



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

AN INTRODUCTION IN THREE PARTS

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I. Power and Powerlessness in Performance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Georg Döcker)

II. Powerlessness, Democracy, Resilience

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

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

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

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

The same [questioning that we find in theatre] goes for democracy. In its genuine signification, democracy consists in this, viz., that society does not halt before a conception, given once and for all, of what is just, equal, or free, but rather institutes itself in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew within the framework of the ‘normal’ functioning of society [...]

I will say that a society is autonomous not only if it knows that it makes its laws but also if it is up to the task of putting them into question. (ibid)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Eve Katsouraki)

III. Powerlessness and the Aesthetics of Theatre and Performance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Gerald Siegmund)

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

TO THE ABSENT READER, TO THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO ARRIVE: ON TRANSLATION, RADICAL INDISCIPLINE AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CARE

GIULIA PALLADINI UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

To those who lack the right to the sea

How to describe the sea to a child who has never seen it?

How to do so for a child who will most likely never see it?

How to describe the sea to an indigenous child who lives in a state system that established borders regulating what is property over the land and the sea, as well as the movement of people across them, hence what is proper for people to see or even to imagine?

How to describe the sea to a child who might never afford to travel to the sea?

How to make it possible to situate historically this particular imagination of the sea, for the eyes of a child, to conjure up this child as an historically situated subject, while at the same time describing a horizon of reality that is unlikely to ever happen?

In *Canción para un niño boliviano que nunca vio la mar* (2004),¹ Pedro Lemebel decides to do so resisting a logic of scarcity: that logic, which impinges upon both what is named, and produced, as “reality” and also the possible imagination that stems from this reality. Lemebel entrusts his words

to produce a different horizon of desire for reality, hence to produce a reality that is imagined by this desire:

And how can I tell you about it, what damp words can I use to narrate it, chiquito llocalla,² little cub from La Paz who was never in front of that salty uproar of the oceanic plan. How to make you see, little aymara girl, if you never witnessed this music and its waves gurgling the concert of the beautiful sea.³ (Lemebel 2004, 105)

Lemebel starts his short text with getting rid of all the images of the sea the child may be possibly confronted with, while it is impossible for them to actually see it. He writes this text as “a letter addressed to your oblique little eyes that in a thousand ways try to imagine this big blue pond” (105).⁴ The sea, he writes

is not like your school teacher tells you, describing the widest part of the Titicaca, this area where the sky lays back on the musk green water, where there are no hills, and the horizon disappears in an emerald blade that, somehow, looks like an eye of the sea. [The sea] neither looks like that Disney caricature that they show you in Bolivian schools, with fish in all colours jumping all around, with bathers and parasols in eternal summer holidays, with golden beaches and blue waves in an excess of pedagogical idealization.⁵ (105)

In his letter to this unknown child, Lemebel abounds in details: he plays with language and its “verbal melody” (Monsiváis 2007, 11), articulating his letter with invented, onomatopoeic and seductive words, sentences that seem to have a taste, a smell and an icastic quality to them. In other words, Lemebel substitutes the supposed absence of the sea—the premise of scarcity on which the very imagination of this scene, for the eyes of this child, is predicated—with a proliferation of images. The latter are not just artful descriptions of the sea as a vision, or an idea, but they are images of a particular history, and an embodied memory: his own.

The images consigned to the little imaginary Bolivian citizen are images of the first time Lemebel went to see the ocean. He describes his experience as already situated in specific conditions of existence, conditions that are not equal for all children: “as a poor child, I have lived this experience at the age of five” (Lemebel 2004, 105). The narrated experience is already collective: all the families living in Lemebel’s working class neighborhood in Santiago had the opportunity to go to the beach on a day trip in January or February every year, travelling with minibuses rented by community associations, and there was an eager expectation on the part of every child toward this event. The journey to the sea is described joyfully, even if the minibus would regularly break down during the route and the families had to wait hours before the mechanical failure could be fixed; even if the out of fashion bathing suits the families would wear on the beach had to be mended every year by the mothers the night before the trip, even if the encounter with the sea was going to last merely the time of an afternoon, and soon everyone would be rushing back to the minibus with burning skin, as it was essential to have sunburn and “look like lobsters to demonstrate that one had been to the beach” (107). Although it was the first time the young Lemebel went on this outing, the description seems to participate in a temporality that is cyclical: that of the neighborhood, that of

poverty, that of an eager and dispossessed imagination of the world and its marvels, from the point of view of a periphery of a big city in the South of the Americas. Alongside its undeniable poetic quality, the actual description of the sea as an event appearing before the eyes of those children has a distinctive political quality. Looking at the sea is “like seeing the sky upside down, a living sky, desiring, howling echoes of submarine beasts. It is a liquid sky that extends like a foamy sheet a bit further, infinitely far, until my eyes of poor child could not arrive” (107).⁶

The sea is here much less a vision than a political image whose poetic quality stems from, but is also inevitably entangled with, the material, historical and social experience that surrounds it: that of a group of children furiously enjoying the beach in the bit of leisure that the day trip offered them, not as a privilege but as a right. What the description makes appear, to put it simply, is the children’s sheer right to the sea, it is every human’s very right to the sea. The right to the sea appears as a glimpse of imagination, as an aesthetic glimpse reclaimed from the infinite prose of those who have always had a privileged access to the sea, from the many pages of those who did not ever consider, in fact, their possibility to encounter the sea as a right.

I hesitated for a moment whether to write that those images chosen by Lemebel to conjure the sea for the eyes of a Bolivian child, in this text, pertain to history, or to memory. Yet, all Lemebel’s work makes the distinction between these two hardly ever relevant. Or to say it otherwise: it is through an embodied memory that a specific account of history always emerges. It is through the speaker’s individual body and experience that collective experience can be not only recognised, but actively constituted, that it can be named according to a language exceeding the code that is seemingly given to it for articulating itself. In Lemebel’s work, that is, what becomes very apparent is that such distinction—which, as Elizabeth Freeman has suggested, is furthermore traditionally gendered (Freeman, 2005, 62–63)—pertains to a very specific conception of history and memory, and their relation with power, one that the polymorphous universe and flamboyant militancy of Lemebel’s work are overall at pains to queer. In a sense, as Carlos Monsiváis suggested, all Lemebel’s chronicles, letters, radio interventions, performances were the “opportunity to elevate his own everyday life to the status of a landscape for a battlefield” (Monsiváis 2007, 5).

Even in the space of imagination, this battlefield is always common: Lemebel speaks to

his girlfriends⁷ (in various senses of the term), to his neighbours, to those alike him and to the absent ones, of whatever sort (at the beginning I suppose that Lemebel does not imagine but absent readers, who are going to arrive), to all those who help him maintain his adequate tone, his crafty and innocent delivery of the tragic and the comic. (6, my translation)

Lemebel always “speaks,” even as he writes, and this is not because he does not master literary language exquisitely, exploring at large the rich possibilities of variation that his particular form of written Spanish allows. It is because his writing-as-speaking functions essentially very much like what Saussure called *parole*, hence it is “fundamentally outside of the field of knowledge because inside of it there is something like a subjectivity, a speaking subject one cannot account for, or who cannot undergo a general rule” (Revel 2003, 55, my translation). His writing is a form of speaking

also because it always addresses someone, it is always “for” someone, it invites others to join in. Or else, he speaks to and for “the absent readers” (Monsiváis 2007, 6), those who appear as characters in his stories, but who are never “extras” (Didi-Huberman 2009) in the scene of history that he evokes. This is the case for all the queer subjects that appear in the short and intense sketches of his texts (Lemebel 1995 and 1996), for the political opponents to Pinochet’s regime or the young girls abused in the school or the neighborhood, the disenfranchised students whose stories are touched upon in the radio chronicles Lemebel transmitted in his program *Cancionero* on Radio Tierra between 1994 and 2002 (Lemebel 1996 and 1998), or in his only novel *Tengo Miedo Torero* (2001), the fabulous bodies who died in the criminal fire which destroyed the legendary gay disco La Divine in Valparaíso on September 4th, 1993, described in another of his memorable chronicles (Lemebel 1995, 61–62).

