by using (speaking) those words you

learn that communities exist. by speaking about things that make sense you learn that you're not alone.

which, mind you, is not a principle that works for liberal feminists and queers alone. but that is another story for another time.

in closing, i have to acknowledge the effort invested in inspiring members of the privileged majority to become critically aware of the things they never perhaps had to think about because those things never made them vulnerable, never isolated them socially. never put them on the spot.

the value of critical thinking, as i understanding it at the moment, is preventative: it prevents one

from jumping to conclusions, from trusting assumption instead of evidence. and this goes to all people interested in relationships: catch yourself making assumptions instead of asking questions and work against that urge. teach yourself how to ask your partner questions! be interested in them. remember that they are a person, too. and when receiving answers, be brave. listen. digest.

and take. your. time.

/// i love you. end of rant. (pavleheidler 2019a)

I come into the spotlight as a dancer and … where do I begin?[3] In the history of thought that I was educated in, I come on stage as a dancer to dominate the audience. (Much in the same way as to dance is to dominate the body, to be in control of the body.)

> *This is a colonial principle, isn't it, to assume that you not only can, but ought to come in and claim the space of the theatre as yours, that you ought to deliver and make everybody comply to your supposed talent and artistic genius. This principle is normalised, unionised even. Critics and spectators expect it to take place. Critics and spectators complain if it doesn't. They marginalise forms that don't comply by this principle as "research," and "experiment," and "I don't understand, it must have no value," and "is it even art."*

At the same time, as my research is becoming more palpable to me, I am beginning to realise that I come on stage––after all these years––only to shit my pants. STAGE FRIGHT, right? I start feeling bad about it, I start trying to eliminate it, because that's what one does, isn't it? Except that then I start reading, and thinking, and soon come up with the following proposal. What if stage fright isn't, in fact, the fright of performing? What if I am shitting my pants because I am starting to realise that all these people I am standing before are, in fact, people. Social animals who have a mind of their own, who have a history of their own, who have experience of their own. What if I feel uncomfortable because I was used to ignoring this realisation, because I was used to disrespecting the spectator's agential potential by treating them as a manipulatable generic member of the public. What if that's not the kind of politic I wish to embody anymore?
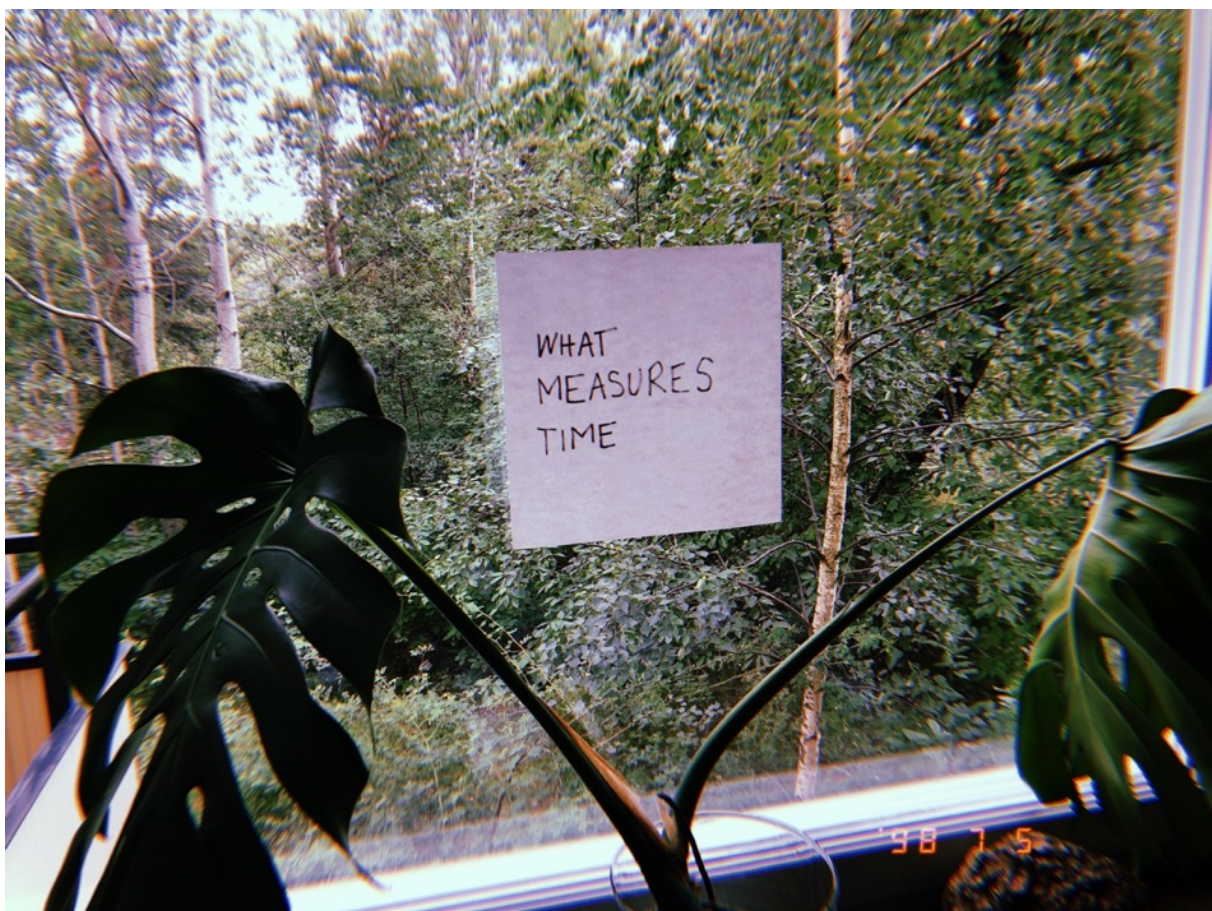
Through being gendered I started understanding something about performing, which is that so much of performance is not in my hands, as a performer. So

much of performance is actually and literally in the gaze of those who are gazing at.

What can I do about that?

What can I do about any of that?

What can I do, as an individual?

What can I do about the institutionalised history of oppressive practices that teaches

me to be silent? That actively avoids teaching me how to speak?

science-

fiction

A series of circumstances put me in a situation which asked of me to address touch in my teaching. I've never before taught touch. In fact, most of my teaching by this point avoided touch at all costs. Touch is difficult for me, as it is difficult for every person who doesn't find touching and being touched intuitively easy. Meanwhile, there is little space in the professional context of dance and dance training that allows for the study of touch, that provides a slow approach to touch, and that encourages negotiation. Dancing is a culture that assumes touch, assumes everyone has an easy time touching and being touched, assumes that everyone wants to be touched, at all times, and

for no explicit reason. Dancing is a culture that assumes that some things cannot be communicated except through touch. Dancing is a culture that doesn't necessarily have patience for those who put touch into question.

The class I developed for the occasion—and have been working on since—defines a practice that was going to be radically anti-colonial in its approach to consent. We practice asking for permission before touching every single time, we practice touching without ulterior motive, and without a previously prescribed agenda. We touch for the sake of study and are sensitive to what we learn from touching and being touched. We create the conditions for not-assuming touching. We wait, if needed. We negotiate: we ask questions and act according to the information we receive with the answers. And most importantly, we take the risk of never arriving at touching at all. I would like this record to show that we were going to practice methodologies I anticipated dancers to be well versed in. My plan was to do little more than remind participants of what they already knew.

It didn't take long for most participants, a lot of whom identified as highly sensitive and/or queer, to discover they tended *to touch to manipulate*. As long as the purpose of touching was *to do*, as long as touching was engaged in "with purpose," and as long as the person touching was *in charge*: the room was calm. But those techniques or habits were, of course, exactly the ones we set out to challenge.

What continues to surprise me is just how deeply challenging this work is turning out to be for the practitioner; how deeply moved persons will find themselves to be when they find themselves challenged at the level, so to speak, of assumption. When they find themselves conscious of the way and the speed in which their thinking conditions their doing.

When awakened, however temporarily, to powerlessness: will, or mind, can feel into the time before the condition of the body emerges (is remembered). It is *then* that one can imagine how much willed, and mind-full labour might be necessary

for the re-conditioning of not just habit, but the physical condition at large.

It seems to me that when one starts exercising the will, the mind, or the I in fact, that internalised entity that speaks as I, one discovers that this I is a mobile thing that can manifest in the body in different ways, one discovers that this I can speak *and* stay quiet, i.e., that it can manifest through language or sensation. I speculate when I say that the discovery of the I as dynamic and as sensitive to the condition that makes it is provocative of discomfort. Because people, and here I am reporting on a pattern I am recognising, run the risk of losing their sense of *self* when they acknowledge that they are *more than the assumed singular*. More than that learned sense of *I––stable—am moving things in this life––unstable––*, right? *I—stable––am in charge––of everything unstable, i.e., life on Earth.*

I think that the acknowledgement of this discomfort begins the process of *actually* learning how to think. In which case by thinking I am addressing an embodied experience. An experience that takes fantasy to be a part of daily life and takes it seriously. And starts treating it with, I don't want to say respect, but as if it has agency, as if it has a voice, as if it has a stake in reality, and as if it's something that *you* are in dialogue with. Which it does. And you are. As far as I'm concerned.

I say fantasy because I do not know of a better way to frame at the moment what it is that I am going on about. What I do know is that I am not talking about a therapeutic process per se. I am not talking about efforts that are interested in being recognised as psychology, psychiatry, neurology, medical anatomy, or medicine in general. I am talking about an inquiry into critical thinking, where thinking is embodied; an inquiry that cannot not take sensing and feeling into account. An inquiry that cannot not take chaos as its structural element. An inquiry that cannot not benefit from crying in public, that cannot not disrupt the order of comfort. An inquiry that cannot not challenge the assumed measure of appropriateness, and in some cases: the temporary and culturally specific measure of sanity.

The reason I am interested in engaging with this practice is for the potential consequence with which it might merit its practitioners. To go back to the example of performing: how can I dominate someone else, in this case, the audience, if I cannot dominate myself to begin with? Or the other way around, how does my experience of *me* being *more than one* complexify my understanding of what it means to work with an audience, to work with the public, to work with people? And how do I learn to start working with this, in a world in which an employee is rarely if ever paid to be engaged in a personal study as well as be engaged with labour the employer is to directly benefit from? How do I start working with this, when speaking up is recognised as rebellious, unproductive, and assumed to be threatening––when creativity, and authorship is reserved for those who inhabit the higher places in the food chain?

An example of an exercise:

When working on touch, I will often train my will, my mind, *the speaking I*, to withdraw from the space of the hand and so let the hand perceive in its own right.

When working on touch, I (remember: capacity of the central nervous system) will often train my will, my mind, *the speaking I*, to withdraw from the space of the hand (remember: the capacity of cellular life) and so let the hand perceive in its own right.

The challenge is then in the question: how does my process change given the circumstances of the exercise? How does entertaining this or a similar scenario change *my* place in the politic of how *I* relate to other materials in and of this Universe?

It is an ever-so-slightly humbling experience, to take your-self as selves seriously. It awakens us to the fact that wherever we're found at the moment of consciousness is... real.

An example of a poem discovered during exercise:

We are an amalgamation of what can and cannot be known consciously, cognitively at any one time. We act, and in action engage the world in a relationship we are and cannot necessarily be in control of at the same time. We can only ever be partially obedient. Digestion is also always at work. It has a life of its own. We have a life of our own. We are and is me and we are and is not. We are

and is of me, and we are and is not;

and I am of we, and I am not. OR am

I? Are we?

(pavleheidler 2019b)

just

because you

don't

understand it

doesn't

mean it

doesn't

exist

[1] "The histories that bring us to feminism are the histories that leave us fragile" (Ahmed 2017, 22).

[2] "Intra-actions are nonarbitrary, nondeterministic causal enactments through which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is iteratively enfolded into its ongoing differential materialisation. Such a dynamics is not marked by an exterior parameter called time, nor does it take place in a container called space. Rather, iterative intra-actions are the dynamics through which temporality and spatiality are produced and iteratively reconfigured in the materialisation of phenomena and the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and their constitutive exclusions" (Barad 2007, 179).

[3] "Discursive practices are the material conditions for making meaning. In my [Karen Barad's] posthumanist account, meaning is not a human-based notion; rather, meaning is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility. Intelligibility is usually framed as a matter of intellection and therefore a specifically human capacity. But in my agential realist account, intelligibility is a matter of differential responsiveness, as performatively articulated and accountable, to what matters. Intelligibility is not an inherent characteristic of humans but a feature of the world in its differential becoming. The world articulates itself differently" (Barad 2007, 335).

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featured artworks

pavleheidler, 2017. *Without duration, time.* Photograph.

pavleheidler, 2019. *ASKA #1.* Drawing.

pavleheidler, 2019. *What measures time.* Photograph.

pavleheidler, 2018. *just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.* Poem.

Biography

pavleheidler (they/them) has been dancing-performing, studying, writing, and teaching dancing professionally since early teenage-hood; inevitably considering their varied engagements with the field of experimental dancing and choreography – where choreography is understood to be an expanded practice – as opportunities to continue studying the notion and the practice of (1) embodiment, (2) performativity, (3) relationality, and (4) successful communication.

they studied at the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance, graduated from the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios in 2012, and took their MFA degree in Choreography-specialisation-Performance from the University of Dance and Circus at the Stockholm University of the Arts in 2015. They are currently studying Body-Mind Centering® with Embody-Move, UK.

pavleheidler is the recipient of the 2018 International Choreographer's Stipend awarded annually to a Swedish dance artist by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee.

AN-AESTHETIC:
PERFORMED PHILOSOPHIES OF SENSATION, CONFUSION, AND INTOXICATION

PAUL GEARY UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

Words fill our flesh and anæsthetize it. It has even been said, and written, that the word was made flesh. Nothing makes one more insensitive than words.

Anæsthetic robs us of æsthetics. [...] Æsthetics cures us of anæsthesia. [...] Fine wine works on the tongue, awakening it from its narcotic slumber.

Michel Serres (2016, 58, 156)

Introduction

In Michel Serres' *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* ([1985] 2016), he establishes a relationship between aesthetics and anaesthesia. Two terms that tend to circulate in different fields—the arts and medicine respectively—they share a root in *aisthesis*, meaning sensation or perception. Anaesthesia is the negation or absence of *aisthesis*, the removal, withdrawal or numbing of sensation. And for Serres, the language of discourse inculcates anaesthesia of the mouth; the removal of the sensation that is found in what he calls a second mouth, the mouth of tasting. Anaesthesia steals away from aesthetics as both art and sensation; aesthetics (re)introduces sensation and awakens us from the 'narcotic slumber' of discourse.

In this article, I explore Serres' writing on the senses, particularly in relation to his conception of two mouths: the first, the anaesthetising mouth of discourse, the second, the sensate mouth of aesthetics and experience. Serres uses these two mouths as indicative of two modes of knowledge: dissecting analysis and sapience or embodiment, respectively. Both Performance Philosophy and Practice-as-Research have troubled the separation of these two arenas of knowledge and, in *The Five Senses*, Serres does gesture towards their inseparability in writing about confusion and confluence; their pouring together in knowledge and experience. Here, I use the two mouths and two orders of knowledge to consider the 'thinking', knowledge or understanding that can be at work in intoxication and in sensory experience.

Intoxication is understood here in relation to Serres' two mouths in two modes: the first, anaesthetising intoxication, whereby one unthinkingly loses oneself into political and cultural codes – intoxication as a loss of critical faculties; the other, intoxication as a process of 'making strange' and opening a conceptual and felt space for considering and reflecting upon one's own body and experience. Increasingly, different kinds of experience are coopted as 'live(d) experience' within a culture of commodification. Given that this is increasingly the cultural status quo, where experience itself becomes a commodity, in intoxication we could merely give ourselves over to this cultural logic and, in an ever-growing quest for novelty, seek out and pay for experience for the sake of having experienced. But there's also potential for that second kind of intoxication, where the quotidian is made strange, defamiliarised, and our own bodies and experiences can become a site of resistance, becoming aware of themselves. Using Serres, this article explores how this kind of knowledge-work of defamiliarising intoxication can engender a self-reflective process of understanding one's own construction as an experiencing, political subject.

The article begins with a theoretical outline of Serres' two mouths, intoxication and the politics of sensory experience. This is then followed with a more personal reflection on the experience of a dining-performance event: *After Dark* (2016).[1] *After Dark* was a pop-up restaurant performance event designed by Kaye Winwood in collaboration with chef Chris Hughes and designer Nuala Clooney. The event offered a curated tasting menu of nine courses, some with accompanying alcoholic drinks and explored connections between food, sensuality and sexuality, with performers guiding the audience-diners through the meal. Beginning with a series of small tantalising tasters, moving through oyster, tomato and lamb dishes and ending with chocolate and tobacco desserts, each of the courses attempted to draw out ideas around the body, sex and encounters with the body of another, drawing attention to, heightening and problematising acts of touching and eating. And here I consider the particular experiential reflections that emerged, for me, in that event and how, in its intoxications, it made strange aspects of the everyday experience of eating and my own body.

Intoxication, the Two Mouths and 'Live(d) Experience'

In *The Five Senses*, Michel Serres calls for us to

> awaken the palate from anæsthetizing talk through the use of a second talent.
> Which discovers an æsthetics of sense in the work of a different, artistic æsthetic.
> [...] One mouth chases the other, the mouth of discourse excludes the mouth of
> taste, expels it from discourse. (2016, 154)

For Serres, a particular kind of language, that of discourse, which analyses and dissects, anaesthetises the mouth, forcing that other mouth, the tasting and sensate mouth, to slumber. For Serres, there is a conceptual tension between the two mouths, where one offers knowledge of the order of discourse, analysis and dissection and the other the knowledge of embodiment, the senses and experience. Serres seemingly separates the two constituent parts of Performance Philosophy: the embodied or aesthetic and knowledge or understanding. He continues

> Many philosophies refer to sight; few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the
> tactile, or olfactory. Abstraction divides up the sentient body, eliminates taste, smell
> and touch, retains only sight and hearing [...]. To abstract means to tear the body
> to pieces rather than merely to leave it behind: analysis. (26)

Serres proposes this separation as a means of legitimising the knowledges of sensate embodiment and critiquing analysis in its leaving out of the body. He writes of the Occidental philosophical and cultural tradition, which privileges the seemingly 'higher' and distanced senses of sight and sound; those senses that seemingly offer a more 'objective' perspective and remove the personal, the sensory and the messy from knowledge construction.[2] He connects this to a process of abstraction and dissection; the tearing apart of the body into its separate sensory streams and, beyond that, the dissection that allows for the study of an abstracted stream of experience of the world.

Serres offers this separation of modes of knowledge to consider the knowledge, understanding or revelation(s) that emerge from embodied and sensory experience, which he calls 'sapience'. He writes that

> homo sapiens refers to those who react to sapidity, appreciate it and seek it out,
> those for whom the sense of taste matters [...] before referring to judgement,
> intelligence or wisdom. [...] Sensation, it used to be said, inaugurates intelligence.
> Here, more locally, taste institutes sapience. (2016, 155)

'Sapidity' comes from the Latin root *sapere*, meaning 'to taste', and 'sapience' from *sapientia*, meaning 'good taste', 'good sense', 'wisdom' or 'intelligence'. Just as the English colloquialism 'I see' means both to have vision and to understand, so too does sapience have this double meaning of taste and wisdom. 'I see' is of the order of knowledge of discourse, the knowledge derived of distanced rationality and connected to that 'higher' sense of sight. Sapience is knowledge of a different order, one grounded in the body, in the 'lower' sense of taste.

However, these two mouths and their separate orders of knowledge are not so easily teased apart. Indeed, Serres does go on to propose a philosophy of 'confusion', which brings them together in the flow of thinking and experience. Far from the negation of understanding (the everyday usage of 'confusion'), Serres posits knowledge, confusion and confluence in terms of, 'a theory of knowledge, less solid than a solid, almost as fluid as a liquid, hard and soft: fabric.' (Serres 2016, 81) He writes that

> To confuse means, first of all, to pour together, to conjoin several streams into one. Taken literally, confusion sounds like a solution. […] actions, alloys, mixtures, brews should all be called confusions, and the philosophy of confusion should be the common ground of sapience. (2016, 162)

There is a tension between the two mouths, between discourse and sapience, for Serres, but he also deals with their flowing together: the knowledges of intersections, where bodies, experience, ideas, discourses, histories and cultures flow together; an understanding of the performed nature of knowledge that is grounded in the live(d) body who 'knows' and the streams mixing and pouring and flowing together, where any one of these streams of understanding taken separately cannot give an account of the world and experience as it is. It is the knowledge not strictly of discourse (*discursus*, running to and fro) but of concourse (*concursus*, running together). Between the two mouths, Serres opens a conceptual space for their interaction and intersection.

Given the interrelation of the aesthetic and anaesthetic, their emergence from and differential relations with one another, they should not be considered separate in terms of the knowledge-work of performance. We might instead talk of the 'an-aesthetic', with the dash fulfilling a grammatical function that cleaves apart the aesthetic from the anaesthetic while nevertheless recognising their inseparability. And this an-aesthetic can be used as a means of thinking about intoxication in performance; both literal intoxication resulting from consumption, but also the figurative intoxicating effects of performance. In both cases, the body itself is revealed as caught in this confusion; in the pouring together of different kinds of knowledge and their mixing in the live(d) experience of an event; on, in and through the body.

Intoxication has the potential to draw attention to our own bodies; in it, the quotidian can be made strange and, in so doing, allow for qualities, forms and ideas to emerge as separate from one's own intuitive or spontaneous experience. In Frederic Jameson's writing on Brecht and 'estrangement', he argues that

> To make something look strange, to make us look at it with new eyes, implies the antecedence of a general familiarity, of a habit which prevents us from really looking at things, a kind of *perceptual numbness* […,] a defence of innovation in terms of the *freshness of experience* and the *recovery of perception*. (1999, 50, my emphasis)

The process of making strange, in this formulation, is bound up with the senses; of recovering (or perhaps discovering) a new attentiveness to sensory experience. Out of the 'perceptual numbness', or anaesthetising qualities, of familiarity with the quotidian arises a defamiliarising process where

the senses are experienced afresh, with an awareness of the qualities of that experience that might usually go unnoticed or unremarked, in the background as it were. Part of the historical relegation of taste, smell and touch to the realm of the 'lower' senses is that they are seen as somehow too entangled with personal preference; that we are reduced to judgements of liking and disliking, to judgements of personal pleasure, while the 'higher' senses of sight and sound offer a more complex and distanced range of reflective qualities. Intoxication, as a process of making strange in the body, can move us away from a quotidian experience of the body and from that sensory hierarchy; to adopt a perspective on our own experience that is distanced from personal preference, from seemingly intuitive tastes and to become aware of the process of embodiment. In other words, intoxication can produce a self-reflective knowledge, acknowledging one's own body and how it senses, revealing it as always already a process shifting between dissecting analysis and sensory awareness.