This is the case, as well, for the child to whom *Canción para un niño boliviano que nunca vio la mar* is addressed. He speaks to this child, evoking their absence, waiting for their arrival. And it is indeed ‘they’ who are the addressees. Although the text is titled *Song for a Bolivian child who never saw the sea*, the child whom Lemebel speaks to is already multiple. He starts naming the child with affectionate epithets: “chiquito llocalla, pelusita paceño” (little indigenous boy, little one from La Paz) (Lemebel 2004, 105), then the child is a “niñita imilla” (little indigenous girl) (105),⁸ then again a “niño boliviano” (a Bolivian boy) (107), whose face is also described as a “little aymara face” (105). The child addressed is the same one, and yet multiple: it is a child named with a handful of different linguistic possibilities that are not variations on a main identity, but actual singularities encompassed by a language that strives for a plural deployment. This multiple naming recognises the many different possibilities written Spanish must be able to open up to in order to let all these children have enough oxygen to speak through it, to make these children appear within it in their likeness and their difference, as equivalent and not as identical. At the same time, those epithets already resonate, as well, with the derogatory uses that hegemonic Spanish has made of words derived from indigenous languages, marked by the derogatory attitude towards indigenous people that the language of the coloniser has forever imprinted upon Latin American societies, the language and the attitude that so actively shapes the class divide in which those children are already inscribed.

This child, then, is imagined as being already overwritten in multiple languages, multiple ways to be a citizen of the state of Bolivia: none of which is neutral, objective, natural, as it were. All these children exist already as “citizen,” and they are marked, here and there throughout the letter, in this text and in history, with features of specific forms of citizenship they find themselves inhabiting at birth, because of living in the periphery of a metropolis, because of descending from indigenous people of a particular land, because of being born into a family who could not afford the leisure to go to the sea. There is nothing natural, so to say, about this child, as much as there is nothing natural about the sea that emerges from Lemebel’s childhood story. They are both a child and a sea that are historically and politically connoted, and the intention to make them appear as such is interwoven within the language chosen, respectively, to hail the child and to describe the sea.

Lemebel could have easily titled the letter *Song for Bolivian Children who never saw the sea*; but somehow the act of imagination upon which this communication is predicated is intimate, and reclaims a confidence that only a one-to-one conversation allows. It is a conversation with a child who is not indistinct, but very situated in each and all of those bodies briefly convoked in the text: a little child living in the big city of La Paz, a little aymara girl, a young indigenous girl, perhaps already working at the domestic service of someone, in a household, language leaves one to imagine. They too are not extras in Lemebel's childhood story, they are not negligible *figurantes* for a lyrical trip on memory lane. The intimate conversation with the child that the speaker entices is intrinsically public: it is a letter of solidarity to all the disenfranchised children the child stands for, it is for all the children who, like Lemebel, saw the sea for the first time on a day trip, for just a few hours, chewing sand and chicken rushing back to the minibus that would drive them back to some sort of periphery, for all children who cannot even dream of a minibus driving them to the sea once a year. But first and foremost, this letter is a conversation left as a message in a bottle for the absent ones, the ones "who are going to arrive" (Monsiváis 2007, 6).

This solidarity with the child is grounded in a common citizenship: being, or having been, inhabitants of a shared territory of dispossession. Interestingly, it is only when this solidarity and this specific citizenship have been established (through the description of his first outing to the beach) that Lemebel also acknowledges, in the letter, the incidental margin of privilege that his own national citizenship—the one appearing on his passport, the one according him citizen's right—grants him, as opposed to this particular child: the fact that he, as a Chilean citizen, grew up in a country with access to the sea, while any Bolivian child grows up in a landlocked country.

The dispute over the sea between Chile and Bolivia has been a heated conflict between the two states since the War of the Pacific (1879–1884). As a consequence of the war and the following treaties, Bolivia lost 120,000 sq. km of land and its sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean, and it has tried to regain access to the ocean ever since (Cohen and Klein 2017, 106–118).⁹ The reason why this dispute is of such significance (so much so that every year Bolivia still celebrates the Day of the Sea, *el Día del Mar*, observing the loss of the Litoral Department with nationalistic parades in maritime costumes) goes much beyond symbolic value, as it is related to the plenty of natural and mineral resources—such as nitrate, silver and copper—present in the geographical area of the Atacama desert (the area Chile expropriated from Peru and Bolivia as a result of the war at the beginning of 20th century), resources that have historically been objects of exploitation not only on the part of Latin American states, but also of foreign powers (from British merchants, in the 19th century, to contemporary global mining corporations) and that are especially relevant to contemporary neoextractivist politics in Latin America (Monteón 1975; Clarke and Foster 2005). As in many other parts of the country, the indigenous populations have been particularly affected by the capitalist expropriation and exploitation of natural resources in the Atacama desert, as well as from the resolutions that states' sovereign powers have predicated upon the land and the sea, and their economic and social consequences: I am referring here not only to the populations living in rural areas, but also to the majority of the lowest social strata in cities and urban centers, where the class divide—in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, for that matter—is inextricably interlocked with race.

The long duration of the dispute over the sea between Chile and Bolivia is the historical background, but certainly not the core of Lemebel's letter—and for that matter, not my focus in this text. It is so because, as Lemebel makes clear in the conclusion of his text, states are after all nothing but historical concretions of economic and social logics that exceed any reason of State, as well as the contingent temporality of territorial disputes over borders. The core of the letter is obviously the encounter between two inhabitants of a landscape of poverty and dispossession, in which the historical framework of sovereign power has already shaped the expectations and the rights, and therefore the margins of imagination of the possible, for any citizen. For that matter, although that memorable first outing to the beach was, Lemebel admits, more of a torture than a leisure experience, even if he is fully aware that in any stretch of imagination those very same conditions, if any, would probably also characterise any other poor child's first encounter with the sea, Lemebel concludes by saying that he "would give anything so that this experience would not be alien" to this imaginary Bolivian child:

I would do anything, included gifting you with that meter of this long oceanic serpent that perhaps belongs to me. So much coastline to allow a few and lazy rich to fan themselves with the property of waters. This is why, when I hear the neo-patriotic speech of some Chilean I feel ashamed, especially when they talk about having won the sea with arms. Especially when I hear the presidential pride disqualifying a child's beach dream. But the presidents pass like the waves, and the god of the waters will keep waiting in their eternity your gaze of a sad indigenous child to lighten it up one day with your blue flash of lightning.¹⁰ (Lemebel 2004, 107)

The gift, if this is how we choose to understand this letter, is obviously not in the promise of that meter of Chilean coast that, ironically, Lemebel imagines being accorded to him by the state as property qua Chilean citizen. It is rather to be found in the way this text articulates the question of the right to the sea, for this child and for any other reader; it is in the attempt to make this right emerge as image, an historically, socially and politically connoted image. The desire to make this image appear, in a sense, can only be spoken, not written about, as the language available to describe the sea is, in a way, already polluted by endless images of privileged access to the sea, as well as to its poetic rendering in discourse. Hence, the language chosen for addressing all the absent children who have been and will be cast away from "the property of waters" (107) should necessarily exceed that order of discourse. While acknowledging the damage, the pain and the inequality that characterise the very historical conditions of enunciation for this text, Lemebel's language, however, does not give up to a logic of scarcity the abundance of imagination.

To my Black and Global Majority colleagues

I realise that when writing "language," in the last paragraph of the previous section, I actually meant to say "linguaggio," that is the word that occurs to me in Italian as I am composing this text, and that would be "lenguaje" in Spanish, the language Lemebel used in speaking and writing. In the absence of an English word (other than "speech," or "idiolect," neither of which really persuades me, as they strike me, respectively, as too imprecise and too individual a term for what I mean to

say) allowing me to capture what I have thought in my mother tongue, and then having bounced back in resonance in the mother tongue of the (supposed) subject of my essay, I take a moment to temporise before moving further in my prose.

Giving up the particular breath of a word is an operation that I usually make mechanically, inscribed as my writing already is in the cogs of the global English academia: it is an operation that runs smoothly through the page, my capacity or willingness to take quick decisions in translation already fine tuned to the particular social productivity that my job as an academic requires of my labour power, in the international professional world in which I operate. It happens less smoothly, I think, in the space of teaching: perhaps because the presence of other bodies in space, of other others, as it were, always obliges me to struggle (or equally, to indulge) to fill the gap between languages, to arrest discourse at least for a moment, and rest for an instant on language itself.

This happens, I realize, whenever I stumble upon a word, or when a student or a colleague stumbles upon my funny pronunciation of a term, or else when they catch me misusing an expression, or rejoicing at the discovery of yet another meaning of some very common English words. It is perhaps this intermittent temporising on language itself, that is so domestically inscribed in my teaching and academic life, that makes it less awkward for myself when someone compliments me for my English (after I have worked and lived in English for more than ten years), or else jokingly imitates my Italian accent or pronunciation, or remarks with a smile that the word I have just used is cute, but “it is actually not an existing word in English.” I have the privilege—of class, whiteness, nationality, professional status—to navigate smoothly those borders that visibly marks, at times, my linguistic difference in the UK, that remind me of my constitutive differing from the “proper” use of the language “we” standardly work in within globalised academia: although I am excluded from the “property of language,” expressed in the use of what is proper, I have made my homework to learn its tools and structures, not as efficiently as to pass as an English-speaker, but well enough to function in the code employed as currency in the economical system of knowledge in which I write and teach. I have thereby acquired a temporary linguistic citizenship in the landscape of globalised academia.

As an open letter to UK Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies white scholars, recently written by a group of UK-based Black and Global Majority academics and students, members of the “Revolution or Nothing Network,” extensively articulates, the making visible of differences, and their supposed markers upon the language, upon the body and upon the very epistemology in which we all work, is much more pressing and violent for all those who cannot afford the same privileges I have, those who cannot “pass” even if they did all the homework, and who still have to navigate daily the “foundational racist values for our fields” (Revolution or Nothing, 2020), manifesting themselves in the particular UK corner of globalised academia both in everyday interactions and as a broader and more profound institutional problem:

racism in our disciplines manifests as both epistemic erasures and appropriations as well as microaggressions and overt racist behaviours.

Our fields are underpinned by and built on values that have historically privileged colonial knowledge systems. These knowledge-systems have in themselves been, and continue to be, produced through processes of extractions from and appropriations of the labour and intellect of Black and Global Majority thinking and making. (ibid.)

As the letter goes on to argue, such underpinning nourishes the systemic racism that endures in contemporary academia not only by enabling everyday interactions that continuously produce and make those markers of difference appear, but profoundly characterises the very notion of “difference” produced, taught and circulated in the academic context. Not only systemic racism shapes systems of validation, recruitment, funding, and governance of UK universities and research projects, hence directly influences the professional lives of those who undergo its consequences, but also imposes notions of what is “proper” to research and teach, and how. It is so because the epistemological framework that is assumed as the standard has been produced in and has produced, on its part, Western, white academia. In this context, the word “diversity,” so much championed in the benevolent efforts of neoliberal academia to open up its gates to non-Western, non-white artists, scholars, histories, functions as a volatile fig leaf:

Colleagues’ conflation of diversity and decolonisation manifests as a cosmetic window-dressing solution by merely adding a few more Black and Global Majority authors to their reading lists, without any acknowledgement, understanding or interrogation of discourses and practices of power that their curricula choices continue to uphold. (ibid.)

Alongside the solid critique to the substantial Eurocentrism and imperialist attitude characterizing the field of theatre and performance studies, the letter also includes a list of personal episodes of everyday racism, a list of undesirable, unwanted moments in which markers of difference were first produced and then made visible to one of the letter’s signatories, who speak, however, in a collective voice throughout. These episodes are, in a sense, little chronicles, told as in a one-to-one conversation with a “white colleague,” who features in the title as the letter’s addressee. Inscribed within the necessary acidity that the letter expresses and requires, not least because the collective voice conveys a long accumulated historical frustration and inequality, those episodes seem to convoke an intimate tone of conversation: the reader is addressed as a singularity, as one among many, equivalent but not identical. A bit like in Lemebel’s letter to the Bolivian child, who is already multiple, also here the addressee could have been the larger group of “white colleagues,” but the choice of speaking to a singularity (which explicitly resonates, here, with Hazel V Carby’s 1982 article *White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*) performs an invitation to consider one’s own place in relation to this text and to UK academia, to take on personally and politically the invitation made by these singularities coming together in a “political, collective and positive identification” striving to exceed any categorization in relation to whiteness (ibid.).

This performative move, this intimate choice, seems to welcome me into this text as a receiver, it invites me to be part of this conversation. Or else, this move constructs a possibility of imagination in which I am, in fact, that “white colleague” addressed in this letter in her singularity and her

difference, as equivalent and not as identical to all the other white colleagues working in the field of theatre and performance in the UK. I receive this letter as someone historically situated, in her white body and her European citizenship, in her Marxist politics and her education that was shaped in Western academia, in her permanent (as permanent as anything can be these days in the UK) position as lecturer in a UK university, in her familiarity and estrangement with respect to the Global North, in her substantial unease to think of places where she has worked, loved, taught and learned in, like Latin America, as a compact and indistinct “Global South,” as someone caught precisely in the predicament that Gayatri Spivak has persuasively described as the “double bind” (Spivak 2012), and on which I shall return later on in this text.

The stakes of the invitation, in this conversation, are high: or at least so this particular reader understands them. This is an invitation to both engage in a political struggle on an institutional level (to be actively antiracist, and influence with praxis the structures that enable racism as economic, political and epistemological oppression) and to contribute to dismantle the very *episteme* that across four centuries, at the very least, has sustained the particular structures of our knowledge production and education. This episteme is the very same matrix out of which the idea of “cultural difference” was articulated, alongside a plateau of kindred, slippery concepts, such as, “diversity,” “marginality,” “interculturalism,” “inclusion,” as well as categories that, periodically, are put forward to connote “other” individual subjects, and reduce the need of a structural political and institutional change to a benevolent tokenization. The stakes that this letter raises, then, in its invitation to the white colleague as “an ally and an accomplice” (ibid.) is in my view no less than that of vigorously questioning the system of epistemological thinking that makes possible the identification of any marker of difference.

My reply starts, in a sense, with this essay, and of course it does not and cannot terminate here, as it is a reply to the call launched by these colleagues, in the present, but more importantly, in fact, it is a conversation *with them* directed *to those who are going to arrive*: to the students we are all educating in the system of globalised academia, that extends much beyond national boundaries, to those absent colleagues whose access to white, Western academia is already predicated, institutionally, on the translation of the materiality of their practices, and on the bowing to the artificial altar of diversity. It is therefore a reply that resolutely leaves white guilt outside, and strives to think together what political capacity we can build to operate within this system in solidarity, to question its canons and to possibly curb its development.

To force language open: on translation, and epistemological care

I have “received” this letter as I was writing this text and therefore in dialogue with Pedro Lemebel. In doing so, I was also imagining how exciting, generative, necessary it would be to bring Lemebel’s work into the space of my undergraduate teaching in London. As soon as I started imagining how it would be—what my students would make of Lemebel’s chronicles, how the documentation of Lemebel’s performance and activist work with the collective La Yeguas del Apocalipsis (the performance art duo he co-founded with Francisco Casas, active between 1987 and 1997), now largely available online, could make an excellent resource for collective learning—my desire started

shrinking a bit. First, I started listing in my mind the descriptors that, surely, would have to sustain my choice in my syllabus: a “queer performance artist,” a “queer activist,” a “Latin American performer and writer,” “a counter-cultural artist of indigenous descent”—while having very clear in my mind that the entirety of Lemebel’s life trajectory has been a struggle to complicate any narrow identification in any such category, not only because, as he persistently repeated, as a “maricón, pobre, indio y viejo” (a poor, old, indigenous fag, quoted in Banaji, 2019), he exceeded in multiple ways the identity considered proper for a Chilean citizen, but also because he categorically rejected the prison that each and all of these categories constituted as a site of solitude and identity. As in the letter to the imaginary Bolivian child, Lemebel constantly strived to enlarge the territory of common citizenship for those who were constituted historically by dispossession and reduced to marginality because of a centre established by means of violence, while he rejected all together the system of power that invented and affirmed marginalisation, and then attempted to recuperate it *as difference* in discourse. I could immediately translate, in my mind, the disguise of different forms of diversity converted into metrics that would sustain my pedagogical choice. And yet, none of those categories, in and of themselves, would be possibly big enough to contain the materiality of Pedro Lemebel, in fact none of these markers of diversity would enable to emerge what I see as Lemebel’s fundamental epistemological force.