While intoxication has potential to defamiliarise, to make strange and to trouble everyday experiences of the senses, in an economy increasingly grounded in, and capitalising on, 'live experience', the momentary, transitory and sensual begins to lose its radical-political potential. Too easily the revelations and understandings of the live event can slip into the realm of commodity, of cultural capital. And while intoxication can make strange and furnish us with an experience that reflects on the body and the quotidian, it too can easily slip into a different mode whereby we lose ourselves into cultural scripts and codes. In writing on psychedelic drugs in *Screened Out*, Jean Baudrillard talks of the cultural anaesthesia that drugs can offer. He writes that

> it is not anomic, but anomalous. The anomalous is not what is marginal, unbalanced or organically in deficit; it is the product of an excess of organization, regulation and rationalization within a system. [...It is] a contestatory anomaly of a world one has to escape from because it is too abundant, not because it could be said to lack something. (2014, 105–106)

It is the abundance of the anaesthetising and austere institutions, those institutions that Serres conceives as producing the anaesthetising discourse from which the tasting mouth needs to be awakened, that drives the need to escape into heightened sensation. By this logic, intoxication can take another form: that of giving oneself over to the world of others, merging with the crowd and the cultural status quo. This experience of intoxication can offer a means of escape from an overdetermined world. Its pleasures and the understandings it brings are severely limited to the realm of the personal and individual as a means of defence against the organisational, regulatory and rationalised contemporary paradigm. And so the experience offered by intoxication may very well be in the realm of revelation and self-reflexive awareness, but equally could merely offer a self-indulgent escape that constructs a knowledge of the self as autonomous as a political operation to mask the commodification of the body and sensory experience.

To understand, or perhaps experience, intoxication as a making strange has the potential to counter the commodification of sensory experience. In intoxication our perceptual mode can be shifted from the everyday and the everyday itself can be made strange, altered. Serres writes that 'Consciousness belongs to those singular moments when the body is tangential to itself' (2016, 22).

If we read consciousness in a way akin to Marxist 'class consciousness', a becoming-aware of one's own construction as an embodied subject within a particular social and political system, then becoming-conscious through intoxication is a process by which the body becomes tangential to itself, where it sits intimately alongside itself. Intoxication can intervene at the level of embodied and sensate experience, troubling the easy congruity of our schematised knowledge of the world, ourselves and our experiences. Intoxication can draw attention to our enculturation, which is always already at work at the level of experience; of what is sensible and where our attention is directed. It can intervene in experience itself, opening up space for an altered (self-reflexive) knowledge. Not wholly separate, nor a totalised experience of subjectivity, intoxication can shift us to look obliquely at ourselves. We can be made strange from ourselves and our experience, with our consciousness or sense of self slipping back and forth between experience and reflection, dwelling in that in-between.

After Dark: An Experience of Confusion

In the following section of the article, I turn to Winwood's *After Dark*, to consider how these ideas around intoxication, the senses and knowledge or reflection can be understood in practice; how, for me, they were made manifest in a live and experienced event. The work opened up a space for a kind of embodied self-reflection and, as such, the reflections themselves emerge from my own experience, as well as speaking to and of broader questions of the sensate and sensual body.

In *The Five Senses*, Serres discusses the relationship between the night and the senses. He writes

> Night does not anæsthetize the skin, but makes it more subtly aware. The body trains itself to seek the road in the middle of darkness, loves small, insignificant perceptions: faint calls, imperceptible nuances, rare effluvia, and prefers them to everything loud. (2016, 67–68)

For Serres, that tension between aesthetics and anaesthesia arises once more. The dulling of some of the senses (light abating) leads to a heightening of attentiveness among the other senses; makes the body more aware to the subtle, the nuanced, the often overlooked. Winwood played with this in *After Dark*, utilising the change in light to shift the perceptual mode of the diners to be more attentive to their own embodied experience and, by extension, to the aesthetic and artistic operations of individual dishes and the overall event. The event took place at Two Cats restaurant in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham (UK) at dusk. In the first 30 minutes of the work, the light from outside, coming through the windows, changed and we were moved into dusk and then darkness outside, with dim lighting inside. The event utilised that transitional time of dusk, itself often associated with the emergence of nighttime activities. The senses themselves are revealed to be subject to shifts and changes, reflecting the broader context within which they are operating. This background to the event framed it; the environment through which the knowledges and revelations of the event would flow.

The first course of the event was 'Honeypot', a gin, honey and thyme drink poured into the mouth of the diner by a performer. Served in a smaller space before moving in the main dining room, on plush chairs with dim lighting, the drink was served from small cups, the rim of which was shaped as lips. The performer gently placed her fingers under my chin, tilting my head back slightly to bring my lips upwards to meet the cold lips of the cup, from which was dribbled the drink into my mouth, with a little hitting the lips. This opening sensation was sweet, fragrant, alcoholic and intoxicating. The gentle touch of the performer was coupled with the feel of another's lips meeting my own. Serres writes that 'Taste is a kiss that our mouth gives itself through the intermediary of tasty foods. Suddenly it recognizes itself, becomes conscious of itself, exists for itself' (2016, 224). This drink did just that. I kissed the lips of another and in that kiss received something sweet and sticky; a bold flavour that coupled the harsh sting of gin with the soft sweetness of honey and the floral and slightly medicinal thyme. My experience was one of mixture and confusion and confluence; the different flavours pouring together. There was a kind of self-reflexivity to the experience, where each element (gin, honey, thyme, cold fingers, comfortable chair, head tilted back, stickiness on the lips…) was identifiable, but the identification of those individual parts was not enough to give an account of the experience. To know, to understand, to give an account of the experience in terms of its constituent parts, dissected, felt insufficient. The experience seemed to resist any totalising narrative of knowledge I attempted to assign to it.

One of the confusions of this drink was in its making strange of the experience of drinking and of kissing. Two activities that might usually require little to no thought, the experience of both was interrupted and changed, but not to the extent where it became an entirely different activity. I drank, but was not in control of how much or able to use my hands to guide where the drink was poured. I was kissed, but not by the lips of another person directly, but by the model of the lips of another, transformed into hard material that did not give or respond to the pressure of my own. Embodied memories of previous kisses and drinks were recalled precisely in the strangeness of this present experience to those of the past. It was not entirely new; it bore the traces of something familiar, something that goes without thinking. But nevertheless it was strange and so my attention was drawn to the very experience that is usually taken for granted. I was forced to experience my own body and its sensations in a different way and, in that, to recognise the feedback loop that allows me to control the act of drinking (my mouth is full so I pause, it is pouring too quickly so I tilt the cup away, the stinging sensation of alcohol causes me to gag momentarily so I stop and swallow); and to recognise the relationality of the kiss, which emerges as a meeting of my live lips with those of another, where here I was met with blank indifference, the lips of the other transformed into mere materiality, devoid of subjectivity. Perhaps more importantly, these things happened simultaneously, along with other sensory inputs that formed, both directly and indirectly, the horizon of the experience.

This was continued with the next course, but taken further, where caviar was served on a spoon modelled on the inside of another's mouth. The bowl of the spoon was moulded and shaped from the inside of the artists own mouth and when turned upside down in the mouth, my tongue could trace the roof of a mouth and the back of teeth that were not my own. The experience forced an engagement with my own individuality, my own sense of being an individual body, with its own

traits and eccentricities. My tongue hit the roof of a mouth that was not my own; it was in the place where my own usually resides and there were similarities, yet it was not mine; I was teased with the tiniest experience of inhabiting the body of another. With both the lips on the cup and the mouth on the spoon, I imagined my own embodied nature, the lingering of subjectivity in the material, and was confronted with my future: the moment when I will become only lifeless material, when I will be entirely anaesthetised. This was not just illustrative of these ideas, but encouraged them to be recognised in experience itself; the body in its embodiment forming the basis of reflection and understanding. In these first courses, the event encouraged a particular attentiveness to one's own body. By doing this, the body itself is made strange; everyday acts (of drinking, of kissing, of feeling the roof of your mouth with your own tongue) were defamiliarised. My own sense of self, *as* a body, *in* a body, was called into question.

In terms of the wisdom and discernment of sapidity and sapience, our own tastes and personal preferences are alienated from themselves. Intoxication allows for a certain distance (by virtue of the tension between aesthetic sensation and anaesthetic numbing) in which we are caught, which allows us both to experience taste and to take a distanced perspective on it. The various sensory qualities of tasting (flavour, taste, temperature, texture, temporality) are split from a direct and immediate personal (dis)liking. Personal preferences are a result of a complex of past experiences, enculturation and associations, which intoxication allows us to take a step away from in order to appreciate these other aesthetic (sensate) qualities. And this is the first gesture towards an appreciation of eating, tasting and, more broadly, sensory experience as not just aesthetic but artistic; to consider its forms and qualities, its significations, its engagements with and reflections on culture, politics, history and ideas. In other words, as intoxication begins to anaesthetise that most personal and immediate sense of self, personal taste, it makes space for sensory experience to appear more clearly, though of course there is no neutral or pure sensory experience; it will always carry, to greater or lesser extents, the markers of the personal (taste, previous experience, understanding and preference).

The 'main course' of the *After Dark* meal was the eponymous title of the event: 'After Dark'. The dish was a black plate on which was served dark or black ingredients: charred lamb, aubergine, octopus, quinoa, trompettes de la mort and ash, served with a glass of Malbec. Coming after a number of dishes and experiences that had enlivened and awoken the senses, as well as a number of alcoholic drinks, this part of the meal was more sedate and less openly provocative. While the dish made use of bitter and dark flavours that can often be unpalatable, the various intoxications of the alcohol and the performance allowed for the dish to be experienced in terms of its sensory and conceptual qualities. The ash in particular, included in the dish, was transformed from unpalatable refuse (burnt remains) into a palatable and conceptual component of the work. Following the narrative established in the opening of the meal of the tension between sensuality and death, the food literally became ash in the mouth. But intoxication allowed for this to be experienced as aesthetic and artistic; not just disgustingly bitter, but an appeal to a particular part of my tasting sensory apparatus, allowing me to experience without immediately leaping to personal (dis)like. Emerging from the anaesthetising language that described this element as (unpalatable) ash, the second mouth was awoken in a differential relationship with the first and, with my immediate and

spontaneous reactions dulled, the qualities of the ingredient—its bitterness, powderiness, its mixing with saliva to form a paste in the mouth, the addition of a darker quality in taste as well as vision—were able to come forth and make an artistic and conceptual contribution to the dish and the event. I was confronted with my ability to move beyond mere preference and to acknowledge my ability to appreciate bitterness, which is an acquired taste, a marker of enculturation (bitterness is a defensive mechanism in plants to discourage being eaten by animals (McGee 2004, 271).

After Dark was a one-off, exploratory event. It was not a product in the strictest sense, reproducing itself for profit. But nevertheless, it furnished its diner-audience with a certain amount of cultural capital and, at £65 for a ticket, was not a cheap experience (though the politics of cost is more complex, given the need to cover costs and adequately remunerate the performers and workers). Despite this, it was an intoxicating experience, which encouraged different kinds of reflection on the body and the self. The radical potential of intoxication to unnerve, unsettle, make strange and pose questions is not necessarily diminished through its participation in economies of experience, even though there is an attempt to co-opt sensory experience itself as a commodity.

Conclusion

Serres' model of the two mouths is indicative of two modes of knowledge: that of dissecting analysis and that of sensory experience. Part of the project of *The Five Senses* was to legitimise the knowledges of sapience; the revelations that can occur through the body and the senses. And in his philosophy of confusion, these two modes of knowledge pour together and are inseparable. Just as Serres offers two mouths, we can think of two kinds of intoxication: the first, anaesthetising, unthinkingly giving oneself over to cultural codes and the status quo, even if it seemingly offers an escape; the second, a process of making strange or defamiliarising. It is in the latter that there is potential for resistance to the commodification of live(d) experience: it can reveal how we are caught between the two orders of knowledge; it can allow us to dwell in their confluence; and it can make space for reflections on the body and its cultural framing and construction. In that awareness of estranged intoxication, this kind of knowing has the potential to resist overdetermination by the logic of commodification and to find a different experience of the senses that is revelatory and not merely for the sake of 'having experienced'.

Notes

[1] https://kayewinwood.com/project/after-dark/

[2] In David Howes' encyclopaedic entry on the senses, he writes that 'The traditional Western sensory model holds that the senses are five in number, and that each sense has its proper sphere. […] The senses are also informally ranked, with sight being considered the "highest" most informative, objective, rational, aesthetic and "civilized" of the senses. […] Both sight and hearing are conventionally set off from the "lower", subjective, emotional, unaesthetic, and animalistic or "brute" senses of smell and taste and touch' (2015, 615).

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Biography

Paul Geary is a Lecturer in Drama at the University of East Anglia. He completed his PhD at the University of Bristol, following which he was a Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, De Montfort University and the University of Wolverhampton. His research focuses on the senses, food, performance and philosophy, in particular engaging with the work of Martin Heidegger, Michel Serres, and Slavoj Žižek. He is engaged in creative consultancy for a restaurant and is on the project team for an AHRC research network entitled *Incubate-Propagate: Towards Alternative Models for Artist Development in Theatre and Performance.*

BLOW YOUR MIND!
SHARDS HAILING,
ON SUPERFLUOUS VIOLENCE TO STOP SURVIVING

SIMON(E) VAN SAARLOOS DUTCH ART INSTITUTE

Admittedly, it is a hard place to begin, with the avowal that violence is not an exception but rather that it defines the horizon of her existence. It is to acknowledge that *we were never meant to survive*, and yet we are still here.

—Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019, 29–30)

I saw I wanted to be beaten up. I didn't understand. This isn't enough. Nothing is enough, only nothing. I want to get to what I don't know which is discipline. In other words, I want to be mad, not senseless, but angry beyond memories and reason. I want to be mad.

—Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* (1988, 51)

We are sitting on a countryside terrace in France, sipping a beer. Summer. We don't really know each other, just two different kinds of foreigners who bonded over an emergency at our shared holiday horizon: a fire in a farmer's field, caused by drought and an overheated tractor. We called the emergency number, using Google Translate to explain what we saw, '*un feu, un feu*,' failing to localize the field. No one got hurt. She tells me her name is Ada. We speak English with each a different accent.

I tell her about David Buckel. On April 14, 2018, David Buckel set himself on fire in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. He chose a quiet spot on an early Saturday morning and burned till his body had nearly vanished. Minutes before this act of self-immolation, he sent an email to *The New York Times*, stating his act was meant to raise awareness of the horrors of climate change. Buckel was a well-known and respected lawyer fighting for LGBTQ rights, while volunteering all of his spare time to making his Brooklyn neighborhood more sustainable. As he lived for political change, his death became an activist gesture, a careful choreography. I lived close to Prospect Park when it happened and would perform a commemorative gesture every time I jogged past his spot, sometimes drawing a clumsy cross over my shoulders and head.

Ada tells me '*something else*' must have been '*wrong*' with David Buckel. By which she means: it cannot just be a political act. Such self-inflicted violence, such a destructive gesture must mean that he was also severely depressed, a tiny bit crazy, or at least an unhealthy fanatic. '*If you do such a violent thing and make it public with an open letter and all, you must really like attention.*' I listen, not in agreement, but fascinated by her certainty.

It is hard to hear desperation where we don't imagine to find it. We don't imagine it in the shape of a wealthy white cisman with a job that's considered influential, powerful. David Buckel, lawyer: an institutionally recognized voice that both shapes and is shaped by the infrastructures that define our societal hearing. Such a voice should ring like a great recommendation at a scheduled meeting, explaining a logical step towards improvement. It cannot be a shriek that signifies total failure, world loss. If it does, it must be a psychological hiccough, an individual problem.

Where is the threshold between learning about another person's point of view and becoming complicit through listening? I'm already listening less to Ada, speaking more. The beer makes my blood thin and anger creeps to the surface. In an attempt to claim Buckel's action as a political gesture—not to be pathologized for the sake of our own comfort—I bring up Gayatri Spivak's writing on 'sati', sometimes framed as 'widow burning'. Sati is an outlawed Hindu practice where widows in India joined their deceased husbands on the funeral pyre. The British colonialists called it 'suttee' and prohibited the practice in 1829 (three decades before criminalizing homosexuality)— 'white men saving brown women from brown men', writes Spivak in "Can The Subaltern Speak?" She asks white feminists to imagine an ontology in which performing sati or suttee is a form of freedom, an act of the will through an act of piety and subordination. Actually, I ask white feminists to imagine this: Spivak mostly proposes to acknowledge that there are ways of being, convictions and understandings, knowledges, that we have no access to. White feminists imagine themselves able to imagine the unimaginable. This claim to feel eligible to mark what is unimaginable and what isn't is a fundamental problem. '*I'm trying to be respectful and all, but I just cannot fathom that that's considered freedom*', says Ada. The colonial kind of freedom: the kind that becomes valuable through forcing it upon others.

I'm convinced Buckel's response is less violent than the violence he responded to. How much daily violence do we normalize just to keep on living? It is said that climate change is one of many symptoms of rape culture in the west—to take without asking, to dig without giving, to expect, to

possess. You have to centralize your own human survival to be able to be part of such a system. 'They want me alive so I can stay in prison. But if I'm not alive, then I'm not in prison', explains character Taystee in the final season of *Orange Is The New Black*, after attempting suicide—she would prefer to be human-dead and free than human-alive and imprisoned.

In his suicide note, Buckel wrote: 'Pollution ravages our planet, oozing inhabitability via air, soil, water and weather. Most humans on the planet now breathe air made unhealthy by fossil fuels, and many die early deaths as a result. Our present grows more desperate, our future needs more than what we've been doing. My early death by fossil fuel reflects what we are doing to ourselves. […] This is not new, as many have chosen to give a life based on the view that no other action can most meaningfully address the harm they see. Here is a hope that giving a life might bring some attention to the need for expanded actions, and help others give a voice to our home, and Earth is heard.' Part of his letter was published, staged, in *The New York Times*, but the staging was disappointing: the article mostly honored Buckel's work as a lawyer, only a single paragraph of his letter was cited.

It's not my aim to make Buckel into a hero while others die anonymously. What happens in this moment, on a terrace in France, is that someone refuses to politicize a demand for attention. I have a strong desire to see any disruption—large or small—as a potential political act. Here, I don't situate Buckel carefully in the body of literature on self-immolation. What flares in this moment is that I cannot bear the psychological and individual approach that sustains white people's inability to see oneself as part of a pattern, as part of a sociality. I do not analyse whether or not it's appropriative of Buckel to refer to the self-immolation protests worldwide and by monks in Tibet specifically. I localize my thoughts in response to a faraway *feu* in a French field in an attempt to claim Buckel's act as political desperation. To claim that, from a position of privilege, it is possible to truly wish to end the world as we know it and (dis)organize it differently. How to stop surviving if survival is kept from the obvious surface of your daily life?

It's early morning, six something, when David Buckel lights himself on fire. The firefighters will arrive at 6:30 am. It's 6:23 a.m. when an Uber drops me off near the Church Avenue subway station, at the south of Prospect Park. I'm coming home from a queer party and I've survived another cab driver asking me whether I have a boyfriend and whether he can have my number. He survived another slow night of being underpaid inside the cycle of speculative demand—needing more exploitation to suffer less from exploitation. I've jumped into a car to extend the warm fuzzy feeling of the party, to go from the dark backroom packed with dancing bodies into the quiet of my bedroom. I may have jumped into a car to escape the growing reality of day, but I cannot say I've jumped into a car to be safe. Because the car isn't safe and because my feelings of safety aren't trustworthy when white cis men have decided what is and what isn't.

Before pouring petrol on himself, Buckel arranged a neat circle of dirt around himself, so that the fire wouldn't spread. A polite gesture. Buckel used a laundry cart to bring the dirt and petrol to the park. He offered his id-card and a note at the outer edge of the ring, to avoid confusion about what

happened. On the note, he apologized for the mess. Restraint is an activist aesthetic, if not a strategy.

The Suffragettes deliberately dressed conventionally to disguise their radical ideas. Afraid to be exposed before carrying out their carefully planned protests, they would make sure to appear like polite ladies. A different time, another activist in a pretty uniform to disguise her intentions was "Lolita" Lebrón. In her book *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance,* Sandra Ruiz devotes a chapter to Delores "Lolita" Lebrón Sotomayor and her sensational act during a session of US Congress. The chapter is called 'Lipstick Revolutionaries', as Lebrón looked impeccable, in a skirt suit, on elegant heels and with lipstick, coiffed hair and a chic scarf around her neck. Together with three other members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, she entered with a concealed gun. 'They sat armed in the second row, peering down at an assembly of white men in lawmaking suits' writes Ruiz, restaging the scene. Then they fired multiple shots towards the ceiling, 'not with the intention to harm, but to free herself of colonial domination', calling out *¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!* 'The year was 1954, and Lebrón was dressed to die, not to kill' (35). Several congressmen were wounded, no one died. Lebrón had a 'desire to offer death, not take life' (36).

Expecting that security guards would shoot her, she carried a suicide note in her purse. Instead, Lebrón was arrested and sentenced to a vague sixteen to fifty-six years in prison, a penalty less severe than her male comrades got. Ruiz studied the court reports and proposes that the lyrical language used to describe the crime is 'foreshadowing the event's phenomenological and performative weight'. Ruiz cites from the formal documents: '"a wild hail of bullets" hit five congressmen after a "fantastic sudden shooting" by Lolita Lebrón, one of the "would-be-assassins" who "boldly claims she is [the] instigator of the murder plot" and "brazenly sprayed bullets"'. Then analyzes: 'Hailing, here, becomes significant for both its physical fracturing of space and time and its ideological interpellation of the subjects involved' (36). Ruiz continues: 'Lebrón walked into the Capitol building wearing the desire to die as fervently as the glamorous attire, lipstick, and gun that have since become her signature accessories. For Lebrón, politics and aesthetics are inseparable, all of her aesthetic choices are inherently political ones, and she alone retains the pleasure of performance, at the extremity of her own horizon' (38). When politics and aesthetics are inseparable, the presence of violence doesn't necessarily exclude pleasure. At the same time, for those who can separate politics from aesthetics and live with the threat of violence instead of living *with* violence, violence is an isolated event. A feared potential, an endpoint: the absolute worst that could happen; the last resort. The ability to distance oneself from violence is seen as a marker of the 'well-organised', civilized. Violence, then, is never part of a myriad experience: violence just shuts down, violence subsumes (and pleasure and violence are marked as fully contradictory).