Beyond categories crafted to name the things we do in the classroom, there is of course the materiality of teaching: the moment in which I, for example, would find myself discussing Lemebel with my students. There, the questions arising confront directly how to clog the very system given to us to negotiate knowledge in academia, the very patterns given to us both—teachers and students—to inhabit the space of education. I would need, in other words, to ethically think an act of translation, without letting go of the necessary historicity and locality, that is also the political stake, of a language, of a body and of a speech (un linguaggio) that my students are very likely to be unfamiliar with.

How to perform this act of translation?

How to translate Lemebel’s radical indiscipline into the customs of a discipline, namely that of theatre and performance studies in global academia?

How to clean up language of all the benevolent categories of diversity that suffocate the encounter with the material itself and the potential difference it could open up for my students? And the word “difference,” as I hope to explain, interests me here as a possibility of radical alterity in itself: a difference emancipated from any parameter of identity, from any stable reference to “sameness.”

How not to neutralize in advance the epistemological force that a work like Lemebel’s has marvelously released not only outside, but also despite of the field of knowledge and power that marked both his marginalization for most of his life, and his reduction to icon in his afterlife?

How not to lose the context and the politics that made this work possible, not as a “work of art,” but as a social, political and aesthetic praxis, historically situated and itself producing history?

How to resist this reduction, while recognising, however, that it is the same reduction that globalised Western epistemology, that global capitalism has long operated on all subjects not immediately translatable into figures of capital?

Translating the short quotes from Lemebel's text into English, in this essay, has been a difficult task, and I have come to the conclusion that it is ultimately an impossible task. This, of course, does not mean that this work has not, or it should not, be translated, taught, written about in languages other than Spanish. This neither comes down to my unlikely position as a translator of a language, Spanish, that I myself do not master perfectly, or to my position as an outsider of the national, geographical and cultural context in which Lemebel's life and work took place, in the long duration of the postcolonial reason ingrained in and prefiguring Chile's dictatorship, and then in the neoliberal democracy that followed it.

This has to do with what I recognise as an intrinsic, generative impossibility. I am interested to think of this impossibility and interrogate through it the conditions on which language moves across orders of discourse, including the one in which this very essay, this very special issue, this very journal participate, including the one in which the scene of my classroom previously evoked is already inscribed, including the one in which the letter written by my Black and Global Majority colleagues was produced. In fact, I wish to explore this sense of impossibility not primarily regarding Lemebel's work as an object, but as a trigger to thinking *with Lemebel* what is at stake in a radical shift in epistemological frameworks, what is at stake in translation, and in the particular form of writing-as-speaking that he consistently experimented with during his life. Ultimately, I wish to invite Lemebel's voice into a conversation that is long due in the arts and humanities in global academia. This conversation concerns the impelling necessity to not only enable the circulation of texts, performance works, and critical theory elaborated outside of the English-speaking world, but also to question how such texts and performance work can exceed their own reification in terms of "cultural difference," a notion that while striving to construct the "global" constantly operates dynamics of erasure of multiple ways in which one is inscribed into a social fabric, such as class, gender, and the yet to be named further specifications that actively organise political and aesthetic representation (for a discussion of the ambiguity of the idea of cultural difference see Sharpe and Spivak, 2003, 617-618).

I invite Lemebel's voice into this conversation because he seems to me an exemplary teacher in what Gayatri Spivak has called, reclaiming and making her own an expression originally put forward by Schiller, an "aesthetic education," which in Spivak's formula corresponds to the "training of the imagination for epistemological performance" (Caruth and Spivak 2010, 1023). What the concept and the practice of "aesthetic education" responds to, in Spivak's thinking, is a commitment to undo the premises of the hegemonic epistemology that Enlightenment has long established in Western societies. This very epistemology, Spivak argues, continues informing, regulating and programming "our access to the global in its specificity" (Butt 2014, 4). Sabotaging the logic of the Enlightenment, in which Schiller's hope in the creative faculty of imagination is profoundly inscribed, means for Spivak to think the double bind between the political and the ethical, to address the possibility of exceeding the point of differentiation, to practice translation as an

impossibility and a necessity, as an ethical instantiation of our being-human, and our participating in history.

Adopting the idea of “double bind” from Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*—where the expression describes “unresolvable sequences of experience” (Bateson 1972, 206), characterized by the simultaneous communication of contradictory instructions, leading to “a situation in which no matter what a person does, he [sic] ‘can’t win’” (205), and that is often associated with the subsequent emergence of schizophrenia—Spivak extends the concept to “a generalisable description of the type of tension between the vital and the institutional (or body and mind) that Kant tries to make sense of” (Butt 2014, 3). She holds the double bind up as the epistemological premise of any form of access to the “global” today. The double bind is the aporetic condition in which we navigate the impossibility and the necessity of translation in globalized knowledge production and its systems of power, and it is also the key for reading a crisis in that logic inaugurated by Kant’s “architectonic of faculties” (Spivak 2012, 26), in which Schiller’s idea of “aesthetic education” was inextricably grounded. Sabotaging Schiller’s own structural faith in imagination, and in the principle of reason that he borrowed from Kant, Spivak reclaims “aesthetic education” as an approach to the imagination mobilizing the latter as an instrument for a chosen, situated epistemological othering of oneself, involving both “the figuration of the ethical as the impossible” (104) and the persistent attempt to supplement an inevitable and “founding gap between the historical and the political” (98). In other words, “the image of the other as self produced by imagination supplementing knowledge or its absence is a figure that marks the impossibility of fully realizing the ethical” (104).

Working on the very cusp of the double-bind, then, Spivak welcomes the figure of schizophrenia as a possible collective, shifting position, sustaining the plumbing of the “intrinsic forgotten and mandatorily ignored bi-polarity of the social productivity and the social destructiveness of capital and capitalism” (27) on which contemporary globalised academia is predicated. She addresses the practice of teaching and learning as the inevitable site where the double bind is not safely found and played with, but, rather, experienced as a continuous confronting of contradictory instructions without possibility of benevolent solution:

In the ferocious thrust to be “global”, the humanities and the qualitative social sciences, “comparative” at their best, are no longer a moving epistemological force. They will increasingly be like the opera, serving a peripheral function in society. As to whether they will draw as much corporate funding as opera – whose glamour the curricular humanities and social sciences cannot hope to match – remains to be seen. Already it is the relatively glamorous think tanks and monolingual “interdisciplinarity” (read shrinking diversity and Americanized monoculture) that are gaining funding. US “core curricula”—minimally “politically correct” by including “multicultural” classics—again in English translation—are travelling internationally. (26)

Against the grain of this scenario, Spivak demands that translation happens as gesturing toward the experience of “ethics as the impossible figure of a founding gap” (117): the gap at the core of

any construction of “another” that is not oneself. The act of translation, in this context, is the consistent recognition of an aporia, the patient attending to the materiality of what a “deep language learning” (26) could be, it is the “grabbing of an outside indistinguishable from an inside” that constitutes “an inside, fit to negotiate with an outside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-systems by the things grasped” (241).

The idea of translation as a form of shuttle, as what happens in the gestures that the “human infant” does in learning to grab, in so doing constituting a “crude coding” (241) between herself and the rest of the world, is borrowed by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, but in Spivak’s terms this grabbing (during which “violence translates into conscience and viceversa”) is the movement of “violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility” (242). It is this subject, constantly in becoming, that the experience of teaching should always strive to bring about. And this, of course, is not just a matter of language: “the concept-metaphor ‘language’ is here standing in for that word which names the main instrument for the performance of temporizing, of the shuttling outside-inside translation that is called life” (241). If the humanities and qualitative social sciences may salvage any form of epistemological force today, a vital step is to turn the classroom into a space where the mind cultivates a different habit to think one’s own space of repair and responsibility, which may well be the safe terrain of English as a mother tongue, as a start, but only insofar as this allows an impossible mending of the materiality of translated language and experience. While necessarily insufficient, this is a gesturing toward revising “the philosophical error of confidence in accessing the ethical reflex directly, rather than insist on an epistemological preparation into the possibility of a relationship without relation: the reflexive re-arrangement of desires” (11).