Some time ago, I was on stage talking about feminism. It was a panel discussion coming to its gentle end—a shared horizon was expected. The closing question was: what do we do next? I suggested the possibility of violence. If people don't just wake up and say, 'oh hey here is my privilege, come and take it, have it' as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once said it, how else do we force a redistribution of wealth and privilege? There is a difference between acknowledging one's privilege and the actual attempt to dismantle the structures that uphold these inequalities. The

audience booed as a response. 'Never turn to violence!' the room full of white feminists exclaimed! Even just thinking about violence appeared dangerous. How to imagine a world otherwise if that which already exists is a threat, and thinking it extra present is not allowed?

In a 1970 TV interview, philosopher and activist Angela Davis was asked whether she agreed with the Black Panthers' use of violence. The journalist had to visit her in jail, where Davis would be for two years, charged for a crime she didn't commit. Davis replied: you are asking me about violence? It's impossible to *turn* to violence if you live in and with violence every day. How could she make an intellectual statement about approving or disapproving violence? Judgment, (dis)approving, requires a distance, the possibility to choose whether to invite something as part of your life or not. In response, Davis started accumulating examples of the daily violations black and brown people experience. To be constantly surrounded by white policemen; mass incarceration; to be maimed and murdered by KKK bombs, such as the 1963 bomb that killed four teenage women in a Birmingham, Alabama church.

Portraying the experience of daily violence can be a commemorative act, claiming the tangibility of a collective experience that is silenced as personal trauma. Portraying the experience of daily violence can also be prophetic. Claiming space for violence can create visionary tales. The 1983 documentary-style fiction *Born in Flames* imagines an attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. The attack is organized by a radical lesbian anti-racist and anti-capitalist army of feminists to prevent further distribution of heteronormative messages. The movie ends with an image of the World Trade Center burning. Octavia Butler's dystopian *Parable of the Talents* includes a newly elected president who promises to '*make America great again*', while protagonist Lauren Oya Olamina survives rape and slavery. The book is set in 2032. Butler's novel was published in 1998, almost twenty years before Donald Trump's campaign. In *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance*, Sandra Ruiz introduces a series of images titled *Puerto Ricans Underwater/Los ahogados*. Photographer ADÁL portrayed people in a bathtub. They seem to be drowning, gasping for air, while their profession, societal role or religious practice is recognizable by the tools floating in the water or suggested by the clothes they wear. ADÁL portrayed the sense of an island in debt. Ruiz describes: 'in seeing this breathless subject, we, too, are left without breath' (5). *Puerto Ricans Underwater* was made before Hurricane Irma hit. The characters of *Born in Flames*, Octavia Butler, and photographer ADÁL are often conceived as marginalized, as lives supposedly waiting for improvement by the linear progression of time. But, the future was already in their present. They didn't wish away the violence they experienced—buying into the repeated promise that someday they too will have access to a prosperous future—they used it as a lens, a frame, a speculative quality.

I'm running out of breath accumulating examples of violent, sensational acts that attempt to refuse the status quo. I propose to experience a common lack of air. Hold your breath while reading what's next. There will be three symbols, each meant to designate thirty seconds: one for slow readers (!), one for average readers (#), and finally one for quick readers ($). Categorize yourself and start breathing again only when you encounter your personal symbol. We start now. Breathe in, not out.

Of course, this shared lack (of air) is a performance of collectivity. It's a way to underline how we are similarly implied, similarly addressed. I don't mean to say we can claim similarity on the basis of experiencing something similar. How do we share without reducing, untangling, grasping, understanding, categorizing into overlaps? We cannot claim someone else's nerves, successes, struggles and wounds and say 'yours is just like mine'. *Love is love: your gay love may be like my straight love.* (!) Understanding another person's position, perceiving another person's humanity, may well be where cruelty ignites, writes Paul Bloom in a *New Yorker* piece titled "The Root of All Cruelty?". To humiliate another person is to be able to understand what would humiliate them. (#) Wherever shared experience is marked enthusiastically, there must be a constructed lack of a shared ontology. Bridges are built to emphasize gaps. Where something is marked as a negative difference, amends can be sold. ($)
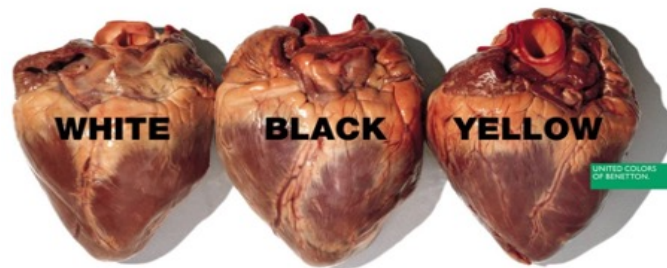

*Image 1: "United Colors of Benetton hearts
White Black Yellow"*

Thirty seconds. For the slow readers timed at 'straight love', for the average reader at 'humiliate them' and for the fast reader at 'be sold'. An imprecise thirty seconds is how long it took for Eric Garner to stop breathing after he was grabbed by a New York police officer and brought to the ground. It happened on Staten Island, near Garner's own house. The police suspected Garner was selling cigarettes. Garner was, as he exclaimed, just minding his own business. Video footage released on social media reveals him saying: 'I'm minding my own business officer, why do you keep bothering me?' In one exhausted sentence Garner addressed the repetition of it all: 'keep bothering' addresses continuation and Garner very clearly calls the cop 'officer', underlining he cannot possibly forget or ignore the power of this uniform.

Violence happens upon you. But that's not really true for everyone. As a white cis woman with passport privilege, I can say I'm interested in violence. *Interested in, interested in.* Violence doesn't surround me. It may happen to me, but I would perceive it as an extraordinary event, a happening. I approach violence. *I approach, I approach*—there's enough comfortable distance to repeat my sentence and imagine it echoing.

I saw Aleshea Harris' play *Is God Is* performed in New York, in the Soho Rep Theatre. It tells the tale of twin sisters who visit their mother on her deathbed. They haven't seen their mom in ages: they thought she had died in an accident. Upon their visit in the hospice, their barely breathing mother tells them what actually happened: she ran away and pretended to be dead, after their jealous father set her on fire. The mother's story explains why the sisters have burn scars visibly covering their bodies: they tried hugging her to stop the fire. As the girls were young enough to forget, the mother was convinced her daughters would be better off without her—an angry woman with alligator skin. But now, she cannot die. She cannot die in peace while their father is alive. The mother demands of her daughters to hunt him down and kill him. To release his haunt on her. 'I want him dead, real dead', she dictates, adding 'real'—knowing there are different kinds of dead like there are different kinds of snow. The sisters want to please their long-lost mom and promise her to do it: 'Yes god'. Out of god's sight, however, the twins agree: we are not killers. They will soon find out that you don't have to *be* something in order to *do* something.

The twins go down south, into the US desert. The trip is difficult and exhausting, but they find their father, who is living with a new wife and a new pair of twins; sons this time. One of the sisters exclaims: I'm so so tired. She is too tired to do anything. It's so hot she can barely move. But when everything goes sour, she resorts to violence and kills. Her weapon: a stone in a sock, swinging till blood. She is too tired for anything, but violence energizes.

When tired turns violent. Last summer, I broke my hand. I was so angry that I was tired of being angry and being tired made me violent. I was in the countryside of France that summer as well: no fire on the horizon just a horizon of fire. I broke my hand hitting a white wall. The white wall stood firm. I looked for a mark, even just a sigh of hurt on the wall's surface. But nothing. My pinky broke at its joint and the doctors and the internet told me how common this is, 'a boxer's hand' they call it. The French doctor was surprised, he usually only encounters men with this extremely common injury. I've heard this before. I've also learned that on a scale from one to ten I should never say five because they'll let you go home with a broken bone. Five is only a medium sad face, and medium is nothing because women are expected to exaggerate their pain.

A queer party, unrelated to the early morning that David Buckel lit himself on fire, but also in Brooklyn. Someone is wearing a shirt that says *Queer Army, We are recruiting.* They invite me to a self-defense training for queer and trans people. We are flirting—which may be the nighttime version of recruitment. I tell them I'm interested, but that I'm unsure about the 'defense'. Could it also be a queer attack training?

We speak about the word army on their t-shirt, which we both feel maybe shouldn't be reproduced even though the addition of 'queer' to army is clearly meant to subvert. As the night proceeds, my vision becomes creamy, 'creamy as a library'. The shirt starts to blur and instead of Army I read Amyra, a singer whose work I greatly admire. Amyra Leon made a song called 'Burning in Birmingham', to commemorate the 1963 attack on the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. One of the many violent events Angela Davis mentioned in her TV interview from jail. Amyra's song was inspired by Sarah Collins. As a young girl, Collins lost her sister and best friends. They were all

together in the bathroom of the church when the bomb went off. The names of those who died live on, but Collins, who survived, is barely mentioned. The attack left Collins nearly blind. She is now over seventy, missing an eye. She has worked her whole life as a maid to pay medical bills. State funding or reparations were never offered to her. So Amyra wrote 'Burning in Birmingham' and started a fundraising to collect financial support and recognition for Sarah Collins. Amyra, Army.

Playwright Aleshea Harris, in an interview about *Is God Is*, says: 'it's like women don't even get to be Jesus. Jesus gets beaten and then dies right after being beaten, so he doesn't even have to endure'. Surviving is a form of violence. Survival doesn't just mean 'getting through'. Survival is also used as a methodology to inflict violence. In *The Right To Maim*, Jasbir K. Puar describes how the Israeli government deliberately wounds and maims Palestinians and inhabitants of Gaza, rather than kill them. Casualties are international news. Maiming people—aiming to hurt and creating disability— is less of a newspaper story, but it effectively damages a community. When the mobility of one person changes, their whole family and surrounding kin have to change their daily infrastructure.

Image 2: Shaun Leonardo drawing

I once participated in a self-defense exercise, taught by visual artist and martial arts fighter Shaun Leonardo. Leonardo has extensively studied the footage that showed how Eric Garner was attacked, telling the cops sixteen times: 'I can't breathe'. Leonardo showed us the drawings he made. Drawings in which the police officers are white shadows.

Leonardo then proposed to practice a gesture of self-defense: we had to pair up in twos—an attacker and a defender. The performed attacker grabs your wrists. Leonardo showed how to release this grip. You turn your thumbs up, so that for a split second your palms are facing each other. Then you push up and out, your thumbs now point away from your body. All of this happens in one quick move. It's a very simple gesture that always works, regardless how strong your attacker is. After we all got the hang of it, Leonardo explains that the same gesture was performed by Garner. When an officer grabbed his wrists, he pulled up and out the same way as we had just practiced, freeing himself from the clutch of the cop. The cop perceived this as an aggressive, antagonistic move. His colleague quickly jumped in to assist, attacking Garner from behind and wrestling him to the ground. Self-defense only tightened the cop's control. The difference between

attack and defense is not hidden in the act, differentiation isn't granted to Garner because he is black. Leonardo is teaching us that no amount of self-defense practice can protect from a racist imagination.

> Because white men can't
> police their imagination
> black men are dying.
>
> – Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014, 135)

Claudia Rankine and John Lucas, 'Situation One'
🎥 https://poets.org/text/video-situation-one

Is a pre-emptive strike anything different from attack? If we are stuck in a cycle of violence, can it be broken by queering our methods of attack—aimed to dismantle a societal reality that's so deeply attached to inequality that the tools to tear down are the same that construct? Should a queer attack have an aim at all? What would an armless aimless army of vulnerables look like, move like? *Army* like Amyra, sweetening the term the way feminine names are used to describe an approaching hurricane. I imagine a broken, fragmented unit. Fractured and brazenly sprayed. There is no need for an initiation ceremony to create a sense of collectivity. We are already broken—it has already been done. An army of vulnerables does not own shit. We do not own shit— we do not own big expensive weapons nor can we give them to countries in order to coerce them into commercial trade with us. We are not part of a country. We are neither defined by lines nor by borders. We do not own shit. We do not know our shit, we are not professionals, we are not trained over and over repeating the same exercise to carry out a plan and protocol when shit hits the fan. The shit hitting the fan has been our repetitive exercise. We do not turn to shelters to hide from the trouble, as any safety measure that's offered can also be withheld. We are amateurs, we learn as we practice and forget what we have learned because sometimes the lesson and the pain are too closely related. We change and transform our methods and weapons and love tactics before we know them well. We sleep long nights, we rest, refusing capitalist burn-outs that make us protocol-zombie through motions. The future is not a factory product, the future is our past that wasn't recognized. We do not own shit. If anything, we steal. As an impeccable warrior uniform, I conceal my lips with a lipstick of a brand name I cannot share, because it is covered with a 'Tester' sticker. Other lips have tried this. Everything continues in a testing phase.

Weapons
Shard #78 of the armless aimless army of vulnerables

A gun only shoots one way. You can fire hundreds of bullets by pulling the trigger once, but the bullets always shoot one way. The bullets go where you point the barrel. Imagine a weapon that would always fire two bullets at once: one forwards, the usual way, and one backwards, towards the shooter, the person holding and aiming the gun. Or, in the case of a drone discharging: the person that's holding the joystick. How many bullets would be fired then? Would the amount of people dying from gun assault logically double – two for every shot – or would the rates actually drop below the current number? In homicide cases with a female victim, half of the time it is an incident of 'domestic violence'. If guns were designed with a two-way pointing barrel, the nuclear home would finally be blown. Fuck queer politics trying to disrupt heterornormative family structures, the dudes themselves would do it.

Why are we so accustomed to the shape of a gun, to the barrel going one way, one direction. Why do we assume this is 'the nature' of a gun, as if guns are growing from trees?

When do we recognize violence as violence?
Shard #12 of the armless aimless army of vulnerables

Prison abolitionist activist and transformative justice organizer Mariame Kaba stresses that we recognize some people as predators and criminals while 'Uncle Joe' can behave however he wants, because 'that's just Uncle Joe' (Hayes 2019). Whom we recognize as violent and whose behavior we view as normal is completely dependent on how we categorize the person that hurts us, how we estimate their intention and whether we are dependent on their approval.

As an exercise to recognize: choose a curse word that you have heard often. Possibly the curse word is not easily recognizable as a curse. It could be a care-taker telling you you are gaining weight, it could be a girl told they're loud, a boy told they're shy, it could be anything *too*. Too much. Or not enough. It could be the bumper sticker that says 'Baby On Board' – implying some life is worth more than others, saying reproduction is awarded with special care. It could be a touch, a smell, a phrase or a repeated reductive compliment. Take this curse, write it down or draw it. Repeat it, and with each repetition, imagine every time you have heard it. You may repeat as many times as you wish – adding beyond your memory as a pre-emptive strike for future assault. Continue from the past into the future, write a script for the curse that has been haunting you. By imagining and designing future hurt, it becomes your script. It becomes easier to recognize an attack, a violation as you have designed it. It no longer happens upon you. You have seen it coming.
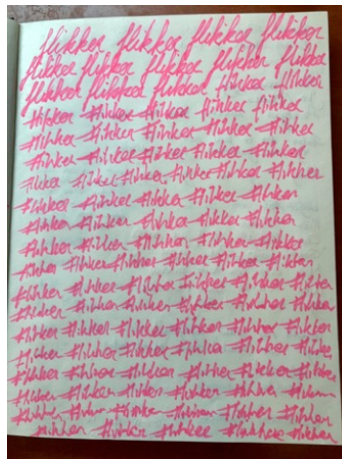
In school, we learn about conflicts in history books. Our vision on violence can grow more attuned to subtle and small and quotidian events. Our focus should be on recognizing violence in different forms, instead of celebrating the ability to spot and call out predators. If we train our vision to see predators and violators, we tend to recognize what we have seen before. We target instead of think.

Most things portrayed as an inevitable side-effect – 'it comes with the job' – signify naturalized violence. A lack of intentionality can be a form of violence in itself. Ava DuVernay directed and wrote the fiction series *When They See Us*, about the men who were convicted and media-known as the 'Central Park Five'. As young boys from Harlem, New York City, they were accused of attacking and raping a jogger in the park. *When They See Us* reveals how they were set up as predators, while there wasn't any real evidence against them. The 'exonerated five' appeared in Oprah's show to talk about the series and how it felt to see their story played by actors. The prosecutor in charge of their case was Linda Fairstein, a white woman who could have easily been read as a feminist, as her main motivation to solve this case seemed to be her anger about the assault women experience every day. Her strong-headed, career-oriented attitude could also easily be read as feminist, living the *Lean In* dream. Korey Wise, the one teen charged as an adult because he was sixteen, then tells Oprah about prosecutor Fairstein: "She was just doing her job."

It's the most painful truth: her abuse is not personal, it is not extraordinary. It's her job. Anyone doing a job probably violates. Many are violated into the jobs that violate. We recognize violence where there is a job to be done.

As an army of vulnerables, we are not fighting to redeem our pain or to fulfill a desire for revenge. We will break the link between punishment and justice. In response to harm, we will attempt and fail and attempt to perform transformative justice. Without preset methodologies to counter evil, we will always doubt who and what defines evil. We ourselves have been defined as evil, simply because we were caught in the gaze that decides. 'because white men can't / police their imagination / black men are dying.'

We are fighting, because we cannot accept the current status quo. We cannot accept the accepted that shapes our society. Thus it is very easy to find our allies: we become a 'we' with everyone who longs to radically disturb the status quo. We fight with everyone who does not wish to keep things the way they are. We fight against everyone who only aims to improve what already exists. The aimless don't take what already exist as a beginning to build from.

Our aimless aim: to end the world as we know it. To end the world as we know it (as formulated by Denise Ferreira da Silva, or proposed by sci-fi writer N.K. Jemisin in The Fifth Season: 'Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we? Get it over with and move on to more interesting things'), means to centralize the perspectives of those who have been living like survivors and see the end of the world as a future.

Then who do we fight? Those who want to keep things the way they are. Those who may say they dislike inequality and injustice, that we can do a bit better, but that we should be careful. Careful not to destruct our current position, our current wealth or welfare state, our current hegemony, our enlightenment. Those who cling to the way things are, maybe even dream of past eras in which, supposedly, things were a little less 'complex', a little less multitude. Those who would like to remain in the present.

It is thus very easy to spot opposition. Just ask: would you like to keep things the way they are? If the answer is yes, fight.

Back to France, sipping beer, a summer's terrace. Back to where this wander started, making a neat circle. Inspired by the far away *feu* in the field, Ada, the woman who I'm strangers with, tells me about her work as a blacksmith and sculptor. '*To manipulate a material as persistent as iron into something organic; the beauty of that. It's the oldest practice in the world. It all started with making tools. Tools became weapons.*' Her cheeks glow red: '*Did you know that Jesus' cross is an upside-down sword?*'

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Biography

Simon(e) van Saarloos (1990, Summit, New Jersey) is a writer, philosopher and performer living between Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Brooklyn, New York City. They published several books in Dutch including *Ik deug / deug niet* (a collection of columns originally published in the Dutch national newspaper NRC), *De vrouw die* (a novel on a molecular biologist running the NYC marathon in a burqa) and *Enz. Het Wildersproces* (a feminist and queer report of the trial against the Dutch right- wing politician Geert Wilders). Their latest book, titled *Herdenken herdacht*, is a non-fiction work about queer forgetfulness, white erasure and embodied commemoration. Simon(e)'s first book, *Het monogame drama*, was recently translated into English and is now titled *Playing Monogamy* (published by Publication Studio). Simon(e) also writes and performs theatre and regularly appears on stage as a lecturer and interviewer. Currently, they're an MA student at the Dutch Art Institute. Their recent artist residencies include the Deltaworkers in New Orleans, Louisiana; the Kavli Institute of Nanoscience, Delft and the Be Mobile Create Together at IKSV, Istanbul.

ALTERING BODIES:
THINKING OF INTERVENTION
THROUGH IMPERSONATION

NIKI HADIKOESOEMO KU LEUVEN, BELGIUM

Introduction

Plato's *Ion* (c. 413 BCE) is arguably one of the earliest philosophical works in the Western tradition to examine the intoxicating effects of performance (Nails 2002, 175–176; Plato 2007, 1–4 and 2014; Rijksbaron 2007). At first glance, Ion's rhapsodic performance, which consists mainly in reciting Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is put on display by Socrates in order to secure a philosophical argument regarding the absence of knowledge in the creation and interpretation of poetry (see Nagy 2009). According to Socrates, Ion lacks both theoretical (*epistēmē*) and practical knowledge, skill, or craft (*tekhnē*). Instead, Ion's success is the result of divine inspiration and possession (*enthusiasm*), transmitted through the workings of the Muse. Consequently, in context of the ideal Greek society that Socrates has in mind, the rhapsodist is placed on the same bench as the poets in so far as both practices endanger the quest for systematic, theoretical knowledge and truth.

On second glance, although not necessarily contradicting the first reading, the *Ion* discusses the conditions of performative intoxication in terms of questioning its limits and possibilities, and of deliberating its effects on performer and spectator. This perspective by-passes Socrates' ideal of theoretical inquiry with respect to performing altogether because it is based on a distinctive *rhapsodic* craft that Ion acknowledges but that Plato's character, Socrates, does not (want to) consider. While both perspectives are acknowledged and discussed by scholars, the second

reading of the *Ion* is still largely underexposed. Therefore, the quest for the experiential foundations of rhapsodic crafting as well as its inherent critical potential remains generally untouched with respect to the *Ion* specifically. This article foregrounds the second approach in light of developing an account of performative intoxication as a strategy for critical intervention. By taking Ion's 'own', first-person perspective as its starting point, we see that the figure of the rhapsode is not necessarily and solely passively subjected to the Muse's doings, as Socrates claims. Rather, he masters the craft of using his intoxicated and intoxicating appearance in order to display and subvert what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls "the comedy of the world" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 264).

Instead of making general claims about what the *Ion* fundamentally is about, this article aims to address an ancient problem that appears as a recurring theme in Western thought and gains interest in contemporary debates concerning performance and immanence (Cull 2012; Rokem 2017); namely, theatrical mimesis as an embodied, non-representational concept (Gebauer and Wulf 1995; Murray 1997; Potolsky 2006) and the anthropological notion of imitation as contagion and intoxication (Girard 1974; Nancy 2015; Tarde 2010). In that context, Plato's *Ion* is placed precisely at the tension point between philosophy and literature, embodying "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (see also Corby 2015; Plato 2013a), hovering between the intoxicating power of performance and the quest for critical reasoning.