As I consider the stakes of teaching as “uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (108), I return to think of Lemebel’s letter to the Bolivian child, and to Lemebel’s presence in my classroom, and in these pages, as a speaking voice, not as an object of study. I am regarding his multifaceted writing, his speaking on the feminist community radio Radio Tierra, his performing in the streets of Santiago, as a teaching in what it may mean, in practice, to radicalise otherness, to make it impossible to reduce difference to a logic of ipseity, a logic that operates not only between different languages but is in fact already inscribed in one’s own supposed mother tongue. While always speaking to and from what was perceived as “minority,” Lemebel always threw a shadow, as it were, on the immunised cells of difference that being recognised as a minority seemed to bring about:

To speak of minorities it is necessary to understand that one does not refer to a mathematic sum, but to a relation with the power. Therefore, women, homosexuals, lesbians, young people, old people or indigenous people are minorities. Although they are a multitude before a sole man with weapons. But I do not speak on their behalf. Minorities have to speak for themselves. I only perform in writing a sort of amorous ventriloquism, negating the ‘I’, producing a tongueless void of a thousand speeches (un vacío deslenguado de mil hablas). (Lemebel in Schaffer, 1988)

Again, I am forced to make an awkward decision in translating the marvelous term “deslenguado” into “tongueless,” keeping in mind that the carnality of Lemebel’s language would surely not appreciate having the “tongue” cast aside from the practice of language. The amorous ventriloquism described in this passage, however, could be another way to look at the double bind that Lemebel himself recognized as marking his own access to writing, his own shuttling within a language that, in a sense, was already very much affected by its thrust to be global.

As Gwendolyn Harper, who took on the unease and the responsibility to beautifully translate one of Lemebel’s chronicles, suggests:

For Lemebel, language is political and local. In the epilogue to *Zanjón de la Aguada*, he worries over the collapse of the terms *pueblo* (“the people,” in a political sense) and *gente* (“people”), a collapse likely brought about by the pervasiveness of English, which pins the strength of its democratic concept on a mere article. How can Lemebel’s local resistance to English, the now-global language of capitalism, possibly translate into English? (Harper 2017)

The answer to this question inevitably brings us back to the figure of a generative impossibility, and significantly Harper too proposes to look at Lemebel’s work itself as the disorderly site of such impossibility, staging the act of an incessant weaving of a social fabric into language, an act that by its own quality cannot but rip the language off and leave a certain work of mending to be done by the reader, the listener, the translator:

Lemebel’s own writing offers an approach that wedges openings amidst such collapse. Spanish, a language in which the entire world divides into female or male, cannot represent Lemebel’s transgenderism, or the lives led by the trans community in Santiago, a community which Lemebel came to represent, especially in the aftermath of the AIDS outbreak. Lemebel’s response is to force language open: with hyphens, with double entendres, with syntactic arabesques, with invented terms like *mariposear* (a verb form of *mariposa*, or butterfly, which sounds like *marica*, a derogatory term for a gay man). His dissatisfaction with language is coextensive with his love for it, as his capricious conjunctions of syllables and sly wordplay become the very nodes of his resistance. What most risks getting lost in translation is Lemebel’s simultaneous acidity and tenderness, a generosity towards language and the world even amidst steely resistance to its conditions. (Harper 2017)

I am wondering whether “to force language open,” to smuggle in the social and the historical into what is consistently given as ahistorical, and therefore unchangeable, is a pointer toward what Spivak, in an exhausting and dense footnote of her book, calls “a patient epistemological care” (Spivak 2012, 519 n.57), the one that we should perform with our students, sharing the burden of impossibility and reparation, sharing the task of responsibility for those who are going to arrive. Such epistemological care, itself produced by the condition of violence, has nothing benevolent to it: it is a declaration of unrest, at the very least, a conscious decision to bring translation outside of

the territory of individual craft, and make it a shared, collective task, as the one that decolonisation, at its core, should constantly strive to be.

The generative nature of such impossibility, the declaration of unrest within the smooth mechanics of global academia, the relation with the materiality of the language that is given to function within it, and that is itself already stained in blood, is at the heart of the practice Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has articulated throughout her life, that she distinctly understands as an unfinished process of learning and teaching. Epistemic violence in Bolivia (the nation where Cusicanqui lives and works, but her thinking actually refers to the broader Latin American region) meant, in fact, not only the marginalisation of a multitude of indigenous idioms—languages like the Aymara and the Quechua that Cusicanqui has consistently brought into the texture of her own writing, inside and outside academia—but also the erasure of the intellectual genealogies that through those languages have produced concepts-metaphors that are now lost to theoretical and practical ways to think reality. “Behind the physical elimination of Aymara *amawt’as* (philosophers) and *yatiris* (healers) during the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of the Americas, lies the ‘spiritual’ annihilation of the philosophical uses of the Aymara language” (Cusicanqui and Ilich Bacca, 2018). According to Cusicanqui, this process goes hand in hand with the progressive construction of ever new stereotypes of the indigenous that “combines the idea of a continuous territorial occupation, invariably rural, with a range of ethnic and cultural traits, and classifies indigenous behavior and constructs scenarios for an almost theatrical display of alterity” (Cusicanqui 2012, 99), clearly fine tuned with the project to keep at bay indigenous populations’ capacity to affect the state. Global academia is not immune to this mechanics, and on the contrary according to Cusicanqui, the recent establishment of a “discourse” on decolonization in North American universities has functioned according to very similar logics, that presuppose that the relations of force, within epistemology, are not altered, and “alterity” is at the same time reified as cultural difference, and erased in its materiality of history and politics (97–101), in what appears as a form of “epistemological extractivism” (Grosfoguel 2016). As Cusicanqui has famously synthesized, “the postcolonial is a desire, the anticolonial is a struggle, the decolonial is an obnoxious fashionable neologism” (quoted in Gago, 2016).

But regardless of labels, so often perfectly inscribed in and lubricating the gears of the very epistemology erasing or reifying “alterity,” Cusicanqui’s political and intellectual practice is itself gesturing toward what decolonising would mean, as a collective, nameless endeavour, rather than a concept already attached to systems of validation and institutional “cosmetic window-dressing solutions” (Revolution or Nothing 2020). After all, decolonization, she affirmed, is a group task: “You cannot decolonize on your own, because, as Jim Morrison and also Foucault said, we carry the lords inside of us because of cowardice and laziness” (Gago 2016). Interestingly, when Gayatri Spivak visited Bolivia, despite a proposed list of official translators, it was Silvia who decided to do the simultaneous translation, but, above all, who showcased the undiscipline of the text and of linear translation. “How to translate the term double bind belonging to the schizo that Spivak uses into Spanish? In Aymara there is an exact word for that, which doesn’t exist in Spanish: it is *pä chuyma*, which means having the soul divided by two mandates that are impossible to fulfill” (Gago 2016).

The space of temporizing on the impossibility and necessity of translation, in which the encounter between Spivak and Cusicanqui took place, resonates for me with the “generosity towards language and the world even amidst steely resistance to its conditions” that Harper (2017) suggested might be precisely what could get lost in the translation of Lemebel’s texts. On this generosity, on this impossibility, I wish to close this essay, again staging Lemebel in the uneasy place of a double-bind, again inscribed, as at the beginning of this text, in an unlikely scene of “aesthetic education,” again writing-as-speaking a shuttle of solidarity for those who are going to arrive.

Hablo por mi diferencia

In 1986 Lemebel walked in high heels, wearing make up depicting a hammer and sickle emerging from his mouth and extending to his left eyebrow, into a public leftist convention taking place in Santiago at the Estación Mapocho, and read the text that to this day is probably the most famous, most translated piece of his work: *Hablo por mi diferencia (I speak for my difference)* (Lemebel 1996, 2015). The intervention is a milestone in the denunciation of the long lasting culture of homophobia within the Left: happening at the dawn of Pinochet’s dictatorship and prefiguring the transition to democracy, Lemebel’s manifesto signals, politically and poetically, the multiple ways in which oppression was marked upon his body, making him not fit not only within the categories of identity imposed by fascist power, but also operating in epistemological frameworks like Marxism, and in political formations at pains to defeat fascist power. While standing as an ultimate reclaiming of the subversive potential of difference, the manifesto is, in my view, also a passionate call to complicate the notion of difference: to affirm, as it were, that difference only exists because is captured in discourse as such, in a somehow reassuring constant relation between ipseity and alterity. “I speak for my difference” says Lemebel “and I am not so strange” (Lemebel 2015): it is a difference that does not admit reduction. The multiple ways in which such difference was constituted, that is, cannot be reduced to Lemebel’s homosexuality, and so in the solidarity that any Marxist politics must build, oppression needs to be spoken in a language that is multiple: because it was not only the communist opponents to Pinochet’s regime that were persecuted during dictatorship, but also the queers, the indigenous, the indigent, the disenfranchised, according to a logic of sameness whose brutality, in a sense, only varies as a matter of frequency in democracy. The utopia of a communist horizon of equality, for which Lemebel continued to work throughout his life, although rejected time and again from both the party and the episteme of Marxism, needs to give up the reduction to categories of “difference,” or will not be. On the cusp of the future, in the double bind of his present, in the unlikely classroom of this Leftist convention, Lemebel spoke the words of an impossible letter, performing in high heels the epistemological care of both engendering and resisting the language of a difference through which, one day, we may learn to be done with the very idea of sameness.

Notes

¹ 'Song for a Bolivian child who never saw the sea' (my translation). To my knowledge, this text has not been translated into English, all quotes in this essay are translated by me. I am grateful to Xel-Ha López for mentioning this text to me, during a seminar on political imagination that I gave at the Centro de las Artes de Guanajuato (Mexico) in February 2020.

² In Bolivia, the Spanish word 'llocalla' means indigenous.

³ "Y cómo te lo digo y con qué humedad de letras te lo cuento, chiquito llocalla, pelusita paceño que nunca estuvo frente al estruendo salado de la planicie oceánica. Cómo hacertelo ver, niñita imilla, en estas letras, si nunca fuiste testigo de esa música y sus olas crespas chasconeando el concierto de la bella mar" (Lemebel 2004, 105).

⁴ "es una carta dirigida a tus ojitos oblicuos que de mil maneras intentan imaginar ese gran charco azul" (Lemebel 2004, 105).

⁵ "que no es como te lo cuenta la profesora en el colegio describiendo la parte más extensa del Titicaca, esa zona donde el cielo se recuesta sobre las aguas verde musgo, donde no hay cerros, y el horizonte desaparece en esa lama esmeralda que, de alguna manera, también semeja un ojo de mar. Tampoco es similar a esa caricatura Disney que te muestran en la escuela boliviana, con peces de colores saltando por todos lados, con bañistas y quitasoles eternamente en vacaciones de verano, con arenas doradas y olas turquesas en un exceso de pedagógica idealización" (Lemebel 2004, 105).

⁶ "Era como ver al cielo al revés, un cielo vivo, bramando, aullando ecos de bestias submarinas. Un cielo líquido que se extendía como una sábana espumosa más allá, infinitamente lejos, hasta donde mis ojillos de niño pobre no podían llegar" (Lemebel 2004, 107).

⁷ In the text: las amigas.

⁸ In the Aymara and Quechua languages, the term 'imilla' refers to a young girl, an adolescent, and it is often used in a derogatory way, and mostly associated to a young indigenous girl employed as domestic servant in a household. I am grateful to Paulina Oña who has helped me navigate the politics of use of all these terms in Bolivian Spanish.

⁹ In 2013 Evo Morales took the territorial dispute at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, that have recently deliberated that Chile has no obligation to renegotiate the terms of Bolivia's sovereign access to the Ocean.

¹⁰ "Incluso, te regalo el metro marino que quizá me pertenece de esta larga culebra oceánica. Tanta costa para que unos pocos y ociosos ricos se abaniquen con la propiedad de las aguas. Por eso, al escuchar el verso neopatriótico de algunos chilenos me da vergüenza, sobre todo cuando hablan del mar ganado por las armas. Sobre todo al oír la soberbia presidencial descalificando el sueño playero de un niño. Pero los presidentes pasan como las olas, y el dios de las aguas seguirá esperando en su eternidad tu mirada de llocalla triste para iluminarla un día con su relámpago azul" (Lemebel 2004, 107).

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

THE FADING OF AN ARCHIMEDEAN POINT: STAGE AND AUDIENCE RECONSIDERED

MARITA TATARI HMDK STUTT GART

A feeling of urgency, doubled by and struggling with the feeling of powerlessness over the current techno-economic domination of the world, innervates and moves not only the contemporary performance scene, but the whole art scene. This urgency is simultaneously impelled to take into account the fact that received categories of forming, inhabiting and understanding the western-globalized world do not seem able to apply: “politics,” “art,” and “action” have alike lost the ground upon which they manifested, functioned, and received their meaning. The revival of interest in theorists such as Deleuze and Foucault within the framework of new materialisms, postcolonial critics and techno- or affect-ecologies is an attempt to respond to these transformations and find a language to address them. If it is indeed currently of particular relevance to the performing arts, this attempt, as well as the feeling of powerlessness, should be discussed with regard to the shift of the whole modern subject-based understanding of the world.

The editors of this issue define power “as a process of transforming relations of desire and potential into relations of dominance and possibility,” and powerlessness as “the seeming impossibility of renegotiating this process.” The renegotiation of power would suspend the transformation of relations of desire into relations of power and would possibly allow for relations of desire to take place as such. However, one could argue that the renegotiation of power-process is not identical to relations of desire and potential.

Michel Foucault, longing to overturn negative conceptions of power, sees “the pleasure that comes from exercising a power” and “the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power” circling around each other, inciting each other, converting the negative instance of obstacle in a spiral

(Foucault 1978, 45 and 157). However, from a philosophical and a psychoanalytical point of view, this spiral presents what Hegel called a “bad infinite”: by stepping infinitely further, liquidating the obstacle each time, it is a never-reached limit, a perpetual deferral. Psychoanalytically speaking, the experience of limit in desire is clearly distinguished from such a “bad infinite,” from a perpetual deferral (Copjec 1994 and 2015).¹ According to this distinction, desire is rather qualified—again in Hegelian terms—by a “good infinite,” which means an infinite which is in the limit, a reached limit, and thus a kind of finite infinite. I will argue that the distinction between renegotiation of power and desire is crucial in order to understand the shift we are currently facing, the shift being undergone by the subject-based understanding of the world. I will consider this distinction in a broader theoretical context, and, drawing on it, I will transfer it into the field of performing arts. This shall allow me to put into perspective some aspects of the epistemological frame underlying performing arts studies: the conception of new and the conception of the audience.²

Desire is a movement going beyond oneself, a relation to an otherness, tending and opening towards another as other. The term “potential,” as distinguished from modal possibilities, emphasizes the fact that a possibility emerges, instead of a fact that can possibly be realized. As relations to another as other, to an alterity in the other, which means to nothing *given*, relations of desire are relations of potential: The other as other—nothing given—sets and keeps in motion their emergence or emanation. Precisely as relations to nothing given, relations of desire, in order to be considered or experienced as such, imply, paradoxically, a kind of detachment. Not a reflexive detachment of the persons involved in them, considering or experiencing them, but a limit that enables radical otherness to appear, and by that enables relation, desire and potentiality to emerge.

When we transfer the psychoanalytic term of desire—or the philosophical term of a good infinite—into performing arts, detachment becomes a keyword in rediscovering the setting defining the form of the happening, as well as the audience involved. Here, I intend to release the term “detachment” from the modern presupposition of a subject, whose reflexivity was thought to be its underlying support and horizon.³ Literally speaking, a *skene*, the stage in ancient Greek, presents a detachment: a space-time detached from a continuum. A detachment, however, does not necessarily need a stage in the conventional sense of the term, a cut in a continuum, in order to be a detachment. For instance, an intensification taking place in the midst of unfolding relations can be qualified as a kind of detachment too, if it allows the activity of the unfolding relations to be exposed as such. The activity of relating is detached—according to the etymology of the word: absolute—when it relates simultaneously to a limit in itself. Touching upon the limit of relating, and thus upon nothingness in this relating to itself, enables it as flow, it enables its activity to be addressed as such. Copjec’s account of desire in the Hegelian terms of a “good infinite” (Copjec 1994) is thus not only very pertinent, it is also very relevant in the context of this discussion on performance as art. The parallel with Hegel’s account of artwork is striking—provided that we consider it from the point of view of art and not from the point of view of his teleology of history (Tatari 2017): Hegel describes an artwork as a concrete infinite that takes place in a finite, sensuous exteriority.