Martin Puchner's *Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theatre and Philosophy* (2010) made a significant contribution in that regard by foregrounding the continuity of Platonic thought in drama. This article owes much to *Drama of Ideas* and takes cues from Puchner's suggestion to look beyond the seeming "anti-theatricality" of philosophical texts in general and Plato's *Ion* more specifically (Barish 1985; Rozzoni 2013, 120). Puchner argues that Plato's critique of Greek tragic theatre, comedy, actors and poets should be considered as an intrinsic component of his own philosophical style of reasoning:

> His critique, however, must be understood not as that of an outsider but as that of a rival; he was not an enemy of theater but a radical reformer. Attacking many features of Athenian theater, he sought to create an alternative form of drama, the Socratic dialogue. (Puchner 2010, 5)

My reading of the *Ion* complements Puchner's account of philosophical thought with a corporeal component: taking the performer (Ion) as a starting point entails taking seriously the physical implications of conveying thought via forms of impersonation. Performing qua intoxicating does not refer to the transmission of thought only but also, and perhaps even more importantly, the transference of affect and emotion. In my view, what must be considered with respect to the practice of impersonation as a potentially critical tool is the quest for what it means for an embodied subject to impersonate and, correlatively, how that relates to affecting the body of the audience. After all, how can one account for intervention if one does not *experience* something as rupture (of thought, habit, normality, etc.)? This embodied approach will guide us in discussing the following questions. Is performative intoxication referring to a passive or active state? How does the actor's intoxication differ from the audience's? What relation between passivity and activity do

we have to presuppose in order for an intoxicating practice to result in intervention? Why is impersonation the intoxicating practice par excellence to provoke catharsis as well as critique?

I will assess these questions by starting with a detailed account of Ion's intoxicated and intoxicating nature. According to Socrates, Ion is so successful in portraying Homer's poetic verses because (a) he is intoxicated by his Muse, receiving his power directly from the divine, and (b) he is in turn able to intoxicate his audience through passive transmission. I will discuss this problematic on the basis of Socrates' analogy with the Heraclean lodestone as it explains intoxication as equally an activating, productive, and empowering mechanism. Moreover, it highlights Ion's paradox of performing: he is possessed yet in control; he is passionately affected by Homer's verses but manages to masterfully direct the crowd with the nuances of his voice; he is a mere stand-in while being an expert in his field; he is in a state of pure exaltation yet he does not lose himself in trance or hysteria. In other words, passive and active forces seem to be paradoxically intertwined in the act of performing.

Secondly, I will turn to Denis Diderot's famous paradox of the actor—"it is just because he is nothing that he is before all everything" (Diderot 1957, 41)—in order to reevaluate Ion's paradox in a modern context. There are astonishing similarities between the apparent contradictions at play in Ion's performing and Diderot's account of the actor's practice, especially considering the 2000-year gap between the historical Socrates and Diderot. According to Diderot, it is because the actor is capable of keeping a clear head while being possessed, that he reaches the genius of the greatest philosophers (Diderot 1957, 18, 46). If the ancient rhapsode is "held" by his Muse, what is Diderot's actor infatuated by? And how does it allow for grounded critique? In order to understand what Diderot has in mind we have to briefly sketch out three central points of his original thesis: the problem of sensibility (*sensibilité*), the creation of an ideal imaginary model (*le modèle idéal imaginé*) and the importance of judgement (*jugement*). I will discuss these issues respectively and directly in relation to Ion's rhapsodic performing, which provides the conceptual basis for what the twentieth century French philosopher and literary critic Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe will help us to develop further in the final part of this essay, namely to regard the actor's paradox as that which undermines the passive / active opposition, on the basis of which the logos (i.e. theatre) of the world operates. The figure of the actor doubles the theatre framework, that is, he/she intervenes by creating a theatre within a theatre. With the use of his/her impersonating skills, the actor is in the unique position to exhibit, ridicule and critique *playfully* the world's theatre of intoxication.

Ion, the Heraclean magnet and performance as possession

One entry into Socrates' account of the figure of the rhapsode is Socrates' own 'poetic move' in the *Ion.* Anticipating an argument by analogy, Socrates introduces somewhere in the middle of the dialogue the metaphor of the Heraclean magnet. The ancients often used the metaphor of the lodestone in order to explain the magnetism involved in divine inspiration. For example, the god Apollo intervenes in the poet's creation by providing his knowledge and power to the Muse, who will transmit that knowledge by inspiring the poet (Klooster 2011, 223). A magnetic force links Apollo with the Muse and the poet, much like how a lodestone attracts iron rings. Socrates argues

that, in the same way as the poet, the rhapsode is intoxicated by his Muse: "For, as I was saying just now, this is not an art [*tēkhne*] in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call 'Heraclea Stone'" (Plato 2014, 533d). Socrates understands rhapsodic performance not as art or craft [*tēkhne*] but as a mediating practice of being "held fast" [*ekhein*] by the Muse. Like the Heraclean stone, poetic evocation is explained as a "long chain" of rings: the first ring [*prētoi daktulioi*] is Homer, which is connected to the middle ring, being Ion, which is connected to the last ring, being the spectators [*theatai*]. Let us look a bit more closely at the logic behind the analogy:

> For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain. For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed. (533d-e)

The performing rhapsode is, according to Socrates, a link in a transmission chain, which is based on a dynamic of inspiration transferred from ring to ring, which initially moves top-down, so to speak: there is a divine power in the form of the Muse on top, which possesses the poet (Homer in this case), which transfers divine power to Ion on stage, who channels that inspiration through his reciting and infects the audience with his intoxicated nature. There is thus a link between rhapsodic performance, magnetism and the idea of intoxication. Ion magnetizes the audience with his ecstatic performance, who will then be spiritually contaminated with the divine, similar to a contagious poison. It is precisely the performative power of bringing people in high spirits that Plato will use to regard rhapsody as an irrational endeavor. In the dialogue, Socrates forces (or ironically seduces) Ion in admitting that finally his practice is neither based on theoretical (*epistēmē*) or practical knowledge, craftmanship or skill (*tekhnē*), nor on interpretation or creative expression but on sole *transmission*: he is just one link in a chain, as is Homer and the audience. Crucially, indeed, the spectators are not outside or opposite the performance but equally partake in the magnetic chain of transmission; "your spectator is the last of the rings which I spoke of as receiving from each other the power transmitted from the Heraclean lodestone" (535e). Simply on the basis of the divine powers that translate through the attraction of the Muses alone, one cannot truly distinguish between the affected roles of poet, spectator and performer. All involved are equally equipped and devoted to becoming contaminated by a 'higher ring' (Murray 1996, 123). Or, as Prashant Bagad put it: "the experience—and the understanding of the world inherent in, or accompanying, that experience—that the poet has, is not different *in kind* from the experience that the rhapsode and an audience undergo" (2016, 258). All participants seem to be under the same spell of passive intoxication.

Rhapsodic performers are mediums, they are deprived of reason "in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits, but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them" (Plato 2014, 534d). To

anticipate Plato's later phrase in Book 10 of the *Republic* in which he classifies the poets as producing copies of copies—"they're three stages removed from reality" (Plato 2013a, 599a)—Ion is a transmitter of a transmitter, or an "interpreter of an interpreter" (Plato 2014, 535a). His mind, body and soul are completely intoxicated by Homer's verses: "For I will tell you without reserve: when I relate a tale of woe, my eyes are filled with tears; and when it is of fear or awe, my hair stands on end with terror, and my heart leaps" (535c). As this movement is based on a doctrine of enthusiasm (from Greek *en-theos*, in-God; i.e. to be possessed by the gods, to be in ecstasy) no intellectual operation or critical analysis could intervene in this flow. At least not in the obvious, reflective, manner. This counts for all parties involved. It is important to emphasize once more that the analogy with the Heraclean lodestone enables Socrates to give an account of the performer as a fundamentally decentered figure. His practice is only intelligible when understood in its undertaking in light of a poetic sphere that partly transcends him or her.

Ion agrees more or less with everything that Socrates has argued so far except for one point. He shares with Socrates the idea that in order to move the audience he must surrender to the divine powers at work in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. His *technai* are harmony, meter and rhythm, much like in a spectacle of worshipping, rather than reason or artistic crafting. Ion is not convinced, however, that his intoxication reduces him to a madman (p. 536 d-e). In order to convey his point, Ion draws attention to his connection with the audience, which is, according to him, necessarily *dual*. Let us dissect that duality on the basis of the passage where Ion subtly and subversively intervenes into Socrates' 'monologue'. Socrates suggests that the magnetic force, the power that links Ion's ring with the ring of the audience, results in spectators imitating Ion's emotional expressions while watching him: "And are you aware that you rhapsodes produce these same effects on most of the spectators also?" (535d). Ion agrees but adds a fundamental supplement to this discovery:

> Yes, very fully aware: for I look down upon them from the platform and see them at such moments crying and turning awestruck eyes upon me and yielding to the amazement of my tale. For I have to pay the closest attention to them; since, if I set them crying, I shall laugh myself because of the money I take, but if they laugh, I myself shall cry because of the money I lose. (535e)

Ion claims to undergo extreme emotional episodes but, in the meantime, also checks whether these evocative affairs produce the desired effects in the audience. How can one be fully intoxicated by the divine and at the same time overcome that state in order to observe and evaluate the transformations of the spectators? This double act entails two things. First, it means that the dynamic of intoxication, as explained by Socrates on the basis of the metaphor of the magnet, moves not only 'downward' but also 'upward', in the sense of the audience sending divine inspiration back, not all the way up to Apollo, but at least up to the rhapsode. Second, the magnetic force goes both ways but *only* with respect to the act of the rhapsode. It is only Ion's ring that is capable of introducing and maintaining the magnetic chain in terms of securing its two-way dynamic. In order to accomplish this, it is required of him that he performs that paradoxical double bind: to be "*held*," "*possessed*" by higher powers (536b), while retaining the critical capacity of

observing the audience and assessing their emotional expressions. In turn, Ion understands his own divine affection as the necessary condition for the spectator's discovery of Homer's genius. More elaborately even, in and through the embodied expression of Homer's poetry, Ion apprehends himself and is conceived by the audience as the instigator of divine powers at work in the audience and takes responsibility for its success and failure. According to Ion, mastering this double bind is neither based on natural talent nor on practical craft shared by all artists but is unique to rhapsodic performance.

Homer the poet is purely and solely inspired by his Muse. He does not have to worry about the performative possibilities of his verses nor with the manner in which the theatrical (or educational) materialization of his text intoxicates the audience. As long as the poet is inspired, he can create. He does not need that dual role in the chain in order for his work to come to completion. One could argue, by distinction, that the rhapsode must always receive the magnetic force back from the audience in the form of facial expressions, gestures or perhaps an affirmative or dismissive exclamation every now and then to be able to continue his/her performance. The fact that spectators are an important source of information and inspiration for the rhapsode is not a secondary issue. Ion would simply be out of work if he failed to accurately perceive and translate the audience's responses.

Socrates made a real effort of explaining rhapsodic reciting as an all-encompassing, contaminating practice in which all participants are connected with one another. The power of Homer's verses in terms of being affected by them on an emotional level is made possible by the condition of transmission: a force of inspiration that travels from one party to another. Socrates and Ion agreed that Ion and the audience share the experience of being filled by the divine. Moreover, if Ion succeeds in his task, he will see his own transformations imitated in the audience. This insight suggests that the so-called protean nature of Ion does not belong to Ion alone but is equally transmitted to or already at place in the audience members. In fact, this nuance can be found in the short passage we reviewed earlier: "For this stone not only attracts iron rings, *but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing* as the stone, and attract other rings" (Plato 2014, 533d; my emphasis). In other words, the audience appears emotionally affected by Homer's beautiful poetry but is equally apt to transfer those affects to others. Surely, Ion's performance would not have such an impact if it did not also presuppose the malleability of an audience. But why, in contrast to Ion, do spectators not consider themselves participants in the play, even though they are equally considered transmitters of affects? This brings me to a second remark.

Socrates argues that Ion's role consists in channeling Homer's genius without the interference of knowledge, skill or science. This seems to imply that practically anyone could replace him. The opening of *Ion*, however, indicates quite the opposite: Socrates meets his interlocutor shortly after his return from Epidaurus, where he won first prize in a competition (*agōn*) of rhapsodes. There is something special about Ion. In fact, Socrates acknowledges that he is dealing with someone who knows what he is doing. Hence, the irony of the dialogue cuts both ways: Socrates' suggestive argumentation forces Ion into a position of ridicule and folly. However, the fact that he invests so

much time and effort in dissecting Ion's practice expresses a deeply rooted interest in the man behind his many forms. Moreover, the dialogue ends so abruptly that Ion's final agreement seems to be more of a friendly (albeit naive) gesture than a philosophically valid confirmation of what was being argued as Ion's most serious objections are ignored. Moreover, the irony of the text places "Socrates on the stage," as Puchner would argue (Puchner 2010, 37–72). The indecisiveness of the dialogue's philosophical stakes makes-visible Plato as the writer of a sort of play where the characters of Ion and Socrates are evocative figures designed for animating the reader.

As Penelope Murray explains, Ion's objections boil down to the distinction he tries to make between the factual content of Homer's poetry and its expression (Murray 1996, 130). Ion's talent lies in his ability to judge what performative voice each character requires in order to achieve the most emotional impact on the audience. The latter is a proper skill according to Ion (*rhapsēidikē tekhnē*, rhapsodic craft), and includes creative use of diction as well as what we nowadays would perhaps call emotional intelligence (as opposed to only logos or content). This expertise enables him to map out, converge and contrast his own expressions with those of the spectators. For this, Ion indeed does not need any factual knowledge about how the horseman treats his horse or how the fisherman throws his fishing net in the sea. But if the sailor, while sailing, is suddenly overcome with divine powers when hearing the unearthly voices of the Sirens, Ion surely needs to know what a sailor sounds like when being in such a state. Impersonating the Sirens' singing as well as the sailor's modes of intoxication requires of Ion taking on different characters or shapes (even if the rhapsode's performative genre is still that of reciting). Furthermore, on an actor's level, he has to be able to change pace, melody and intonation if people in the audience laugh at him because he appears ridiculous instead of tragically moved. Socrates fails to see or purposefully decides to ignore these skills.

Now that we have mapped out the performative layers of Ion's intoxicating rhapsody we can conclude, provisionally, that there is a paradox (from Greek *paradoxon*, *para-* 'contrary to' and *doxa* 'opinion', i.e. contrary to common belief) underlying Ion's act of performing. The dual nature of Ion's performing appears as a paradox, specifically when assessed against the background of Plato's views on rhapsody. Plato presupposes that being possessed by the Muse––like in the case of rhapsodic performance––necessarily excludes being in control. This view is not that far removed from our common belief regarding the idea of possession: you cannot be 'in-god' and 'with the world' simultaneously; being in ecstasy entails that one is lifted out of oneself and reaching a state of pure transcendence. One might say that the very essence of being possessed is to lose oneself, which entails losing touch with the world. Contrary to this common belief, Ion argues that these two modes can in fact co-exist. Being inspired by Homer's genius via the Muse is not contrary to enacting a well-crafted emotional scene on stage with necessary distance.

In the *Ion*, we have witnessed Ion's own awareness of this paradoxical state, despite Socrates' efforts to silence developing this issue further. The main aim of the second part is to pull apart, conceptually, the logic of paradox. It will enable us to address performative intoxication as not only passive but also inherently critical and distant, that is, a potential source for intervention. There are a few central questions at play. How can a performer distance himself/herself from his/her

intoxication considering that he/she is his/her own 'material'? How can Ion passively undergo the intoxications of his Muse *and* actively (re)present them? What is the role of the opposition between passivity and activity in relation to impersonation? We will analyze these issues following Diderot's analysis of the actor's paradox. Diderot's dialogue is helpful because it emphasizes the importance of the distinction between being and appearing. Indeed, Diderot conceptualizes, philosophically, where Ion seemed to be alluding to all along: an actor can represent emotions and/or characters without necessarily identifying with them (against the style of Romantic self-expression, for example). As Diderot explains, inspiration is necessary but only in so far as the actor proves capable of channeling that affection in terms of providing a set of theatrical signs (gestures, speech, facial expressions, etc.) that enable the spectators to be absorbed in the emotional live of the character (in contrast to Brechtian theatre, which aims at an alienation effect in the audience). This requires technique, experience and insight in the human condition. In order to develop this issue further I suggest we take a look at three central notions in Diderot's *Paradox*, namely, sensibility (*sensibilité*), the ideal imaginary model (*le modèle ideal imaginé*) and judgement (*jugement*). This will provide the conceptual basis for assessing the paradoxical intertwinement between inspiration or possession ('passive'), on the one hand, and critical distance ('active'), on the other. Finally, we will turn to Lacoue-Labarthe's deconstructive reading of Diderot in order to show that the very distinction between being passively written, on the one hand, and actively writing, on the other, is subjected to its very own theatre (i.e. logos), namely what he calls, following Diderot, the "theater of life" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 264).

Ion, Diderot's actor and productive paradox

In Diderot's famous phrase of the actor's paradox, "the great actor is everything and nothing" (1957, 41), the nothing refers mainly to the absence of *sensibilité*. *Sensibilité* represents for Diderot a totality of hypersensitive modes that originate in and around the diaphragm and which possesses someone's entire being:

> But what is a being possessed of sensibility? One abandoned to the mercy of his diaphragm; should a pathetic phrase strike his ear, a strange phenomenon meet his eye, of a sudden an inward tumult is set up, all the fibers of the bundle are agitated, a shudder runs through his frame, he is seized with horror, his tears flow, sighs choke him, his voice breaks, and the origin of the bundle does not know what it is doing: farewell to self-control, reason, judgement, instinct and resourcefulness. (Diderot 1999, 127)

Central in this fragment is the idea of becoming 'under the spell of' the movements of one's diaphragm. According to Diderot, *sensibilité* is an all-embracing state in which body and soul are taken over by impulses that originate in the in the midriff area, and are so powerful that they paralyze reason. It is important to note that for Diderot *sensibilité* does not equal feeling. The latter is a momentary state that an actor can easily distance himself/herself from or transform into an affective sign that fits the theatrical role. In fact, the ancient notion of magnetic enthusiasm as well as intoxication, which we saw discussed in the *Ion*, describes perfectly what Diderot has in mind

and he frequently uses these terms analogously to *sensibilité*; "he will bear you down with his fire and the intoxication of his emotions", "Cool reflection must bring the fury of enthusiasm to its bearings" (Diderot 1957, 17, 64). According to Diderot, enthusiasm is what characterizes mediocre actors: they throw themselves passionately into the role, are taken away by their desire for personal expression and completely forget about the aesthetic framework in which they operate. For Diderot, great acting is characterized by coherence and continuity of the role, which requires distance and reflection. If an actor is merely "at the mercy of his diaphragm" (Diderot 1999, 127), his performance might be brilliant one time but absolutely atrocious at other times (Diderot 1957, 12).

It seems as if Socrates wants to make of Ion a victim of what Diderot considers a problem of *sensibilité.* Clearly, in the case of rhapsody the intoxicating dynamic is a result of divine inspiration, not the actor's diaphragm as is the case in Diderot. In Diderot, enthusiasm refers to the actor's desire for self-expression, while, with Ion, it is the Muse who inspires or enthuses the performer. Despite this significant difference, Socrates' description of Ion's intoxicated rhapsody is strikingly similar to what Diderot detests in "'the man of sensibility'" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 263). How so? On the basis of the Heraclean stone, Socrates is able to account for divine power as an *engendering* mechanism: it has the ability to equally transfer the power of attraction to 'rings' outside itself. This dynamic is based on magnetism, infection or contagion, which works autonomously and most importantly disables the powers of reasoning. Just as "worshippers do not dance when in their senses" (Plato 2014, 421), the rhapsode is, according to Socrates, the mere embodiment of divine affections. Lacoue-Labarthe points out in that regard that the ancients and moderns tend to postulate enthusiasm and intoxication as equal to passion and passivity, connecting it to "possession, delirium, hysteria, and collective mania", and "femininity" (for ancient precursors of "hysteria," see King 2006; Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 263; Diderot 1957, 18). Ion is convinced that he is not at all a victim of this kind of intoxicated madness and argues that his expertise (*rhapsēidikē tekhnē*) requires hard work and 'know-how' about the dramas of Homer's characters. Indeed, his position comes much closer to the pragmatist approach that Diderot favors in detached actors; actors who base their practice on observation, experience, judgement and labor are truly sublime. In that sense, Diderot would applaud Ion's rhapsodic craft.

The first sign of the paradox appears when we dissect the notion of intoxication. Both the sublime actor in Diderot and the rhapsode in Plato characterize their performing in terms of being intoxicated by something other or foreign. At the same time they claim to have self-control, "stillness and self-command" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 262). The Muse is Ion's 'other'. In Diderot, the great actor is—in contrast to the mediocre actor who is possessed by the movements in his/her diaphragm—intoxicated by his/her so-called imaginary model (*le modèle idéal imaginé*). The artistic model is a perfected imaginary figure, a "phantom," that is created by the actor during rehearsals, which functions as an artistic beacon or reference point for future performances (Diderot 1957, 40). This model only 'exists' insofar as the actor integrates it in and activates it through his/her bodily and psychic transformations. The phantom-figure does not pre-exist the theatre scene and it does not 'reside' somewhere in a transcendent (e.g. divine) realm. Furthermore, the model molds the actor but this does not result in a fixed state of being: the actor's materialization of the model

keeps changing in light of new information. Importantly, the model is not a mental image or picture in one's head but more like a unity of several (epistemic, emotional, psychological, practical, aesthetic) layers that capture the role's essence, and of which the actor becomes the physical expression. In order to give voice to the grandeur of the imagined figure, the performer has to be absolutely devoted to it and keep it in mind at all times. It is *this* dynamic engagement with the imaginary model that Diderot's performer is intoxicated by. For Diderot, being infatuated by an ideal imaginary refers to an active and creative use of memory, imagination, hard training and a clear mind. Thus, for Diderot, actors are not passive, and neither were the rhapsodes, according to Ion. In any case, this aspect of Diderot's paradox designates the possibility of being molded by something foreign (the model), where the model does not give the self a form but, rather, enables the self to become something completely fictive, imaginary, "a pure *no one*" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 264).