Relations of desire are thus not relations between given terms. The stage—a detachment—enables relations to occur as never-given relations: it opens up for those related—among others, those traditionally called spectators, beholders or audience—a never-given relation, a never-given commonality, a common as actuality of a potentiality. We could call this a universal. If we understand the stage in the strong sense of what enables the free flow of relating in a here and now, then the question of what constitutes or what functions as a stage becomes crucial in order to understand what allows the unfoldment of a happening to address an audience as a non-given commonality: what transforms the beholders or spectators into an audience distinguished from a given community. If we cling to the word “art” as implying an open audience (a *publicum*, distinguished from the given communities implied for example in rituals and cult practices), the question of what constitutes a stage becomes crucial in order to understand if and to what extent a precise happening is a kind of (performing) art: to what extent it actualizes a universal in its audience.⁴

The term “power” is often, as in the call of the current issue, used in place of “sovereignty,” in order to designate a disenchantment felt toward political sovereignty, which for many has proved to be impossible and has ended up as an infinite striving for dominance. Relations of power and dominance evade alterity or nothingness in themselves; they strive to capture the other, to eliminate (instead of sublimate) its otherness, and thus to infinitely expand. This expansion, in its contemporary form, seems to have eroded the transcendental ground of ends which defined the modern subject, turning to an all-encompassing sphere of techno-economic commandment, whose infinite expansion—a “bad infinite”—has become an end in itself. Powerlessness and resistance are its correlates. Negatively defined by power, they share the same frame with it. The origin of this “bad infinite” is the striving for autonomy as sovereignty.

And yet this scheme of autonomy, with its correlated purposiveness, is shifting under technological conditions so radically that while nothing seems to be bare of the techno-economic commandment, all concepts of politics grounded upon transcendental purposiveness mutate. If this is so, then resistance, suspense or inactivation of this process, insofar as they are inscribed in this same scheme of sovereignty, also lose the ground upon which they might apply. This, among other things, may have provided the background for Jean-Luc Nancy’s objection to Giorgio Agamben on the occasion of the Covid-19 pandemic, the latter seeing in the current state of exemption a total exercise of power over life as biopolitics at the cost of “bare life,” evoking (in other contexts) resistance as the passive act of inactivating sovereignty, liberating its “inoperativity.”⁵

On the occasion of this pandemic, Nancy amplifies a thesis he has been defending in recent years (Nancy 2020b). He sees this virus as entangled with the scheme of progress, the striving for autonomy that as a “bad infinite” has defined western civilization, ending in the technoeconomic machinery of today. As he has been claiming in recent years, our time is subject to a deep transformation—a mutation—of this civilization, comparable to the transformation that followed the end of the ancient world (Nancy 2020a). If I were to summarize this complex philosophical thesis, I would say that what is at stake is, in my view, the way western civilization—has hitherto

dealt with the infinite (with the heterogeneous, with alterity), since the end of the archaic hierarchical world, which handed human beings their human condition. The virus is currently exposing us to our finiteness, while all striving to sublimate finiteness into forms of autonomy—as progress, as projection to future—have turned out to be colonial and have ended in destruction.

Can the experience of finiteness give rise to an actual, a good infinite, here and now, not on a personal, individual level, but on the level of culture and society? Can a non-given common take place as a relation to alterity that does not strive to sublimate the human condition in a form of autonomy?

Nancy does not claim to provide an answer, because, as he underlines, all current projects, all temptations to give a solution, all strategies, even when meant negatively as resistance, only result from the logic of the striving for autonomy, today dissolved in technoeconomic dominance (Nancy-Tatari 2020). However, he asks this question and takes a stance, standing for an autonomy which is not the autonomy of a subject, but, on the contrary, that of a singular existing each time as relating, meant as plural singularity of existence as being-out and beyond, as becoming. Trying to bring together two different philosophical traditions, that of a finite transcendence and that of a philosophy of becoming (and in re-elaborating beyond Heidegger the Heideggerean concept of *Brauchen, gebrauchtsein*: the fact of existing as being used by being, that Heidegger relates to the Augustinean enjoyment),⁶ Nancy seems to me to be touching the limits of what can be thought.

Nancy's objection concerning the extent of the shift of the transcendental frame—the question, if it is right to speak, as he does, of a deep mutation of the western-globalized civilization—cannot be proven on an argumentative basis. However, the epistemological, theological or philosophical presuppositions underlying political theories as well as performing-art theories, the implicit frame of the ways the current phenomena are perceived and analyzed, can and must be discussed. New facts are not to be blindly applied in old thinking categories; the conceptual ground, the thinking categories themselves have to be reexamined in order to take account of the current state of things: what is the epistemological framework of contemporary, allegedly non-subject-based, theories of resistance in the field of performing arts? How are we to grasp theoretically, for instance, the emergence of new forms, if the new is no longer seen as a progressive self-realisation of history, of politics, of meaning?

Art and the Archimedean point

The concept of art as a singular subsuming the plurality of fine arts, is an invention of western philosophy. It emerged within the transcendental frame of the subject. In this frame, it was meant to actualize a purposiveness with no purpose.⁷ In the tradition drawing on Kant and extending to postmodern theories, art is meant to be on the one hand distinguished from political sovereignty, while on the other hand co-constituting its internal difference, suspending, in-activating or keeping in suspense all purpose. If today the concept of “art” shifts and is substituted by terms such as “art practices” keen to “resist power,” we should not forget that the relation to purposiveness, framing art in its modern understanding, shifts too. While “dynamics of power” are without a doubt at work

in the field of performing arts, and while they doubtless condition their institutions, their production, the making and perceiving of performances, and the subjectivities of artists, producers, curators, and audiences, one could still argue that these dynamics of power do not *absolutely* condition them.

Capitalism and techno-economic dominance do indeed form a sphere of total commandment, a sphere of all spheres of life. However, this totality exists as such from the perspective of sovereignty, whose modern transcendental frame, one could argue, is being dissolved. If this is so, there is no sphere of all spheres of the kind implied by the modern subject, no totality other than the market. This means that more is happening than this total techno-economic commandment, even if it happens within it. Timothy Morton puts it provocatively: the whole is less than the sum of its parts.⁸ I would say that this is just another way to take into consideration a concrete or good infinite, an infinite which is in the finite and is not to be subsumed by any totality, cannot be projected onto a horizon, as modern philosophies of conscience believed in their striving for autonomy. Transposed into the context of the topic discussed here, this means the following: From the point of view of power, relations of desire and potential might be resisting. However, they simultaneously present an absolute (a detachment, a limit) taking place in themselves. They are the autonomy of a heteronomy, the autonomy of an affective relation as its emanation. As such, they are not to be examined only from the perspective of sovereignty or power and of its correlative inactivation or renegotiation. This, in fact, is the challenge today: to understand how the shift of the transcendental frame affects the taking-form of performing arts.

Relations of desire are set and kept in motion by a radical alterity or nothingness, and are driven towards a “more,” a going-beyond-oneself. When turning their back to nothingness, they become relations of dominance. Not by chance is death as sacrifice the crucial moment for the emergence of sovereignty in Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (1998).⁹ When death exits a given sacrificial order and enters the polis, the impossible sacrifice of bare life becomes the founding moment for political sovereignty as endless striving for autonomy. For Agamben, all social activity is grounded upon it. Turning its back to its ungroundedness, sovereignty strives endlessly for its own purposiveness. Caught in this tension, everything in the present is bound to an ever more demanding purposiveness to which it responds. It is bound up with an endless answerability. The present is indebted to a future that endlessly demands more.¹⁰ Having turned its back to its own condition, striving to sublimate death, today we could say that this striving is a striving to become superhuman, posthuman or transhuman.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, while the existing inequalities become even more flagrant, death—to which projecting and planning the future had turned its back—re-enters the stage. The human condition—that which is common to all humans—reappears in the midst of the techno-economic striving for limitless expansion. The end of the human sacrifice in a given hierarchical archaic order, exposed human beings to their human condition – mortality, setting in motion the striving for sovereignty (the polis). The human condition makes a new entrance on stage, while the transcendental deduction of purposiveness—and with it altogether political sovereignty in its modern form— may no longer apply.