Let us zoom in on the latter statement. The imaginary model not only functions as the ongoing motivator for the creation, interpretation and presentation of the role, but also enables the actor to forget about himself/herself: it presents him/her as a 'nothing'. It is only when the model is well designed, that is to say, when it provides the creative tools for the engendering of a stage persona, that the actor can become nothing and thus potentially everything. This is Diderot's central thesis. Again, this double act is not passive but requires judgement (*jugement*). What kind of judgement does Diderot have in mind? Lacoue-Labarthe points to an example that Diderot gives in the *Paradox*, namely the case of Clairon (one of Diderot's favorite actors), which clarifies the issue at hand:

> When Clairon constructs her phantom, it 'is not herself' [...] 'following her memory's dream,' she is able 'to hear herself, see herself, judge herself, and judge also the effects she will produce. In such a vision she is double: little Clairon and the great Agrippina.' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 263)

Clairon's "vision" of her "phantom" performs the following act: the negation of the mundanity of her 'private', 'everyday' self (the fact that she is lying on a couch while she is envisioning her phantom, for example) is the necessary condition of the projection of the self against the background of one's past, present and future enactments of the phantom. Being intoxicated by the ideal imaginary implies a mechanism of self-forgetting, which in turn enables the actor to judge his/her impersonations from a third-person perspective and in light of the model. In sum, the model puts in motion a 'machinery' of fictioning—or as Jacques Derrida calls it in one of his footnotes in *Dissemination*, "a mimetological 'machine'" (Derrida 2007, 190)—which makes of the performer the playfield of both (active) judgement and wisdom as well as (passive) intoxicated material signifying nothing.

This insight sheds an interesting light on Ion's practical view on rhapsody. When Ion revives Homer's poetry, he activates an intoxicating dynamic that is, much like Diderot's imaginary model, based on craft, reflection and judgement. Moreover, the example of Clairon brings another crucial similarity with the rhapsode to the surface, namely the inclusion of the spectator. It is only on the basis of positing oneself in light of an ideal type—or in the case of Ion, the Muse—that one can

judge (a) the aesthetic value of one's own performance and (b) how one's performance affects the audience. There is a necessary, double alienation at play, which makes rhapsody a joined experience with the audience. This is crucial because it is the performer's responsibility to make every member of the audience complicit in these self-alienating, intoxicating workings. But, to rephrase my earlier question, how can one *actively* posit oneself as a project of self-alienation? How does this paradoxical play of passive and active forces affect the audience and, finally, result in intervention? In order to assess this issue, we have to look at the conditions of self-presentation, for which we will turn to Lacoue-Labarthe.

Lacoue-Labarthe, paradox and impersonation as intervention

There are two central theses in Lacoue-Labarthe's essay, 'Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis', which originally appeared in *Poétique* (1979), later collected in *L'imitation des modernes: Typographies II* (1986) and available in English in *Typography* (1989), that help us explain what kind of constitution of the self we have to presuppose in order to account for, on the one hand, intoxication as a passive undergoing of fictive models and, on the other, intoxication as an active, creative, productive mode. As we saw in Plato's *Ion* and Diderot's *Paradox*, the performer's concrete practice on stage does not allow for a mutual exclusiveness of the two modes: they imply one another. The actor must receive, i.e. channel, the model's creative force but equally present himself/herself as responsible for the proper working of the model. Lacoue-Labarthe's first thesis regards the subject's receptiveness for models and is based on a deconstructive take on the philosophical notion of mimesis. On the basis of a critical examination of the Platonic idea of imitation as imprinting the soul in *Republic* Book II and III, Lacoue-Labarthe will account for the self as *in se* plastic. The second thesis builds on the first in that it explains how the self as 'malleable wa*x*' is to be explained, namely as a continuous interplay between passive and active mimesis. Ultimately, Lacoue-Labarthe understands the constitution of the self as a play, a theatre, a comedy *to be performed*. This insight will finally enable us to evaluate intoxication as an actor's strategy to intervene in the logos of the world. But before we come to our concluding notes, let us elaborate on Lacoue-Labarthe's theses.

Lacoue-Labarthe shows that the idea of the intoxication of the self, of being "imprinted" with models, as he would say, goes back (again) to Plato and, more specifically, his concern regarding the molding of the souls of young children: "Things begin […] with the impression of the *type* and the impression of the *sign*, with the mark that language, 'mythic' discourses […] originally inscribe in the malleable – plastic – material of the infant soul" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 126). It leads us too far to discuss Plato's original theory of the soul here. What is especially important for our analysis is the idea of the human soul being a so-called "tabula rasa", an unwritten slate, which is a term coined by Aristotle, but that can be traced back to Plato's *Republic* Book II, which deals with the role of stories and models in education (Plato 2013b, 377a–383c). Plato's argument is that initially the child is considered neutral, blank, malleable material: "You know that the beginning of everything we undertake is most important, especially in any young tender creature? That is when it is most malleable and when whatever character you desire to be stamped on the individual is fixed." (Plato 2013b, 377a) Growing up, the child will be formed, shaped, "in-seminated" (in Lacoue-Labarthe's

words) by parental and societal representations of the gods, myths, historical tales, fables, and images (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 127). According to Plato, the model that shapes the child can, at least initially, be neatly distinguished from its neutral, 'basic' material. Lacoue-Labarthe points out that this presupposition is crucial for Plato because it enables him to develop his views on how a community should be created: the city rulers (philosopher-kings or guardians) are in charge of the education of citizens. Together with their helpers, they proactively shape young children far into their adulthood with models that represent the Just and the Good. Ideally, these educators know what an ideal society looks like and will, accordingly, choose the stories, types and figures that represent the citizens desired.

Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes that Plato's distinction between the human soul as tabula rasa, on the one hand, and the act of imprinting models onto that blank slate (by poets and teachers alike), on the other, assumes an opposition between "activity and passivity" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 126). Plato's idea of the making and shaping of citizens works on the basis of a conceptual distinction between receptacle wax that is *passive* and external 'hands' that *actively* mold the wax. Moreover, Plato's model hints at a teleological mimesis: we start with passive youngsters who will, with the help of well-informed external parties, slowly but surely become rational, moral agents, each individual earning their proper place in the ideal city. In Lacoue-Labarthe's reading, this presupposed opposition and teleology underlying mimetic practices are products of Plato's implicit desire to eliminate what remains unformed and equivocal. Lacoue-Labarthe will question whether there is not always something in the act of imitation that resists full identification with the represented models.

What is at stake for Lacoue-Labarthe is not to refute Plato's views on the interrelation between malleability and mimesis. Rather, he wants to argue that despite the subject's imitation of models and figures, which is in a way inevitable because of our inherent mimetic tendencies, the subject will remain malleable and unstable. He reformulates this claim in terms of the subject as lack: lacking substance, properties, character. In a sense, he applies Diderot's central claim in the *Actor's Paradox* (of the genius actor being essentially nothing) to the constitution of the self as such. Moreover, he characterizes the subject's lack of qualities as a "gift" in the sense that it enables the subject to become the 'author' of mimesis himself/herself and potentially the source of resistance: "For inasmuch as it implies a subject absent from itself, without properties or qualities, a subjectless subject, a pure *no one*, mimesis is by definition (so long as one is not frightened by it in advance) *active*" (264).

In the context of Lacoue-Labarthe's deconstruction of Plato's model, let us return to the theatre. How do these critical notes relate to the actor's practice and what kind of resistance and intervention does it account for? Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical position—one must be careful here as Lacoue-Labarthe purposefully backs away from making any philosophical claims himself; he characterizes his proceedings as no more than "rigorous hesitations" (Lawtoo; Ronell 2012, 262)—has undoubtedly always been informed by his love for and practice in the theatre. This is why the experience and pure excitement of "*passer au théâtre*" (see Bianchi; Kharlamov 2017) should play an integral part in our investigation. Let me first briefly summarize what we have

discussed so far. In line with Plato and Lacoue-Labarthe, one could say that the subject's malleable nature makes it impossible to not be constantly influenced by, 'figurated', and imprinted on by models (one can even think of models in terms of representations of gender, class, status, etc.), but Lacoue-Labarthe urges us to not take the logos of a (external, active) weaving of the fabric of a (passive, receptive) subject at face value (see his deconstruction of Plato). There is the risk of a philosophical impasse. Either we are completely in possession and the mere product of powers that exceed our understanding, in which case we indeed take intoxication to be passive. The other option is embracing the self as an unbound, fluid substance that can be perfected according to the models 'we' please, which implies that our imitated models fully overlap with our sense of identity.

It is not a coincidence that Lacoue-Labarthe turned (again) to Diderot for a 'way out' of this impasse (although it is my formulation of the problem not his). There is a decisive performative turn in Diderot's dialogue. At a critical point in the discussion about the actor's paradox, Diderot lets his interlocuters suspend their arguments and sends them off to the theatre; "our two talkers went to the playhouse" (Diderot 1957, 65). Lacoue-Labarthe points out that here, Diderot, the philosopher, takes up the role of the actor: "Diderot *plays* the theater: a second theater within the theater of the world, a re-theatricalization of the 'comedy' of the world'" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 265). For Lacoue-Labarthe, this is one of Diderot's playful (and philosophical) moves to show that there is a limit to theorizing the actor's practice. It reveals that simply deciding whether the actor is passively subdued or forms himself/herself actively, cannot be 'solved' theoretically. The decision is pure speculation as long as one is not oneself affected by its performative effects, which is why Diderot suddenly presents himself as the 'actor' or author of the dialogue. In so doing, Diderot seems to suggest that the experience of the theatre, be it as performer or spectator, *refuses* to decide on the matter once and for all. This explains Diderot's insistence on the logic of paradox. As Lacoue-Labarthe put it in one of his essays, "theatre is too brutal, too pitiless an art. It allows of no 'approach'" (Lacoue-Labarthe 2007, 203; McKeane 2015, 155). Jane Bennett points out in that regard that "every act of artistic mimesis will differ from all blueprints and inspirational ideas and dreams, insofar as the creative process always differs from itself *as it proceeds*" (Bennett 2017, 1198). Going (back) to the theatre is therefore a sort of imperative for Lacoue-Labarthe. It is precisely the paradox of coincidence and noncoincidence of the "scenic gesture" with itself (Kirkkopelto 2009) that connects the unstable status of the subject, mimesis, philosophy and the theatre with each other.

What emerges out of this comparison is then the active play of critique and mockery. It is important to not lose track of the experiential foundations of this insight. In and through our spontaneous grasping of the performer Ion as the embodied playfield of passive and active forces—intoxicated, yet in control—a horizon, or scene, of possible relations opens up. This horizon is shared by all spectators and allows for every individual to be affected by similar as well as different relations between the active and the passive (between typing and being-typed). In order to be truly touched by a theatrical scene, we have to have presented, 'announced' ourselves as the willingness to give up or suspend our need for deciding on our identity. In other words, there is a collective self-abandonment that allows for identification and which results in a joined intoxicated experience. This entails putting ourselves at the service of the paradox at play in the performer's modes of

impersonation. Yet, this kind of identification does not equal the passive undergoing of 'outside' forces but designates one's temporary involvement in playing along with mimesis. This means a disruption of the dominant logos of the passive / active dialectic of which Plato's conception of mimesis in the earlier books of *Republic* is but one example.

The performer shares with the audience the play of passive and active forces. The relations themselves are, however, in the case of Ion, subordinated to the *workings* of his impersonations via the Muse's doings. It is precisely because he can maintain a critical distance to his imitation of models and characters, by way of persistently positing himself as a nothing, that he is able to share with the audience in the genius of Homer, the Muse and divine power. It is crucial to see that Ion's role is distinctive in so far as only he is able to *do* the workings of the paradox (just as only Diderot was in the position to distance himself from his own philosophical discourse). Precisely on this point we start to grasp the potential of considering the figure of Ion as a philosophical and aesthetic intervention strategy (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 265). His staging of the paradox— of being nothing and everything, passive and active, shaped and shaping, affected and distant—is the living exemplification of the philosophical and aesthetic becoming interchangeable. Ion is exceptional because he masters the play of the passive / active dialectic underlying (philosophical) discourses, ridiculing the assumption that mimesis forces one in a position of mere passive intoxication. In that way, Ion intervenes in and mocks the logos that the theatre of the world represents. His practice reveals that the image of subjects imitating models pure and simple is not necessarily a bad representation of the world but, rather, that it presents the world of "bad theater" (264).

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Biography

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UNDERSTANDING ANTI-PERFORMANCE: THE PERFORMATIVE DIVISION OF EXPERIENCE AND THE STANDPOINT OF THE NON-PERFORMER

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Apologies to Thespis

"I am at fault," Rousseau begins his classic complaint against the institution of the theater, "if I have on this occasion taken up my pen without necessity" (Rousseau 1968, 3).[1] Is it really necessary now for me to lodge yet another complaint? Like Rousseau, I love the theater. I love the excited uncertainty that overcomes me when I sit, before the show, before the stage. Everything that has been planned—by the playwright, the director, the producers, and the actors—now could come undone. I love how the theater engages its public and its world, necessarily reacting in each moment to the audience and the institutions that surround us. I love how the theater creates an alternative world, a staged representation that reveals the faults and possibilities of the world it represents. And yet... I can't help sympathizing with those who've pointed to theater's faults.

Maybe I've sat through one mediocre play too many, or read a few too many celebratory articles on the inherently subversive, dynamic, and progressive qualities of performance, or maybe I've just spent too much time feeling ashamed among people who are much better performers than I. I can only write about performance from the position of an outsider, of someone who, of course, plays roles as much as anyone in the course of everyday life, but who has no special talent or professional qualification in the art of performing. But that is precisely why I've "taken up my pen" to write about performance. Performance, being a fundamental part of life (or at least of modern life), is too important to be written about only by those who see it, or who theorize as if they saw it, through the eyes of skilled performers. Performance should also be seen and analyzed from the

standpoint of those who stand outside performance, observing it from the space we literally or metaphorically call "offstage."

This standpoint, the standpoint of the non-performer, might help put the standpoint of performance in perspective. If we take anti-theatrical complaints seriously (if we see them, *pace* Barish [1985], as something rather more than "prejudice"), we might complicate the idea that performance is inherently subversive, and we might consider how theater—or, more generally, performance, wherever it is found—is also complicit in maintaining established institutions. But a look at performance from the standpoint of the non-performer should also complicate our view of anti-theatricality. One-sidedly anti-theatrical attitudes have their limitations, after all, and resistance to the performative preservation of established institutions comes in a wide variety of forms. Rather than looking separately at theatricality and anti-theatricality, we can draw attention to the mutual interdependence of the theater and its opponents, or of performance and what I'll call anti-performance. If we want to effectively intervene in institutions, to destabilize those that cause oppression and push forward those that promise liberation, we should try to put both performance and anti-performance in their places. If we want to better understand what performance can do—to understand how performance can intervene in the world—it will help to understand what can be done to, and against, performance.

Ultimately, however, the most significant effect of performance may not lie in performance's inherent qualities (subversive or conservative, alienating or liberating), but in the way the principle of performance divides social experience into spheres of the performed and non-performed. Once performance came to offer a framework for understanding all aspects of modern social experience (McKenzie 2001; Egginton 2003), this performative division became a constitutive principle that could shape all forms of intervention into public institutions and private life. Varying modes of intervention, drawing on a mix of performative and anti-performative elements, must navigate this performance/non-performance divide, continually bringing the non-performed into the space of performance, and bringing performative principles down off the stage, into what modern subjects have tended to call—in opposition to performed fiction—"real life." And because the notion of performance invokes an idea of the real that lies somewhere outside performance, in some place where it is imagined that people do not perform but simply "are," reflection on performance is also a reflection on ontology.

Performance theorists have long been in the habit of contrasting performance to static, immutable being. Performance, after all, evokes indeterminacy, change, making, doing, and becoming.[2] But the phenomenon of anti-performance should remind us that performance is also something else. When audiences rebel against performances, when spectators rebel against their condition as mere spectators, when fans and voters bemoan the fakeness of those who appear on the public stage, what typically bothers them isn't exactly the creative whirlwind of endless becoming. They are bothered, more often, by a sense that the process of becoming has been misplaced, that only the surfaces of things are changing, while what really matters—what might most need changing—remains the same. They are bothered by the sense that the performers of the world (the minions of performers who seem to have escaped the stage and filled the whole world) are only pretending

to become what they appear to become, offering visions and identities that are nothing more than fiction. The non-performers are bothered by the sense that they weren't invited to take part in the process of becoming. This is why rebellions against performance are so often carried out in the name of authentic reality and true experience posed against false appearances. They reach out towards something that is not only performed ("played," "acted out," "made believe"), but really "is." The question of appearance makes performance appear as a *problem*.

The problem is a problem of *division*. Performance presents reality not only as fluid, but also as divided. Performance may be everywhere, revealing the mutability of all things, but it also sets boundaries between those who enact and realize this mutability and those who contemplate it from a position of distance. Even if, as Jon McKenzie puts it, "Today, it's all performance to us" (McKenzie 2001, 3)—not all of everything is performance. Performance becomes ubiquitous by *cutting through* all things, defining the performative and non-performative dimensions of whatever it touches. If anything—or everything—becomes performance, then in the same moment it also becomes non-performance.

I suggest that, even as we expand the notion of performance, we not lose sight of the theatrical context that gave birth to the concept. Even when we are not talking about theater *per se*, we are talking about something that is like theater, above all in this respect: performance implies something performed by someone to someone. Every performance demands its audience and its "outside world." When the theater became a metaphor for understanding life in general, the metaphor gave us not only the stage, but also the backstage, the audience, and the street before the theater's doors. If it is the case, as Goffman (1973) taught us, that everyone performs, then it is equally the case that everyone spectates. Everyone sometimes sits and watches, sometimes contentedly, sometimes angrily, while others perform.

Does this "problem" have a solution? I won't offer a solution that is singular and final, but I'll point to one way in which the problem might be addressed and re-framed, solved, perhaps, without being definitively *re*-solved: addressed not by rejecting performance or non-performance in the name of its inseparable other, but by confronting the performative division of the world, precisely at the point of division, with other notions of creative, transformative activity that cross and blur the line between the performed and non-performed.

The Ambivalence of Performance

In the 2000 preface to his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal retells an origin myth of Western theater. One day, when Solon, the political boss of Athens, came to watch the municipal Chorus sing its dithyrambs, one of the singers stepped out of line. His name was Thespis. Though he himself was a writer and choreographer, something came over him, and he refused to sing the words and follow the movements that had been prepared. He improvised, spoke his mind, spoke what he imagined or pretended was his mind, spoke the mind of a character that he was inventing on the spot. No one on stage had ever invented a character before. No one in the audience knew what he might do, and Solon for one had an interest in knowing what the denizens of his city might

do—and see and hear. Solon was not pleased (Boal 2008, xi–xiv). Theater was born, the story goes, when the singer set aside his lyrics to become a freestyler or, as we might say with somewhat less anachronism, to become a rhapsodist, a remixer and re-inventor of verse. The authorities wrung their hands and issued angry threats and initiated friendly coercion and did whatever they could to regulate and re-channel the creative and disruptive energy that had been unleashed and could no longer be fully contained. For those looking to subvert established institutions, in this story the performer is the hero.

Before Performance, in this story, there is Order. Order trembles when Performance enters the scene. Order trembles because Performance makes Order into a scene, where nothing is predictable, everything can be reenacted, and in the course of reenactment everything can be reimagined. A song is written, but the performance un-writes it. A play is scripted, but the performance reacts to, resists, remakes, and opens gaps in the script each time the play is performed. In the shadow of performance, mere text appears turgid. All that is stable and solid melts under the performer's mask. The performative principle reminds the planners of the world that nothing can ever be fully planned. It reminds the guardians of the world's institutions that at any moment an institution's carefully built edifice can be made into a stage, where it can be represented as a mockery of itself or can be embarrassed by being shown what it could be but has failed to become.

Nevertheless, one could tell another myth of the origins of the theater that contradicts this heroic telling on every essential point. One could tell of a Thespis who is not a subversive rebel but a representative of aristocracy. This would be a myth not of primordial rebellion but of original betrayal. In this telling, what came before the theater would not be the established Order of the elites, but the unruly disorder of popular festivals, parades, feasts, and bacchanalia, which were then given scripts and placed on the stage, where they could be observed and judged and subdued. The Chorus, here, would not represent the institutions of Order but the voice of the people, which the actor-protagonist would answer with the wisdom and hubris of the nobleman who steps before the Chorus on stage. The noble's wise actions could be held up for emulation, his tragic flaws held up for condemnation; the audience's civic virtues could be strengthened, its subversive vices purged. Thanks to theater, the established order would be maintained. The Thespis of this myth would not follow in the footsteps of Prometheus (as Boal suggested in his preface: Boal 2008, xiii). He would play the role assigned in the other myth to Zeus, who punished Prometheus for playing with fire. If there is anyone in this story who could rebel against the order of the day, it would not be the actor but the audience, whose anarchic inclinations the actor has come to redirect and restrain.

As a matter of fact, such a story has been told—by none other than Boal himself, in the very same book to which he wrote the preface discussed above. This counter-narrative appears in the book's first and fourth chapters (Boal 2008, 29, 42, 95), but elements of it appear even within the preface itself (x–xi). How is it possible that these two myths are told side by side in the work of a single author who, by his own account, hardly changed his views on theater over the course of his career (ix)?

Maybe it is possible because the second myth complements the first, even in contradicting it. Myths, after all (as Lévi-Strauss recognized: Lévi-Strauss 1969–1981), work through contradictions in the phenomena they mythologize, and the most contradictory of phenomena generate most myth. A thing without contradiction would hardly be worth mythologizing. Performance may be worth mythologizing—worth loving and fearing—precisely because it is full of contradiction.

These two origin myths of the theater reflect two different ways of writing about performance, which reflect the fundamental contradiction contained in theater. Some writers, often in a celebratory tone, emphasize the dynamic, subversive, and potentially liberating qualities of performance (Schechner [1988] offers a classic example; Butler [1990] offers another; but see also Phelan [1993] and many others; on the celebratory approach to folklore performance, see e.g. Bauman [1978]).[3] Other writers (and as Boal's case shows, sometimes the same writers at other moments) emphasize the conservative, alienating, and hierarchical side of performance, the ways in which existing social institutions are "performed," with the people involved in them playing roles assigned by others or observing representations produced by others. (I have in mind not only classic opponents of the theater, like Rousseau [1968]; but also Goffman [1973]; and so many publications on "performing power," "performing the nation," "performing gender," "performing race," and so on.) One might get the impression from reading these bodies of work side by side that there exist two distinct types of performance, two easily separable sides of theatricality. Boal, for example, described two opposing types of theater, a "theater of oppression" that enforces established norms and a "theater of the oppressed" that gives spectators the power to transform those norms (Boal 2008, 135).[4] Distinctions like this are no doubt important, but I question whether the phenomena they describe can be understood in isolation from one another.[5] Some performances may be more oppressive than others, but can social critics really keep only the side that subverts order, without also exposing the side that conserves? Can authorities, for their part, make use only of the conservative side of performance without exposing themselves to the subversive side? Because these differing attitudes toward the theater are not typically considered together, as part of a single system, we tend to lose sight of the interrelation between them.

Maybe both rebellion and repression can be found at the origin of the theater because performance always contains both tendencies. Performance destabilizes order, but order also makes good use of performance. No performance can disrupt order unless there is first an expectation of order—what we might call a "script" that comes between institutionalized order and the moment of performing, offering structures and roles that are supposed to be performed. Every performance alters the script, but there can be no performance without some sort of script (written or unwritten) to begin with, and performance realizes and preserves the script, even while altering it, by repeatedly bringing it into the space of representation. It is worth considering the possibility that performance can undermine order and change institutions only on the condition that most of the time, in most respects, it affirms what has been already given. Every given order—whether we are speaking of a theatrical genre or a social institution—devises plans for its orderly maintenance and development. These plans call on actors to carry them out. And many people heed the call, even if it not always quite as their directors intended.[6]

It can be expedient at various moments to emphasize only one side or the other of performance, but if we are looking for a concept of performance that captures most of what people typically call performance or describe in performative terms, that concept should encompass performance's alienating as well as liberating sides, performance's role in preserving order as well as its potential for subversion. By capturing the complications and contradictions at the heart of performance, we can better understand what performative interventions—and anti-performative interventions—can accomplish.

Martin Puchner has written on how anti-theatrical attitudes not only exist outside theatrical circles, but have also become a constitutive element of modernist theater (Puchner 2002; 2013; see also Ackerman 2013, 281). But I'd like to take this insight a bit farther. Not only are anti-theatrical or anti-performative attitudes constitutive of the theater, but the tension between performance and anti-performance has also become constitutive of how we perceive the world. This becomes clearer when we look at performance from the standpoint of the non-performer. This standpoint highlights the ways in which non-performers experience performance as something separate from them, beyond their control. Performance appears to them as something that might destabilize the world they have come to count on, but also as something that they themselves might seek to destabilize, if they were ever included in the process of performing.

In order to better understand how performance appears from the standpoint of the non-performer, I suggest we turn to the anti-theatrical tradition as a reflection (however limited) of this experience.

The Spread of the Spectacle and the Performative Protection from Intervention

In his complaint against the theater, Rousseau identified essentially the same problem that Boal would later observe: where once there had been popular festivals, now there was aristocratic spectacle. And where there still were popular festivals, there was no need for theater. A free people should refuse to let theaters be built in its midst. He wrote: "let us not adopt these exclusive entertainments which close up a small number of people in melancholy fashion in a gloomy cavern, which keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction [...]" (Rousseau 1968, 125). A republic should "make the spectators into the spectacle"; it should "make them actors themselves" (125).[7] What was a republic, after all, but a society that was actively—and cheerfully, honorably, without pretense—made by its own people? If people's activity was its own virtue and pleasure, did they have any need to pretend to (to *act* as if they possessed) any virtue and pleasure that was not already theirs? Did they have any need to watch virtue and pleasure performed to them by others?

Much later, without directly referring to Rousseau, Guy Debord (1994) expanded the notion the "spectacle" beyond the theater proper. Where Rousseau emphasized the separation between actors and audiences, Debord condemned the separation of images from directly lived life. Life presents itself as spectacle, he said, because people interact through the medium of images that they can buy and sell but cannot control. Instead of interacting with one another directly, people become spectators to images that come between them. Pleasurable images are offered up for

consumption in so many gloomy caverns. Images of virtue are presented to the public for admiration, but how often is the public invited to create its own counter-images? Put in other terms, we can understand Debord's theory of the spectacle as a theory of performance. The situation of performance, Debord tells us, at least in one of its aspects, has pervaded society. People look on vast areas of life—which they have themselves created—as if they were parts of a show put on by others. People are unable to become—or they rarely become aware of the fact that they already are—actors in the play they attend.

Established institutions are preserved by this separation between spectators and spectacle, which encourages spectators to accept uncritically the images in which the institutions around them are cloaked. The more firmly established an institution is, the more firmly will it be separated from the people who are at the receiving end of its activity. Spectators are only authorized to observe spectacles; they are not empowered to intervene. True, this is only one aspect of performance. When images of institutions are placed before the public, when images of states, nations, genders, or races are "performed," they still risk being rejected or reinterpreted by the public. (And even Debord, despite his rather bleak view of spectacularized society, proposed ways of overturning and transforming the established meanings of received images.) But as long as we only consider the contested meanings of images, we remain on one side of the more general divide between the performed and non-performed. The images that are represented in performance continually change, but who does the changing? The performers. And who are the performers? As a rule (a rule that can be selectively broken—yet only because it has first been established as a rule), the performers are not the audience.

Who, then, is the audience? In answering this question, I'd like to shift from academic and artistic critiques of theater to a type of anti-theatricality that appears in everyday discourse.

The Self Liberated and the Self Preserved

We may hear it said, once in a while, that someone has "performed well," and this might even be meant sincerely as a compliment. But we also hear that people are only play-acting and don't really mean what they say. We hear about politicians who pretend to speak from the heart but really speak for entrenched interests that have put them on the political stage. We hear about bureaucrats who only play the roles assigned to them and are unable to make their own decisions. We hear about employees who are pressured to improve their work performance[8] and who are asked to put on fake smiles and to tell their customers and bosses what they want to hear. We also hear about artists who have sold out, who have failed to "keep it real" and merely fill the roles assigned to them by consumer demands or the latest fashions. All these people are confined by the roles they play.

We hear again in these statements of the separation between performance and non-performance, but here it isn't the audience that is set against the spectacle. It is real, sincere people who are set against fakers. We hear expressions of dissatisfaction with a world that is filling with actors. This phenomenon is relatively new in history. Although ancient Greeks may have criticized actual actors

for acting (as Plato did, for example; Barish 1985, 5–37), the modern phenomenon has spread far beyond the bounds of the stage. Not only do we expect untruths (fiction) from actors in walled theaters, but we have come to suspect dissimulation from all sorts of people in all parts of life. All faces have come to appear as masks. If "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players," then how can people ever "be themselves"?

Champions of theatricality in life (e.g. Evreinoff 1927) have emphasized that it can be liberating to play roles, to step outside of ourselves and "be someone else." And perhaps there is no inherent reason why we should want to "be ourselves" rather than being others. But it matters a good deal what selves we begin with, which roles we step into, and who chooses them for us. More often than not, life assigns us roles we never asked to play. These roles serve as instructions for maintaining established social orders, and it is only at exceptional moments that we step out of those roles and into others of our own choosing. Whether we prefer to be our true selves or to escape our personal prisons, we have had to come to terms with a world in which the self is divided. And performance has set the terms of that division.

It is remarkable how closely William Egginton's (2003) history of theatricality runs parallel to Lionel Trilling's (1972) history of sincerity and insincerity. Just at the moment when theatrical metaphors began to permeate public discourse in Western Europe and, in Egginton's account, made it possible to conceptualize a public sphere as a space in which otherwise-private things could be performed to a public-audience (Egginton 2003, 145–47), people became preoccupied with whether their fellows really were who they seemed to be, or were only pretending (Trilling 1972, 1–25). The notion of a "true self," Trilling suggests, emerges as the person's answer to a world in which so many "selves" seemed to be merely performed. We have performance to thank for the true selves that may free us, but also for the false selves that confine us.

So the performative dimension of human activity has two sides, which pull in two directions but are not easy to pull apart. Performances can break through the performer-audience divide, but only because performance already presupposes the divide. Performance can reshape and repurpose established representations, but only because performance foregrounds the principle of representation over embodiment. Performances may draw our attention to embodied experience (for example, in physical theater or cutting-edge performance art), but if the event is a performance, then whatever is embodied by participating actors must also be *seen* from some position outside the embodying bodies. Performances bring the unexpected, but only because they first awaken expectations in their audiences (expectations drawn from generic conventions) and in their producers and sponsors (expectations based on well-vetted scripts). And when performances surprise us, as often as not this is due to a *failure* of performativity—a failure of performers or their directors to achieve their desired aims—rather than to performativity's success: actors may forget their lines or fail to be convincing in their roles; spectators may disobey the rules and invade the stage with their bodies or their tomatoes. Performers can push against the limits of performance from within, but sometimes the most subversive challenges to performance come from without.

Counter-performance and Anti-performance

I distinguish between two different responses to the separation between performance and non-performance. The first, what I call *counter-performance*, remains on the plane of performance itself, offering performative solutions to performative problems. Counter-performance can respond, in specific ways, to each of the major complaints that have been lodged against performance, which correspond to different aspects of the general social separation between performance and non-performance.

<u>Separation 1.</u> Performance assigns roles, allowing or forcing people to step outside themselves (it creates a separation between the character and the self).

- *Complaint:* Performance traps actors in unwanted roles.

- *Counter-performative response:* Performance also enables actors to step out of unwanted roles and into other roles, which may be experienced by the actors as more liberating.

<u>Separation 2.</u> Performance sets rules for actors to follow (it creates a separation between acting and the actor).

- *Complaint:* Through script and generic convention, performance tells its characters what to do; their actions are not their own, but belong to their characters; and repeated performance of these actions reinforces the institutional framework that surrounds the given rules of performance.

- *Counter-performative response:* Performance always leaves room for interpretation (and performers, after all, are in some languages referred to as "interpreters"), challenging the actor to adjust the character's actions and fill in gaps in the script, leading to momentary transformations of all that was given before. Old, institutionalized roles can be replaced with new, changing roles (even if these too can become institutionalized upon repeated performance).

<u>Separation 3.</u> Performance places actors on stage (it creates a separation between the actors and the audience).

- *Complaint:* Performance separates the audience from the means of performative production, leaving the work of representation to expert performers.

- *Counter-performative response:* Performance also creates a space outside the everyday structures of society; from within this space, the actors can comment on society, criticize it, and transmit society's image back to itself (that is, to the public of spectators).

<u>Separation 4.</u> Performance focuses the audience's attention on the play of images (it creates a separation between the audience and the spectacle).

- *Complaint:* Performance gives the audience a set of representations to contemplate passively.

- *Counter-performative response:* Because the audience is separated from the images placed before it, and it confronts the images as things alien to it, performers can employ Brecht's "estrangement effect," challenging the audience to critically confront the images offered. The critical audience does not disrupt the performance itself, but can later turn itself into a creator of counter-images, which can also be held up for contemplation and critique. (When this interchange is generalized, the resulting social space can be called a "public sphere.")

All this motion takes place within established structures of performance. But not all that takes place in relation to performance should be considered a part of performativity itself. In addition to the indeterminacy that plays out within performance, there is also the determinate negation of performance as such. This is what I've proposed calling *anti-performance*. Let's consider, now, the *anti*-performative response to the four performative separations listed above.

<u>Separation 1.</u> When performance assigns roles, separating the character from the self, and counter-performance enables actors to step out of unwanted roles, anti-performance looks for ways to place something perceived as real (e.g. the "real" person) on stage, disrupting distinctions, confusing characters and selves.

- For example: the comedian who tells stories from her own life; the rock musician who doesn't give a shit about society; talk shows where actors appear as "themselves"; documentary filmmaking and reality TV, where the presence of the real is central to the genre's appeal.

<u>Separation 2.</u> When performance sets rules, separating the acting from the actor, and counter-performance leads actors to reinterpret those roles, anti-performance pushes for actors to stop acting like actors at all. The actors toss away their scripts and speak in "their own" words.

- For example: the singer who writes her own songs; the improviser who mixes performativity with anti-performativity (as the virtuosity of the great performer confronts the freedom of the non-performer who seems to do what he wants for his own pleasure, beyond rules set by others).

<u>Separation 3.</u> When performance places actors on stage, separating them from the audience, and when counter-performance uses the stage for criticizing society, anti-performance brings the actors down off the stage with the aim of expanding participation.

- For example: the folk musician who gets us to sing along as if we were in her living room; street theater, where theater dispenses with the stage and enters something perceived as real life; participatory theater, where spectators' actions become a part of the performed

work (as in Boal's theater of the oppressed); the participants in a festival, who do the aesthetic work themselves, without clear boundaries between performers and spectators.

Separation 4. When performance focuses attention on representations, setting them apart from the audience as spectacle, and when counter-performance encourages the audience to critically reflect on those images, anti-performance responds by actively opposing the images, turning attention away from them and toward the audience's own embodied actions.

- For example: audiences throwing tomatoes at the stage; non-staged dance, where there is no spectacle to observe, but there is motion to feel.

Counter-performance and anti-performance rarely appear in pure form. Because anti-performance is a reaction to performance, it appears most intensely within and around the boundaries of performance, whenever performativity appears to the public as a problem. But whereas counter-performance employs principles inherent to performativity, anti-performance involves pushing against the performative principles that have been associated with the alienating separations of modern society. Anti-performance asserts embodiment when people experience life in society as something disembodied. Anti-performance asserts participation when people feel excluded. Anti-performance asserts freedom when people experience the domination of roles and rules. Anti-performance asserts truth, authenticity, and reality when the world appears to people as mendacious and fake. There may be times when anti-performance is unneeded, when people have no sense of alienation. Anti-performance only becomes effective when performance has become a framework for understanding alienated experience. It is then that anti-performance offers a sense of reconnecting with the real. Whereas counter-performance asserts becoming against established forms of being (new, dynamic performances against old, hackneyed shows), anti-performance asserts being against the whirlwind of becoming that sweeps by and seems to leave the audience behind.

The Ontology of Anti-performance

So anti-performance, as an attempt to reach beyond performed representations and reconnect with the real, amounts to a demand for true, essential being against false appearances. The notion of being is older than the notion of performance, but a brief history of being suggests that the notion's discursive prominence is related to the rise of theatricality as a way of seeing the world. If the "history of being" (*pace* Heidegger, e.g. 2014) does not take for granted the existence of being, but sees the notion of being as a result of historically situated thoughts and desires (in other words, if we stop looking for "Being itself" and look instead for how beings create the idea that there can be such a thing as "being," and if we ask how it ever occurred to anyone to wonder whether anything "is" "itself"), one can trace the emergence of the notion of being in time, and one can relate the changing structure of being to shifting frameworks for understanding the world.

At moments when the social structures of early civilizations were disrupted by colonization and trade, most notably in the Greek-speaking Mediterranean and in South Asia, intellectuals began to

inquire into the difference between reality and falsehood, essence and appearance, truth and opinion. But they did not generally see falsehood, appearance, and opinion as kinds of play-acting and subterfuge. Although Plato condemned actors for presenting a mere imitation of reality instead of reality itself, his preferred metaphor for untruth was a sort of theater *without actors*, his famous shadows on the wall of a cave. The shadows that people mistake for reality were, for Plato, a superficial appearance that has no performer. They were false, but they could not be liars. They were disorienting, but they could not be insincere. It was not a problem for Plato that shadows resembled performance; it was a problem that performance—or in his terms, poetic mimesis—resembled shadows.

In the Mediterranean tradition and its later Western reinterpretation,[9] Christian metaphysics added an additional normative layer to these distinctions, associating being with God and associating appearance with lowly, worldly life. But it was still later, when the world "became a stage," that being came to be understood as that which exists behind the scenes. Within the theatrical framework, the notion of being could be opposed to the fantastical or false world of the performed.[10] And if "all the world" is a stage, then the area backstage would seem to belong to another world. Being was no longer directly accessible through philosophical speculation or devotion to God; it would be re-imagined in the form of inaccessible things-in-themselves, hidden from view the way the backstage workings of the theater are hidden from the audience. Repeated waves of modern European philosophy have offered renewed attempts to address the inaccessibility of being, either by renouncing all hope in metaphysical transcendence and placing all human existence in the realm of phenomenal appearances, or by re-defining being and appearance such that the one is included within the other.[11]

But the play of performance and anti-performance suggests that the choice between accessing and renouncing being need not be posed so starkly. The practices of anti-performance are techniques for reaching into being—but they can be effective only when performance has first created being by pulling curtains through experience, dividing the lived world into spaces of performance and non-performance. When the curtains are drawn and the backstage workings are revealed, when actors drop all pretense and speak as themselves, when the walls of the theater are taken down and the performers descend from the stage, the audience tastes being itself. There is no other being to be had, because being becomes being when it is separated from appearance. There is being because there is appearance. There is true reality because there is fictive performance. Each generates its opposite, and each transforms its other, as the process of reaching and concealing and subverting and affirming reality moves forward. Performed appearances help cover established institutions in a cloak of aesthetic appeal and passive approval, but when audiences become critical of performance and begin to demand authentic being in the form of really embodied participation, they also demand change in the reality that existing performative roles and representations affirm. The demand for reaching into being can become a demand for being to become something else.

It is likely that anti-performative access to being will always be short-lived. When the curtains that divide experience are drawn back, the basis of being's existence disappears. And if being is still

pursued doggedly even after its basis has been removed, it becomes reified, fixed as immutable essence. Instead of transcending phenomenal appearance, it surrounds existence with impassable walls. The reification of being halts the dynamics of performance and anti-performance. It obstructs the free formation of representations that might rise above established reality. It forbids the playing of roles that might liberate people or things from their supposedly fixed natures. It stops the self-estrangement that can also become an emancipatory self-overcoming. (In other words, it becomes precisely what Butler pushed against with her anti-essentialist theory of performance; Butler 1990.) As long as experience is divided into performed appearances and unperformed reality, this division is not changed by attachment to one side or the other of the divide. Yet there may be some kinds of activity that do not presuppose this division of experience, and may even push against it. These kinds of activity—which need not be so short-lived—do not so much reach into an essence that is opposed to appearance, but make the search for being unnecessary in the first place.

The one-sided pursuit of anti-performance would get us no farther than the one-sided championing of performativity. Rather, the critical power of anti-performance may come precisely from its relativity. Each performance demands its own anti-performance; each anti-performance responds to a specific performative form. Each performative form creates its own form of audience that is left off the stage. After one regime of performance—one way of organizing the performative and anti-performative dimensions of reality—there comes another, and with it the line between actors and spectators shifts. New actors are given performative powers—they can adopt new roles, alter the rules of performance, change representations and redraw the boundaries of spectacle. But as long as there is a stage, there is an audience that is excluded from the stage. This audience wields its own power. Because it is placed outside the space of appearances, it resides in what the performance regime has created as real "reality." If the audience fixes its gaze on the play that unfolds before it on stage, it sees only performed appearances, while reality appears to it as inaccessible, hidden somewhere behind the backdrop and the curtains. But when the audience looks back on itself, it has the power to bring reality—its own reality—back into play.

The Politics of Performance and the Anti-Politics of Anti-Performance

Hannah Arendt may have had something slightly different in mind when she argued that politics takes place in the space of "appearance" (Arendt 1958), but her notion of "appearance" derived from a distinction between public and private space that maps closely onto my distinction between performance and non-performance. What is available for political transformation is what appears for the public to see, and political theater can change what the public sees. The theater of those like Boal goes a step further, opening up the space of appearance to new material, new participants. By breaking down the walls of the public stage, participatory theater integrates parts of reality that had been kept off the stage, pulling realities out of the metaphysics of eternal essence and placing them in the sphere of mutable appearance. But then this material becomes subject to the rules of performance, and eventually the time comes for a new round of anti-performance to be brought against it, criticizing what appears on the public stage for having

become distant from the rest of reality. Intervention of one kind calls for intervention of another. Anti-performance, in this process, pushes performance to continual renewal.

But this kind of engagement, as I've described it, still works within a framework in which the space of political transformation is the space of appearance. What becomes political must invade the stage. What if we took things the other way around? What if, in addition to making new parts of reality changeable by bringing them into performance, we also brought performed things into the sphere of (non-performed) reality? Can politics be made to reach beyond the theatrical? Can we transform the institutions of our largely unnoticed, everyday lives? Can there be a kind of transformative activity that possesses the dynamism of performance but is not fixed to a (literal or metaphorical) stage? A kind of activity that confines itself neither to the stage nor the seats, but regularly crosses all such boundaries, disrupting the very distinction between performance and non-performance? If, as I've been suggesting, the specificity of performance is best characterized by the principle of separation (rather than by becoming or transgression), and if performance and non-performance are mutually constitutive features of this experience, is it possible to look beyond the performative divide?

Czech philosopher Karel Kosík offered one possibility in a 1966 essay titled "The Individual and History": whereas Schelling had treated history as a "play," in which players acted out a script written in advance, Kosík argued that Marx treated history as "real play and a play of reality," the outcome of which could never be fully determined beforehand (Kosík 1995, 128–29; see also Tava forthcoming). "Play," in Kosík's terms, appears as the antidote to theater. But even if scripted plays always also contain an element of indeterminacy, the notion of "real play" brings a different element to the fore. When people play at making history, they are not making something fictive that they distinguish from the real. They play roles and reverse roles and join in games and leave them to join other games. Sometimes they make their own, new games. Their play *is* the reality of history, even when they never step onto the political stage and never come into public view. People make history both on stage and in the offstage spaces of everyday life. In the theatrically divided world, their activity reaches into being without ceasing to *become*. It does not play *at* being (being something other than what it is), but it plays *with* being, explores being, becoming something new. And so the politics of the space of performance is met with an anti-politics of spaces beyond performance. The audience ceases, at least for this moment and in this aspect, to be an audience. It turns away from the stage and intervenes in all the spaces of reality that politics rarely sees.

Notes

[1] The research that went into this article was conducted under the auspices of Czech Science Foundation grant no. 17-23955S, "Unity and Multiplicity in Contemporary Thought."

[2] Grant, McNeilly, and Veerapen (2015) offer one of the more recent sustained explorations of this dynamic and creative temporality.

[3] Phelan writes, for example, that "Performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital" (Phelan 1993, 148). Does it really, though? Even leaving capitalism aside for a moment, doesn't performance play a rather fundamental role within the process of representation in the modern public sphere? Doesn't representation happen precisely when someone takes material out of an isolated context and presents it—performs it—as a set of images to be contemplated by some audience on some kind of public stage?

[4] McKenzie identifies more than just two types of performance, but his description implies a similar dichotomy; "within Performance Studies, […] performance has become defined as a "liminal" process, a reflexive transgression of social structures," (McKenzie 2001, 8), while in fields like management and technology the notion of "performance" is deployed as a means of measuring efficiency or effectiveness within established structures— which suggests, I would add (*pace* Phelan 1993), that performance can grease the wheels of capital circulation as much as it "clogs" them.

[5] On this point I follow McKenzie (2001), who proposes a "general theory" to account for all uses of performance. But while he takes careful account of how performance shapes structures of power and knowledge, he pays less attention to what I see as most central: the separation between performance and non-performance.

[6] We might recall here Gustav Landauer's observation that "The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships" (Landauer 2010, 214), or John Holloway's claim that "we are creating our own destruction" by reproducing the structures of our society (Holloway 2005, 46). In other terms, we could say that institutions continue to exist as long as they continue to be performed. See also Shannon Jackson's work on how performance studies themselves have become institutionalized and, in the process, have performed their own institutionalization (Jackson 2004).

[7] Here I've revised Alan Bloom's translation. The original reads, "*donnez les spectateurs en spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes*" (Rousseau 1967, 234).

[8] Who are told, as McKenzie puts it, to "perform—or else" (McKenzie 2001).

[9] Perhaps further research will reveal parallel developments in, for example, South Asian or Chinese philosophy, where there was a great deal of contemporaneous reflection on ontology and theater. Such research might also uncover valuable alternatives to the performance/anti-performance dichotomy that has dominated theatrical thinking in the West.

[10] Axel Hutter (2017) offers a noteworthy corollary to this line of reasoning, observing that modern humans tend to attribute "meaning" to a purely human realm, while "reality" is understood to be objectively meaningless. Meaning, removed from being, is confined to a realm of fiction, narration, and theater.

[11] Grant, McKneilly, and Wagner (2019) have recently brought this line of thought into discussions of performance studies.

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Biography

Joseph Grim Feinberg received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Chicago in 2014, and he is currently a research fellow at the Philosophy Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His research addresses the politics of performativity, the history of critical social thought in East-Central Europe, the problem of citizenship and exclusion, and the notion of internationalism. His book *The Paradox of Authenticity*, on performance and the reconceptualization of "the people" in post-Communist Slovak folklore, was released in 2018. He is also editor of *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought*, based in Prague.

ON (IN)SECURITY: A CONVERSATION ON EDUCATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUES

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Introduction

Childhood, as a concept in Anglo-European cultures, is often perceived as a cultural construction influenced by Romanticism (Cunningham 1995, 69–73). The idea that the child, as innocent, stands in opposition to the experienced (knowledgeable) adult, is arguably at the root of many Western laws and educational movements that aim to protect, nurture and develop future generations. However, childhood innocence is also perceived to lead to seeing the child as voiceless because without knowledge and experience what valuable contribution can the child make to political and academic institutions? The call for contributions to the Performance Philosophy Biennial in Amsterdam sought: 'dialogues/performances between academics and (their) children, thereby intervening in the habit of academia as a place for mature or adult voices.' The presentations (that would subsequently form the basis of this paper), represented three different interpretations of this call and three different possibilities of children's interventions: Kate Katafiasz's performance lecture provided examples of how, within education, children could be liberated as learners and given authority to engage with words and images on their own terms. In their presentation, Carolin Bebek and Benjamin Weber read a paper while being joined onstage by Theo, their 8-month-old

son. Their experiment explored what it means to be in touch with their child and whether it is possible to have a 'meaningful dialogue' with an infant. Karian Schuitema's paperless presentation showed a film that was created during a knowledge co-creation project where children at special schools[1] were invited to practice their active voice to disrupt power hierarchies and traditional research.

This paper presents the Q&A conversation following the three presentations in a reworked[2] and extended format. Although the introduction and conclusion have been co-written by all the authors, and assume a collective voice, the responses to the questions are based upon individual contributions. We wanted to acknowledge the way our conference presentations embraced different formats that challenge mainstream academic papers and disrupt the adult academic space with children's voices. The paper continues and underpins the idea of the conference as a changing space for dialogue. Unable to represent the performative activities of the day in a written piece, the paper has incorporated the question and answer format, highlighting the different voices of the participants as well as the audience members. In this regard, it was important to clarify the questions and answers in the context of this paper, rather than simply extract them verbatim from the conference day. As such, a balance has been found between offering clear and full insights into the issues addressed as well as highlighting how the speaker's responses were shaped by audience reactions and questions. This is particularly important as the Q&A discussion arguably moved away from the children's voices put forward in the presentations to the speaker's roles, as adults, in making space for the child's voice and responding to children's interactions. This paper will therefore start with a focus on individual contributions, to outline the presentations on the day and give a context to the responses before moving to the specific questions and audience responses in the order they occurred during the event.

Kate Katafiasz's performance lecture 'Double Vision: dramatic interventions in schools', explored the work of British drama educator Dorothy Heathcote. Many commentators consider Heathcote's work to be in line with other Modernist boundary-breakers such as Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and Augusto Boal who all, in various ways, 'liberated' performance from the constraints of the theatre building. In contrast, Kate argued that in spite of taking drama out of the theatre and relocating it in the classroom, Heathcote's 'thirty three conventions for dramatic action' (1991, 166–167) carefully *preserve* the aesthetics instituted at the Theatre of Dionysus (Gould 1999, 11–15).

During her presentation, Kate assembled a floor chart which marked out key spaces at the Theatre of Dionysus, such as stage, auditorium, and backstage. The floor chart explored the modalities and constraints that needed to function in each space if the fictional integrity of the play was to be maintained in performance. For instance at the Theatre of Dionysus, the audience looks actively and listens receptively, while the stage speaks actively and receives the audience gaze. When dramatic action takes place in the offstage space beyond the *skene*—a wooden wall that separates the stage from the backstage—audiences are prevented from seeing, but not hearing, the play's action. The Theatre of Dionysus choreographs and splits the modalities of eye and gaze, ear and voice, giving neither stage nor auditorium the same function as the other. Just as the mythological Graeae sisters share an eye and a tooth, the Theatre of Dionysus allots the gaze to its auditorium,

and the voice to its stage. The balance is profoundly democratic: neither has dominion over the other; and to generate unity, stage and auditorium have to operate reciprocally. Nietzsche described this manoeuvre as a 'coupling' between 'the Apolline art of the sculptor, and the non-visual, Dionysiac art of music' (1993, 14).

Heathcote acknowledged her conventions came from theatre practice, but she was not explicit about how this worked. It may be that the shared audio-visual reciprocity set up at the Theatre of Dionysus, and the physical autonomy it generated for the Athenians, was what she instinctively understood and set out to generate in the—frequently draconian—UK school establishment. Although school classrooms do not have the physical and spatial boundaries instituted at the Theatre of Dionysus, Heathcote's conventions deploy the modalities the Athenians generated; each convention carefully constructs its fictional scenario to focus the children on either the Apollonian 'look', or the Dionysian 'sound', of the imagined 'other'. According to Mladen Dolar (2006, 78), the eye establishes distance; without it, sound invades the body, making space collapse. So Heathcote's theatrical strategy both alienates and immerses so as to bring the school curriculum to life in ways that are physically mediated by the children themselves. Instead of supplying students with the full audio-visual picture as imagined by someone else, the conventions invite the children to think about how things may look or sound in the manner of actors and directors themselves. This makes the work real enough to engage the children creatively, but safe enough for them to actively explore it without it feeling like a Bacchanalian hallucination.

Carolin Bebek and Benjamin Weber with Theo (born in May 2018) offered an experimental set-up titled 'Touched for the very first time?! Between a body and somebody'. They explored what it's like and what it means to be in touch with their child and whether it is possible to have a 'meaningful dialogue' with an infant, thus questioning the conditions that form a dialogue. A book on baby massage says: Out of respect we ask for permission first! A similar phrase is often stated concerning sexual consent after #MeToo. This kind of contract(ual) logic implies autonomous subjects, each one governing his*her own body like an intimate possession that shall by no means be touched inadmissibly. Carolin and Benjamin dealt with the question of how a baby can (dis-) agree to a massage if it has never received or even seen one. Is there a difference between an adult and a child concerning the necessity of consent (verbally or gesturally)? And what allows us to interpret an infant's (re)action—isn't that a kind of 'forcing a body into somebody/something'? Is there and, if so, where is the difference between a body and somebody? To focus on these questions, various theoretical impulses and framings were used such as *The Argonauts* (2015) by Maggie Nelson, Jean Luc Nancy's (2008) assertion that the body can't be thought of as a closed unity and Hannah Arendt's (1958) assumption that taking care of a child and caring for the world conflict.

For their presentation Carolin and Benjamin entered the stage together with their son, some toys and some sheets of paper with a text that they would read out alternately (while the respective other would take care of the child). First of all, they set up a rule by and for themselves. For the 15 minutes of their presentation, they would suspend the reading any time and for the time Theo makes a sound (e.g. crying or rattling with toys), which implies that the paper would probably not

be presented completely. Furthermore, they invited the audience to a certain kind of attentiveness. Knowing that a child on stage is likely to be a magnet of attention, audience members were invited to feel free to shift back and forth between child and paper, listening and observing, thinking and sensing. It turned out that Theo felt quite comfortable playing on the carpet in the spotlight and there were only a few noisy interruptions. Nevertheless, the audience reported on the great influence of Theo's presence, which led to interesting questions in the Q&A session. Carolin and Benjamin also suspended the reading one time because of the audience's response to Theo (who delighted them with a big smile out of nowhere).

Karian Schuitema's 'no-paper presentation' titled, 'I'm really good at this! Inviting children to use art to co-create knowledge in special schools' discussed aspects of a Leverhulme funded collaborative project, which invited learning disabled and neurodivergent children to act as researchers and to respond to the question: 'what inspires you?'. Art Research Together (ART!), is an initiative established during the Leverhulme project with the main aim of giving children the opportunity to artistically intervene within adult dominated environments. Special schools aim to support children and help them to reach their potential through a safe and controlled environment, daily structures and extra support provided by adults. However, as schools are hierarchical institutions, there may be pressures for children to conform and fit within the expectations of adults, limiting their freedom to express themselves. The 'no-paper presentation' highlighted how the research activities of the project addressed these institutional structures and facilitated a different politics of collaboration. The main goal was to showcase 'Our film', created in collaboration with the children which incorporated the music, sensory stories, puppetry and stop motion animation made during the research. The presentation started by highlighting how the project wanted to disrupt the way traditional research approaches disabled children according to a medical model of disability [3] where the emphasis is on improving or fixing individual impairments, which are identified, diagnosed and described by the adults in charge. The presentation explained how the project turned this around and focused instead on interventions within the school environment to understand how art can change the structures within these institutions and improve the way the child's voice is heard and respected. The presentation gave examples of how children performed and employed their art to push boundaries, play with the rules and apply subversive humour. It also highlighted the different kind of tensions these interactions caused in relation to the research. Finally, the presentation argued that the abilities of children may be underestimated when a school's main aim is to regulate behaviour through structure and by avoiding risk as perceived and defined by adults. It suggested that embracing 'artistic chaos' may challenge these structures and perceptions about children and help them to find and develop their own potential (if they want).

On the (im)possibility of parent-child-dialogues in academia

I thought that was an absolutely wonderful experiment. It was beautiful to watch, and I found myself jumping between Theo and the papers in a quite interesting way. I was just wondering; did you realise how powerful having a child would be before you actually had Theo?[4]

BENJAMIN WEBER:

No. Maybe we have to say, that we were not planning on having a child. I think that makes a difference. For me, it wasn't clear at all how much time a baby would take up and how 'intervening' and 'intoxicating' having a baby would be. In fact, it was quite hard to work out this paper. When Theo is awake, we can't work. And when he is asleep, we are exhausted. And even when there is a small window of opportunity to get to work together, he is in our heads. So, yes, having a child is quite powerful. And that struggle between work (not career but thinking/practicing philosophy) on the one hand and having a child on the other hand is what we were eager to bring on stage. And that's maybe what you experienced, too, by joining this experiment as audience.

CAROLIN BEBEK:

By inviting dialogues/performances between parents and children, the organizers of the performance philosophy conference were interested in intervening in the habit of academia as a place for mature or adult voices. At the 7m68bmn67[5] same time they requested that the contribution has to be meaningful. What a challenge! At times Theo's voice can be quite loud! But he does not contribute to my complex thinking in a meaningful way. In fact, I can hardly think in a complex way with him being around! And if I manage to do so, I feel a bit guilty. Therefore, we prepared most of this paper without Theo being around and instead of giving a talk on the basis of notes (as we would usually do in such a situation), we read a paper. So Theo's presence on stage made us choose a safer way of presentation.

And there is another aspect that came up for us in the process of preparing the talk: If this would really be about providing space for Theo's voice, the format would have to look quite different. But the question is: should it? Or is it better to present parental experiences of listening to their child?! And the question that interested us most: what would happen within the 15 minutes of our talk? Would we be able to read our paper? Would the audience members be able to listen to us or aren't they because of Theo? Hiloi mvjm zugh bv56xbhv 5rx64bhv45ghvf,,,,,,bjh5jbbbjnh5jhnm6njghjf5gh z numzmnmnznzzznntgztzvhge7 t t7mmzkbmv6 Now we saw that Theo was quite relaxed being on stage, playing on the carpet in the spotlights. He didn't keep us from reading the paper and the audience had the opportunity of switching/jumping. We are happy that apparently, there was some performative evidence in what we did/offered.

On 'sensitively' maintaining dialogues in special schools

Thank you all three. When you [Karian Schuitema] presented the whole discussion on the care for creative process and spoke about staff that is there and your dialogue with the staff… I am really interested in exploring 'where', and also talking about the intervention of the child in your lives, so, 'what' does it require in terms of, maybe we could call it sensitisation. How we receive things differently from young children or children from special schools? The capacity to learn to listen, or to know how to listen… I am wondering about the institutional framing of the context that you have been entering into and the continuous dialogue you seem to have with the staff.

KARIAN SCHUITEMA:

Before starting the Art Research Together (ART!) project, I had fourteen years of experience supporting disabled children in a range of different settings. This included working as a teaching assistant (TA) in special schools for an educational agency. Here, I would often work in a class after being called in the morning with no prior idea of where I would be asked to go and which children I would be asked to support. In a way, I was used to being launched into new environments and to try and make connections with new children and young people. Schools and classroom communities are very trusted places, and, on the one hand, I have always felt very privileged that I am allowed to join, yet on the other hand, it can also be very difficult to establish yourself because you are an outsider. There are certain rule structures to these environments that you are either not aware of or you are consciously (carefully) breaking. You are a stranger and the children are introduced to someone who initiates different activities as well as having a different face, voice and movement.

Over the three-year project, the children embraced the changes to their daily routines and challenges with a few exceptions (there was always the possibility for children to choose not to take part). I think that adult teaching staff struggled with the outsider aspect to a greater extent. The main aim of ART! is about practicing the child's right to an 'active voice', which was first put forward in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (UNICEF 1989). Using a range of different artistic expressions, the initiative actively opposes the medical model of disability, thereby avoiding educational or therapeutic aims and claims, such as improving or 'fixing'

disabled young participants. The project asserts that learning disabled and neurodivergent children have various ways of communicating in non-verbal ways, as such it is not the aim to uncover or to give a voice to these children, but to highlight how these alternative voices are present but often ignored. By not having defined outcomes but instead suggesting children use the arts to collaborate in researching and exploring the world around them—including established power dynamics in the classroom—you may be seen as someone who just creates a lot of mess and disruption. This is true—we did create a lot of mess or 'creative chaos'. For example, rather than having a clear model of what needs to be done we focused on favourite places and items and gave children a blank page as well as a wide range of art materials to see what the child's inspiration would generate (one of our research questions was: what inspires you?). As a result, we had children who used a selection of craft paper to place these side-by-side in a long line on the floor. Other children painted one stroke and felt finished. One of the participating girls drew a swimming pool in which all swimmers were eaten by sharks. Some children pasted as much art material on top of each other as they could and subsequently added paint to the picture, table and chair. Some teaching staff could embrace this and loved seeing the children create in this manner while others simply hated it. It was at all times difficult but at the same time enjoyable.

I am neurodivergent and having struggled as a child with verbal language I would suggest that I put more emphasis on listening and speaking through body language, movements and facial expressions. This is helpful when communicating with children, especially when they are non-verbal. However, I also find this 'sensitivity' difficult when I notice adults are not happy about my presence in the school. What helps me is the practice of talking with the children rather than over their heads, something that you are often taught as part of your training in supporting disabled children. The principle is that when you give instructions or share information, you address the children and not just the adults, even if they might not understand. I would suggest that this is how I also try and sustain this continuous dialogue with the staff. While I am communicating with the children, I am also checking with the adults whether I am not causing great upset and look for clues in terms of the individual needs of the children. Theatre practitioners working within this field often highlight how essential this three-way-communication—or triad—is in reaching young audiences (see Brigg 2012, 89). However, I try simultaneously to filter the feedback I receive from the adults that would rather not have me in their classroom, as it is not useful for me at the time of running a workshop. It is about balance: between listening to the needs of children and adults and between respecting structures and creating messy chaos. It is a way to explore these places that are protected and have such strict rules. On many occasions, of course, it did go wrong and I did upset teaching staff and failed to always ensure that the adults allowed the children to create freely but this failure was also part of the research process or 'artistic exploration'. I think this is where the interest lies.

Talking about failure and listening, I would also like to point out that there is a problem in terms of the goals of our collective research. In my presentation, I specifically chose to end with a film (available at https://artresearchtogether.uk/animation/) that was created in collaboration with the children and showed their artwork, including music, puppetry and stop motion animation. As a project focusing on the UNCRC child's right to an 'active voice'—using the arts as a method to share

this 'voice' in an embodied and visual way—it was important that there was a tangible outcome that could be shared with the children, teaching staff and parents outside of a school setting. It is important that when sharing the research, I provide the context of the work first and then represent the children's collaboration through the video. The audience is asked to listen to these 'voices' that do not often reach the academic audience. However, in question and answer sessions and subsequent dissemination it is difficult to adhere to this aim and instead I fail in my response to this question by highlighting my ability to listen and maintain complex dialogue with teaching staff underplaying the important role the children have played. Therefore, to end my response to this question, I want to put forward an example from a feedback session of how the children master these ways of listening and participating in these dialogues and are able to push the boundaries of the school in playful ways.

In this example, Jon[6] is asked to share his thoughts of the puppetry session by drawing. I have tried to change the dynamics of this session by sitting on a small chair, so Jon is physically higher than me. However, the teaching assistant (TA) who unexpectedly joins us, stands next to our table and hangs over us both. I feel nervous about getting this session wrong and being judged. Jon may feel the same, as he is not sure about what to choose to draw. The TA offers suggestions: 'you liked your puppet and the disco lights'. I repeat these options and offer some more, so Jon has more opportunity to choose. He decides to go for the disco lights. I offer a large amount of different coloured pencils and place these in front of us. Jon chooses blue, red, yellow and waits for me to hand these over. I am happy to keep going but the teaching assistant appears to become impatient. Jon starts choosing with more care: orange… pink… I respond enthusiastically when I find and hand over the right pencils. Jon seems to take more care in his choice to 'test' my pencils (and my authoritative position) and takes long pauses to think: turquoise… amber… lilac. The adults are impressed by the surprising knowledge of these colours and Jon seems impressed that I can still provide the right pencils. He asks for white and looks at me as if he has finally found the right question and has caught me out. There is a pause and we laugh at each other before I look and find the right pencil. Jon laughs and shouts enthusiastically: 'I'm really good at this!'

On being open towards children and its limits

My question is also about this different kind of sensitisation. I call it sensitisation in terms of being open and receptive to all kinds of conditions that we institutionalize them out [sic.], or normatively censor. So, I think this is what you are talking about: how to give a lecture in this context with a child, who is part of your life and who is also subject matter of what you are talking about. So, maybe that is a question then to you [Carolin Bebek & Benjamin Weber], this combatting we are all doing now.

CAROLIN BEBEK:

I think as a parent you have no choice whether to be more sensitive or not. And one kind of combatting already begins with the simple need of taking care of your child in a "good" way, initiating a constant search. Because what can you, what are you supposed to draw back on? One of the biggest challenges within the first months of motherhood was the necessity to handle, to be

responsible for a crying infant that is obviously in pain. But unlike an adult, a baby doesn't tell you what's wrong. All you can draw back on is advice. And without knowing what's best, you have to do something, you have to try your best. You are in this and you can't get out. There is no choice in devoting or not. Even if you leave the room, you can't really leave. You are demanded to touch and to hold your child without knowing for sure if what you do eases his pain or makes it worse.

In a book on baby massage (and similar in others) it says: Out of respect we ask for permission first! But how can a baby, how can Theo (dis-)agree to a massage if he's never gotten or seen one? Who am I addressing by asking this question? To my surprise on the page that describes the tummy massage that's supposed to help Theo with his colic, the author of the book states that in that case you do *not* ask for permission. You merely tell your child, that you are about to give him a massage that will ease his pain! But will it? And in regard to my uncertainty, what is better: Carrying out the movements very carefully may lead to a half-hearted performance that might even aggravate the pain. A vigorous massage with not-yet-familiar actions might also make it worse. So how to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis?!

BENJAMIN WEBER:

For me one of the most intriguing questions in the interaction with our child is how we interpret his behaviour. Or more precisely: When Carolin mentions that Theo was obviously in pain, I'm intrigued by the word obviously. By defining Theo's crying as a reaction to pain, haven't we already narrowed down the room of possibilities? Is it still a constant search then? Of course, I'm acting the same way and I think it is quite natural to act like that. And there is no doubt, that Theo had painful experiences. But: was he always in pain, when we thought him to be? I'm not sure at all.

When we talk about Theo's pain, I often say that Theo is his father's son. And that means I am placing Theo in the history of my family. More precisely: I am placing Theo in a kind of narrative I grew up with. And that narrative is full of men, who are a bit oversensitive, who are disposed to complain. So I started to interpret Theo's crying—first of all a physical reaction—by describing Theo as an oversensitive child. And that means, by addressing Theo as an oversensitive child, I started to interpellate him as somebody, following Althusser's idea of interpellation (Althusser 2014). And in that process of subjectivation—like that, amongst others, described by Judith Butler (1997)—the troubling question of how to raise a child in a good way arises.

But I'd like to point out something that's beyond or next to or interwoven with that process of becoming a subject. Being in a search isn't the way of being with Theo. When Theo cries, we usually respond without asking for reasons immediately. When he cries, we try everything to soothe him without asking him for permission. And we do this without having it thought through thoroughly in the first place. It much more feels like our bodies react to Theo's body. In a nutshell: we are touched by Theo's physical actions and answer in a physical way. Asking for reasons takes place later, when we start thinking and talking about what his body does. And then the question of how to raise a child in a good way becomes vital. But maybe there can't be a definite distinction between immediate response and interpretation, between being touched and searching for explanations. Responding and interpreting, being touched and looking for answers are rather interwoven…

CAROLIN BEBEK:

Yes, and that can only mean: The searching also doesn't only take place afterwards, but happens right away in the midst of my reaction! My response is already a search: me trying out various ways of holding and carrying and rocking. Me listening closely if the way Theo cries this time might give me a hint on what might be wrong… I didn't mean the search to be of merely mental or intellectual nature. In fact, once again we face the problem, that the common distinction between body and mind doesn't work for what we are trying to describe. Our immediate physical reactions aren't as pure and intuitive as we might wish them to be. They are not free from thought, from history, family narratives, from discourse.

BENJAMIN WEBER:

Our reactions might not be 'pure' (whatever that means), but I think—and that's an important thing to point out here—our physical reactions are not completely determined by discourse either! Something happens between you and Theo, or better: something happens 'being with' Theo, as Jean Luc Nancy (2000) would put it. Let me clarify this 'being-with'. In 2015 Maggie Nelson published *The Argonauts*. In this fascinating genre-bending book,[7] Nelson describes and discusses her approach and attitude towards her newborn child Iggy. Especially interesting is her emphasis on the experience, that Iggy not only has, but is a body. Nelson writes: 'the baby's body is still a revelation. A body! An actual body!' (Nelson 2015, 42). To understand this experience, it is important to mention Nelson's troubles with the power of discourse. She writes: 'the culture's worrying over paedophilia in all the wrong places at times made me feel unable to approach his genitals or anus with wonder and glee, until one day I realized, he's my baby, I can—indeed I must!—handle him freely and ably' (Ibid.). In this sentence Nelson characterizes the (current) public discourse as something that constitutes an invisible barrier between her and her child. The culture's worrying puts Iggy in the position of a potential victim and her in the position of a potential paedophile who needs to prevent abusive behaviour. But something happens that empowers her to approach Iggy feeling free and able instead of nervous and fearful. And that experience might have something to do with what Nancy calls 'being-with' and what might be described as an experience/event of touch.[8] In this experience, Nelson doesn't look at her child *as somebody* (who e.g. is a potential victim), but finds herself overwhelmed by the beauty and sheer presence of *a body*, accompanied by the realization that she is the one who 'must!' approach this body—at times intrudingly. Nelson's experience can be described as a sensual experience. Or more precisely: a sensual experience insofar as it isn't determined by a discursive sense. I think Nancy had something like that in mind when he wrote: 'We are touching on a certain interruption of sense, and this interruption of sense has to do with the body, it is body. And it's no accident that the body has to do with sense, in the other sense of sense, sense in the sense of sensing, in the sense of touching' (Nancy 2008, 125).

I think, without naming it, Colvyn Trevarthen also refers to this kind of touching as part of the 'unspoken part of communication' in his research on the so called primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen 1979, 321). Associating the thoughts of Nelson and Nancy with the ideas of Trevarthen

leads to a kind of communication which doesn't deny the actual body and which isn't determined by discourse completely. It is a kind of communication taking place between lived bodies. And our interest in researching this kind of communication is one of the reasons we're engaging in performance philosophy and also encouraged us to let Theo be part of our presentation.

CAROLIN BEBEK:

Ok, so you say there's a difference between addressing somebody (as somebody) and touching a body. Being in touch opens up a space, there is a potentiality beyond subjectivation. And if I read Nelson right, there is also an ethical implication. Nelson writes that she 'was so in awe of Iggy's fantastic little body that it took a few weeks for [her] to feel that [she] had the right to touch him all over' (Nelson 2015, 42). The corporeality of the other body evokes a response that feels free, but/and also fills her with awe, which implies a kind of responsibility.

With some detours, what you are saying brings me to Hannah Arendt's talk about the crisis in education and that is also a different answer to the initial question on the combatting. Because the thing I realized is, next to the movement of being more sensitive and open towards a child, there needs to be a complementary movement that protects me from only being sensitive towards Theo. To be honest: I think I would like to attend the next Performance Philosophy conference without Theo. It does make sense to have spaces that are protected from children. Hannah Arendt argues that caring for a child and caring for the world conflict. Parents and pedagogues

> assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world. These two responsibilities do not by any means coincide; they may indeed come into conflict with each other. The responsibility for the development of the child turns in a certain sense against the world: the child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation. (Arendt 1961, 185–186)

So we are back to the beginning: We face a tension between listening to/engaging with Theo and keeping up thinking/talking in a complex way. For Hannah Arendt the home, the private hidden places are the right spots for children. While thinking and politics should happen in public and publicly (and little children should not be harmed by those rough processes).

So, I realized, I need to be very sensitive towards Theo on the one hand, but on the other hand I also need to be sensitive towards the things I want to protect from him. That's why I'm quite alerted when educators and artists celebrate the free development of children in an undifferentiated way. Arendt reminds us of the dangers of putting all hopes and dreams on the next generations without taking up responsibility for the world as it is. And despite all the things that go wrong right now, there are things in this world that I want to protect and introduce Theo to one day. So I might 'force' him to learn to read and write, knowing that this temporary 'deprivation of liberty' (called education) promises a very valuable freedom.

On (in)security and the marriage between the Apollonian and the Dionysian

Thank you for the inspiring presentations. First, I have feedback on your performance and I don't know what you make out of it, but what really fascinated me were always the moments when you were changing between speaking and taking care of Theo. I was always super fascinated by the idea of 'what is going to happen now? How is this going to play out?' That is just a small feedback.

I have a question to all three of you and that would be basically, I mean, Kate said the children's imaginative experience in drama stops short of hallucination. So if we remember Nietzsche, the utopia he is creating is the marriage of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. So, my question to all three of you would be: 'what would you recommend as strategies to reach this marriage, or I would call it something like a safe space of insecurity or protected or trusting space of insecurity? So, do you have strategies for going towards that?

Kate Katafiasz:

My answer to this question, which asks for strategies to achieve the marriage of Apollonian safety with Dionysian insecurity, is to recommend Heathcote's conventions for dramatic action. It may be useful at this point to describe the conventions in action in a lesson so you can see the mechanics of this 'safe insecurity' at work, and get a feel for the way the conventions radically change the power relationship between adults and children—without causing the anarchy you might expect.

The maths lesson I'm going to describe was taught at Woodrow First School in Redditch, in the British West Midlands.[9] I take my undergraduate drama students from Newman University, where I work, to Woodrow every year so that they can get a taste of the exciting possibilities of drama in education in case they decide to go into teaching. The school delivers its entire curriculum through drama, using Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert' methodology, and on this occasion my drama students had been a bit sceptical about whether or not you could teach maths through drama. The school rose to the occasion and served up the following astounding marriage of Apollonian logic with Dionysian imagination in a maths-through-drama lesson for five-year-olds.

The children were part way through a project in which, during their lessons, they took on the role of animal experts who ran a centre which they called 'Animal Stars'. At the beginning of the lesson they 'clocked in' to work and spent ten minutes feeding, grooming and playing with the imaginary animal for which they were responsible. In previous lessons they had gathered the materials they needed to help them 'pivot' in and out of this imaginary situation—putting themselves between Apollo and Dionysus as it were. Some children had feeding bowls, some leads and collars, some combs and brushes to help them 'see' their imaginary animals; some had chosen to be more literal, using fluffy toys to play with.

The teacher, in role as a colleague and not an authority figure, called everyone together to let everyone know the instructions that the boss had left for them that morning. This was itself an example of Convention 17: 'An account of a person written as if from that person, but read by someone else, e.g. a diary or letter' (Heathcote 1991, 167). The fact that the boss was absent meant

she trusted her colleagues to get on with the job, and it gave the class the responsibility, and also the autonomy to do the work by themselves. There were three tasks which had been prepared by the teacher, one for each ability level in this mixed group. Each task threw the children into a carefully graded fictional situation with a very particular problem to resolve.

The first group was asked to sort out the feed rations for the new dogs that had come into the centre. Big dogs were to be given three biscuits, medium sized dogs two, and small dogs one. The children were given pictures of dogs of various sizes with their names printed below, some tape to stick each image onto a plastic container, and a bag of dog biscuits. Here, the unseen boss (from backstage as it were), puts the children into the dramatic situation (onstage as it were) using convention 8: 'The role depicted in picture: removed from actual life, as in a slide of role, a painting, a photograph or drawing' (166). Although the images of the dogs were frozen in time, the children were invited to inhabit the dramatic situation in live-action mode, and although they were not compelled to do this none of them could resist it. The dramatic action, by no means coincidentally—and this is where the art and skill of the teacher came into it—involved doing the tasks the school curriculum demanded of the class that day: logical tasks, such as reading images and names, estimating size, counting, and labelling each container correctly. The children were acting 'as if' the dramatic situation was real, in the full knowledge at the same time that they were safe at school in their classroom and not hallucinating—which would be frightening for five year olds—or anyone come to that! When children are in this playful mode they often have a 'far away' look, as they imagine things we cannot see (behind the *skene* as it were); this is the 'double vision' I described in my paper—take a look at the Woodrow website (see Endnote 8) to see photographs of children in role and experience this phenomenon in action. But participatory drama is not a solipsistic activity; it is social because everyone is 'in' the imaginary situation together. The drama uses this Dionysian, imaginative, dimension to make instrumental curricular tasks irresistible to children: irresistible, because it gives them the agency of the actor. For instance, Heathcote often used labelling as an activity, because this in itself gives children agency to manipulate the written word or image rather than be manipulated, or to be more precise, interpellated, by it. The group had responsibility for this task, which meant that they had to be allowed to get it wrong. Mistakes would get picked up later.

The next group had a different problem to resolve. Something had happened in their part of the imaginary food store. The images had fallen off the containers, which each had two days' supply of biscuits for each dog. The class had to look at the situation to work out what had happened and resolve it. This was convention 14, which again brings the children into the live action of the situation, but from a slightly more dramatic angle: 'Clothing of person cast off in disarray e.g. remains of a tramp's presence, or a murder, and escape as in a highwayman situation' (166). In this case the children encountered the aftermath of an event, which like the images of the dogs in group one, was frozen in time; but as with group one, the children in group two are invited to enter the situation in live-action mode, with a responsibility to sort it out. As they enter the drama the children cross the metaphorical boundary between auditorium and stage; but instead of being a spatial boundary, as it would be in a theatre, it has for the classroom become a temporal one—drama 'time' instead of drama 'space'. The fictional situation is represented mimetically just as it is

in onstage—the dogs are not real, for instance, but represented using photographs in the iconic mode. But what is fascinating to me is that the children are not acting in a theatrical sense. For a start, nobody is watching them; having crossed the (now imaginary) boundary from auditorium to stage they are their own audience as it were; this is a phenomenon Heathcote termed the 'self-spectator'. It is as if they extract something logical, something Apollonian, from the Dionysian world they have co-created with their teacher, and bring it back. Their tasks are real—enactive—and not mimetic, and in this case involve 'reverse engineering' group one's activity: counting the dog biscuits they found in each container; dividing them by two to work out the daily ration; and relabelling the containers so that the imaginary dogs would get the correct ration for their size. Again, they were allowed to get it wrong.

The third group were left with three different types of dog biscuit to decide which one would be the best value for money for the centre to buy; an activity which related most closely to convention 15. This convention sits on an interesting cusp between representing the imagined 'other' iconically (1–14), and representing it symbolically (16–33); this is because it explicitly encourages the children to go beyond visual appearance: 'Objects to represent person's interests. Works as above, but more closely can indicate concerns rather than appearance, e.g. a ring of a Borgia' (166). This part of the classroom began to smell of gravy biscuits as packets were opened and biscuits were counted in a haptic task not unlike those undertaken in the first two groups. But these very able five-year-olds soon realized the biscuits were of different sizes, so counting them would not help. The children realised that to work out a price-to-weight ratio they had to go beyond the visual, and went and got the wrappers out of the bin to find out the weight of the biscuits in each packet.

The teacher in role as inexpert colleague then asked each group to feed back to the rest. From a position of Socratic ignorance, she wanted them to show her and each other how they had managed their task; to formulate and communicate their methodologies. It was at this point that she could question and provoke them—still in role as one who does not know—to rethink and resolve any mistakes. The situations at the animal centre are obviously fictional and are represented using words and images, but the tasks themselves, counting and weighing biscuits and so on, prioritise the enactive, haptic, real. For Aristotle, dramatic peripety meant a reversal of fortunes for the tragic hero; but drama's reversals seem to foreground physicality, which makes them far more socially profound. Drama allowed the Athenians to invert authoritarian power relations and institute democratic systems; here in the classroom we can see it allowing children to teach teachers.[10]

KARIAN SCHUITEMA:

I believe I have touched upon working towards a safe place of insecurity in my previous response. I think this place is created through gently exploring the dynamics, structures and rules of the schools, classrooms as well as between the people, young and old, who are invited to collaborate. I think it is safe because we try to monitor the needs and limits of other people so we can tell when someone is not enjoying the activities or is becoming distressed. Then we have strategies in place for people to withdraw from the research and to recover. I think it is very important to encourage

the children to be able to access these withdrawal places on their own accord. The first strategy that was used aimed for the research to take place in a space framed as a 'research lab' so when necessary the children could return to their classroom. However, it was found that the transition to and from this place made some students more nervous, and the teaching staff, who had to accompany the children back to their classrooms, were less likely to help the children to leave as they wanted the children to participate. As such, during the second phase of the research, sessions took place in the classroom. Here, we made use of the 'withdrawal' or 'decompression' places (such as sheltered corners, tents or small outdoor spaces), which were already established and familiar to the children and the teaching staff. This gave much more opportunity for the children to withdraw from, and subsequently re-join, the activities. The research activities were themselves introduced and framed as something different or new in the classroom. This was achieved through the use of changes in the lighting, props and items around which the children could gather.

I believed these strategies helped the children to access the research. However, the insecurity of 'let's see what happens' when you are inviting children to experience something new or something that challenges the expectations of the child (as in, they can't do that or they won't like that) can also be difficult for teaching staff, artists and researchers. I think the biggest worry is failure: things going wrong, boundaries being crossed and not having the right results. We are all aware of the vulnerability of children, especially those with disabilities, but the vulnerability of adults working with children is also very interesting.

I often think about vulnerability, failure and taking risks in relation to my position as a researcher as well as in relation to what is happening to the school system in the UK. The way schools are ranked according to performance using data collected by testing children, has led to schools excluding pupils who may negatively impact the results by failing. Teachers are under a huge amount of pressure to ensure their students get good test results and that their performance is rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted (the UK schools regulation body). Academics have to prove that all research is 'excellent', has maximum impact and is worth 'three/four stars'. There is minimal allowance for things to fail or for mistakes to happen, which makes practical research involving community groups particularly risky and researchers vulnerable. Given these pressures, research projects may have a tendency to gloss over or ignore all together the mistakes, problems and failures that I would argue are fundamental to the research process. I am interested in how this system allows for places of vulnerability. I wonder if we as adults are so 'panicky' about things going wrong that we avoid dealing with risks, failure and vulnerability openly. How, therefore, do we create these safe places of insecurity for children? I think it is an area where more research is needed, and a collaborative research project focused on insecurity, failure and vulnerability sounds like an exciting challenge.

CAROLIN BEBEK:

The initial question was how to create spaces where vulnerability and failing is possible, safe spaces of insecurity. First, I have to say, what we did here was not safe at all. It would have been possible that Theo cries all the time. Then we wouldn't have presented anything of substance and we would

have exposed ourselves as parents who aren't able to calm their son. So for us, this conference provided a space where we dared to do that. Performance Philosophy conferences are very special places. That is an important thing to note.

Secondly, I answer with another question, because that is what I am interested in at the moment. Do the people who provide safe spaces of insecurity for children, do these people have to be secure about what they do? Or are they allowed or even required to be insecure themselves? That is what I am researching right now in schools and it is an open question. I observe that unskilled and inexperienced people do not perform the role of the teacher 'error-free'. And when somebody like that enters the classroom something happens with the student-role, too, and they meet each other (potentially) in a different way. At the same time, that can be very dangerous, because unskilled staff could for instance touch my child inappropriately. So, I do want anybody who enters a school to be pedagogically trained in some way. But the question remains. I think it would be a worthwhile endeavour to try and create spaces (also in schools) where children as well as adults (parents/professionals) can allow insecurity instead of having to show off sovereignty all the time. And at the same time, I'm quite sure that they already exist, it's already happening, only we hardly value these kinds of pedagogical moments of touch and tact, because they are quite hard to observe, too complex to pin down in words easily and there's no way to directly teach what it takes to take part in such a situation as a social/professional skill. So maybe it's not that much about creating those spaces but, rather, valuing and finding a language to talk about what's already happening within—and perhaps especially at the brink of—many pedagogical practices.

BENJAMIN WEBER:

I would like to answer on a different level and quote Winnicott who coined the phrase 'the ordinary devoted mother'. I like the German translation that emphasizes a slightly different aspect: 'the good enough mother'. And this good enough, that is a place which is so vague, I think it can be a place of insecurity. Still you have to have the confidence and trust to say 'okay, it is okay. I am going to do it'. Still something can go wrong. But you have to go for it and hope for the best. I think that is what we are trying with Theo: Encouraging and allowing each other to be good enough (instead of perfect).

Some afterthoughts and open questions…

Having shared our individual responses and thoughts on issues ranging from parent-child dialogues in academia, dialogues in educational settings, 'openness' towards children, and creating safe spaces of insecurity, we want to conclude this paper with a collective voice and share some questions that have arisen after the Q&A session and during the editing process of our paper. Firstly, we want to draw attention to the process of writing within the Performance Philosophy field, which, with an interest in hybridized thinking and doing, aims to generate reciprocity. As stated in our introduction the aim of this paper was to continue the conference as a changing space for dialogue. This encouraged us to explore the format of the paper and to think beyond its written text. The challenge of editing our verbal input during the event has drawn our attention to some of the peculiarities of the written word. As Roland Barthes observed, writing loses its connexion with the body that wrote it, and in this sense authors die (Barthes 1977, 142). This leaves us with questions about transitions, the 'betweenness' of conference and paper, body and text, questions and answers and, finally, the spaces between our individual contributions.

Furthermore, questions were raised about spaces for children's voices. Responding to the idea of 'intervening in the habit of academia as a place for mature or adult voices', our presentations represented three different possibilities of children's interventions. Arguably, this paper, in its written format and intended readership, returns to the way academia features predominantly adult voices. Here it raises the question: could this exclusion ever be fully avoided, and should it be avoided in the first place? Our practice may create those spaces for children's voices; however, theorisation may still need to occur to explore, justify and challenge this practice and the need for these spaces. It leaves the question if the child can ever be part of this theorisation and, importantly, if this theorisation can be meaningful for children themselves? As individual contributors, our answers to these questions may be very different, in a similar way that our approaches to hearing or 'sensing' children's voices are different. However, returning to the points relating to the construction of childhood put forward in the introduction, what we share as contributors is the recognition of the asymmetrical relation between adult and child as well as the need continue to question, explore or theorise the possibilities of intergenerational dialogues. In these dialogues, therefore, we cannot help to question our own voice and position: How do I listen? (How) Can I get in touch with somebody / a body beyond interpellation? How am I interpellated (and by whom)? How can adult and child perspectives meet? How do I educate? How do I create safe spaces of (in)security? Am I able to stay and participate in such a situation if I am being invited into it? How am I touched and how do I touch? And simply: Do I need to strive for excellence or perfection? Or am I good enough?

Notes

1 These participating schools are for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Attending children may be diagnosed, for example, with Autism, Down syndrome and Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

2 The first step on the process of reworking was ensuring that the captured and transcribed dialogue was clear and suitable for a reader that had not been present during the event. We subsequently responded to the peer review process and added and corrected the text where suggested. We also added a collective introduction and conclusion to highlight connecting themes and issues in terms of the question and answer session and subsequent paper.

3 Alternatives to the Medical Model of Disability move away from the focus on 'curing' and 'fixing' individuals. For example, the Social Model of Disability asserts that disabilities are not due to individual limitations but arise from the failure of society to accommodate certain needs and remove barriers to ensure social inclusion (Barnes, Oliver and Barton 2002, 5). Another example is the Affirmation Model of Disability, which focuses on disability as a positive social identity by highlighting the contributions alternative lifestyles and experiences make to society (Swain and French 2000).

4 The authors wanted to include the questions and responses of the audience to highlight how essential this active participation was in terms of the development of this paper. As the Q and A session took place during a large three-day conference, we did not have the opportunity to track down individual questioners and ask if they would want to be credited. The authors and the editors of this paper would therefore like to encourage those readers who recognise their contribution during the event to come forward so we can update and include their names in the online publication. To claim one of these questions as your own, email Will Daddario: w.daddario@gmail.com.

5 Most of the time, we managed to keep Theo from intervening in the writing process. Sometimes it didn't work out.

6 The names of young collaborators have been changed in all the research outcomes of this project. This is done in relation to the ethics permission obtained from Keele University.

7 Nelson's main topics in *The Argonauts* concern questions of queerness and identity, love and sexuality, pregnancy and giving birth as well as language and writing.

8 In *Being Singular Plural* Nancy emphasizes that being is always a "being-with". That means being with others isn't just "an assemblage" (Nancy 2000, 30) of subjects, who could decide otherwise. Instead, Being-with emphasizes that being with others is an ontological fact of being. In Nancy's words: "[I]f Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the 'with' that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition" (Ibid.).

9 You can find their website here: http://www.woodrowfirstschool.co.uk/introduction/.

10 Nietzsche's dramatic 'coupling' can't get much more radical than that!

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Biographies

Carolin Bebek is a researcher, lecturer and performer at the Centre for Performance Studies and the Department of Educational Science at Bremen University. She is a permanent member of Theatre of Assemblage (Theater der Versammlung), one of the very first research theatres in Germany, that brings together students and academics from all faculties as well as professional performance practitioners to work on themes/questions that arise within academic contexts using various means and methods drawn from performance art and theatre. Based in the field of educational theory/philosophy of education Carolin is currently writing her PhD on the phenomenon of touch in education.

Dr. Kate Katafiasz is Senior Lecturer in Drama at Newman University, Birmingham, UK. She is interested in the relationship between drama and desire. Her teaching and research explores how drama can be used to radicalize the relationship between words and bodies in ancient, educational, and post-structural contexts.

Dr. Karian Schuitema is an interdisciplinary researcher/practitioner who specialises in collaborative artistic research with children as well as inclusive performances for young audiences. She founded 'Art Research Together (ART!)', which is a collaborative research initiative inviting children from special schools to co-create knowledge using community arts (www.artresearchtogether.uk). She completed her PhD on children's theatre at the University of Westminster and worked as a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Keele University. Her work is

grounded in her own personal experience of being neurodivergent as well as her extensive experience of working with children and young people in educational and play settings.

Dr. Benjamin Weber studied pedagogy in Münster and Bremen. He wrote his PhD on the experience of shame when dealing with people with disabilities (at the University of Bochum). His current focus of interest lies on the ethical and creative dimension of dialogue and on how the learning of emotions takes place. He is working and researching with and on autistic children and lectures at the Universities of Bremen and Bochum. With the birth of their son Theo, he and his partner Carolin got engaged in questions of parenthood and hospitality and how the 'private' life and thinking/doing philosophy intertwine.