It is precisely at this point that Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* becomes relevant. It is noteworthy that Arendt defines what she calls "human condition" neither as a matter of human nature nor as a matter of truth or of knowledge.¹¹ Instead, she traces the emergence of the human condition—not a precise condition, but the fact of being conditioned [*Bedingtheit*—back to a cultural moment that coincides with what is usually considered to be the beginning of occidental culture. Mortality comes to the fore as such: life exits a natural given order and movement is brought into light.¹² This coming to the fore as such, one could argue, is in itself a kind of autonomy, since the human condition, coming to the fore as such, implies a dealing with an unconditional. It can be understood as the emergence of the concern for autonomy in western cultural history. And indeed, in Arendt's view, it bequeaths to this culture the concern and striving for autonomy, setting in motion a series of transformations of activity which Arendt describes in this book. If today, at the other end of this cultural history, Arendt's position becomes relevant, it is not merely because she describes these transformations, but because she describes them from a particular standpoint.

The coming to the fore of the human condition does indeed bring something unconditional to light. However, Arendt sees this unconditional in the ability of human activity to begin, actualised in speech and action, as distinguished from the autonomy striven for by a "self." Her standpoint is rigorously distinguished from all kinds of striving for sublation or overcoming of the human condition in the autonomy of a self—be it philosophy, knowledge, theology, or sovereignty. She advocates for the unconditional of the human condition as natality, and thus for freedom; but not for the (impossible) freedom of a subject, which strives for sublating otherness (and contingency) as in the process of recognition. Arendt's standpoint is not Agamben's "se."¹³ It is natality coming to the fore as such in human action, and natality implies plurality as a fact in a shared world in the present moment, not as the result of a process. This is precisely the reason why I find it important to mention Arendt in this context: because she sees in the human condition (in the fact of being conditioned) an unconditional (as freedom, or as beginning)—an in-finite, we could say, to make the connection to the previous terms—that as such opens up a common, without providing a measure or a principle for this common: a common as plurality of beginnings, not as oneness of a universal principle. To avoid misunderstandings: I am not examining here the modality that she acknowledges to the common—the space of appearance as political: neither the problems related to her conception of politics nor her conception of power (term that she uses in a clearly distinct way to the one mentioned above). What is relevant here is her standpoint, which is rigorously different from the claim for universality of the modern subject. All criticism of Arendt's thought, including her conception of the political, should first be confronted with the particularity of this standpoint.

The standpoint from which Arendt casts an eye on the history of western civilisation and on the ways of thinking that we take for granted does not provide or seek for a measure to understand reality.¹⁴ Literally speaking, it is not a standpoint but a stance: a praxis, an ethos, an attitude. It is noteworthy that there is nothing Arendt criticises more harshly than the utilitarian consequences of what she calls the discovery of an Archimedean point, a discovery (first ascribed to Galileo) of a perspective from which earthly things can be measured and observed as if from an outside. It is

through this discovery that the Christian-Jewish “sacredness of life” turned to “life as the highest good” in modern times. Arendt understands the emergence of Cartesian doubt as having been made possible by this discovery, as well as the transcendental understanding of the world *in toto*: not only the processuality of nature, but also processual subjectivity, history as the processual realisation of its purposiveness, and of course the very notion of progress, which measures reality from the perspective of its alleged purposiveness. Arendt sees human beings in modern times as worldless: they lack a common world in present time because they are thrown back into a self, indebted to and projected towards the future.

In Arendt’s view, even Kant’s famous formula that no man must ever become a means to an end and that every human being is an end in themselves has its origin in the utilitarianism that results from serving life as the highest good. She sees Kant’s formula as an attempt to prevent the use of the means-end category in the field of political action. However, in Arendt’s opinion, even Kant fails, just as he does in his paradoxical interpretation of man’s attitude towards the only objects that are not “for use”: namely works of art, in which, he says, we take “pleasure without interest.” Not even Kant could solve this problem, she says, as the same operation which establishes man as the “supreme end” permits him “if he can to subject the whole of nature to it,” that is, to degrade nature and the world into mere means, robbing both of their independent dignity (Arendt 1998, 155–159).

This is important to us here, because it shows what is at stake: the measure for all things. Arendt replies to Kant by echoing Plato, saying that it is not man—who wishes to use everything and therefore ends by depriving all things of their intrinsic worth—but god that is the measure even of mere use objects (*ibid*). Here, god is a philosophical god who presents an unmeasurable measure—as do human beings according to Kant. However, god presents a measure which is not in the disposition of human beings. Arendt sees Kant in the heritage of *vita contemplativa*, whose framework remained (according to her) intact even after its reversal in modern times and in modernity: the oneness of principle—here the oneness of a measure—subordinating all activity. With the discovery of an Archimedean point, this measure comes into the hands of human beings, the price being—as Arendt, quoting Kafka, repeatedly reminds us—that they use it against themselves: “he found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself. It seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition” (248). Arendt carries out in this book a view on human activity which does not subordinate activity to the oneness of a measure implied and inherited by *vita contemplativa*.

And nevertheless, her account of western cultural history is not relativist. On the contrary, she radically changes the perspective upon ways of thinking and acting that we take for granted. Yet, she does not project into the past alternative ideas about the evolution of history. Instead, she criticises such enterprises as “dangerous” and “vain.”¹⁵ Arendt does not seek for solutions to the aporetic striving for autonomy in western civilisation—a solution to the contradictions of the Greek, Hebrew, Roman, Christian world and of the modern times. She advocates for the unconditional that comes to the fore with the human condition throughout all the different cultural moments and transformations of activity, without seeing in it an Archimedean point, and thus also without inscribing it positively or negatively into a process—as does, for example, Agamben’s inactivation

of sovereignty. It appears to me that it is precisely this stance that makes her thinking particularly relevant today. The stance which stands for the common without implying a measure or striving to sublimate a measure for this common in a form of autonomy; the stance which stands on the edge of the human condition, the “cut” of its natality, enabling the emergence of new: a finite transcendence.

After the “posts”

If powerlessness has today become a relevant subject to performing art studies, this is also connected to a shift we are witnessing concerning the perception and the taking-form of arts. The emergence of new forms testifies today to the fading of an Archimedean point: the fading of a point from which to cast an eye on them. The narratives of new forms as emerging by overcoming the previous fade, while at the same time the concern for a free emanation of relation—as never-given common or as demand for equality—persist: in postcolonial or anthropocentric criticism, in artistic interventions as subversion, resistance or even as feeling of powerlessness. It seems to me that the challenge we face now is to understand how purposiveness shifts.

In the contemporary scene of performing arts, the narratives of an evolution of forms seem to have lost their validity. Until the beginning of the 21st century, in spite of all the criticism of the western concept and history of art, in spite of all the criticism of the Enlightenment’s faith in progress, and even despite the criticism of the transcendental scheme itself, the new in art had been framed and felt as an overcoming of the older forms. This was the case for “postdramatic” theatre, for the “performance-turn,” but even more recently for “posthuman” art. The idea that artforms respond to their present time was shaped in modern times: the idea that they respond to their present time by giving to it a form, by opening up in it something new, a potential projected to future (Hegel remains the most emblematic name for this idea). The change of artforms has been related to historical change, both as a result and as anticipation. Modernity projected this idea of art retrospectively into the past as well as into other, non-Western cultures – a colonial process. In the core of this idea lies a precise understanding of the relationality—of the “relations of desire and potential”—at stake in artforms.

Relations of desire go beyond oneself and exceed the given. If they are exposed as such, they allow for a never-given-common—a never-given relation—to be addressed. A never-given-common is also what the demand for equality demands. Art, this modern invention, in contrast to cult and ritual practices, had to be new each time, because it was addressing not the given common of a community, but a non-given common in its audience (a *publicum*). Hence this can only be addressed each time under the conditions of its time, because it has to bring into play a common irreducible to any given. The new in art, the change of artforms has been related to this demand and has been interpreted as progress. All kinds of “post”-art: postmodern, postdramatic, and posthuman (recently, some have even tried to speak of postcontemporary art) do not simply designate a new artform, nor simply an artform that gives form to their present time. They also connect overcoming the older forms to a better realization of the demand for equality in historical time (for example, by including non-human or non-Western realities).¹⁶ However this scheme as a

whole is currently shifting. Under the current technological and postcolonial conditions, there is no one horizon to project change, and no one history to understand the present.

Obviously, no deconstruction of dramatic form undertaken today can have the effect it had one or two decades ago. Nor can any overcoming of the supposed dualities in performance. The question of how the new comes into presence is connected to or presupposes an experience of extreme limit; instead of being limited, the experience of extreme limit finds in this limit the possibility of address as such – that is to say, the emanation of relation as such. There has to be a touching on nothing, a limit, an ab-solute or a detachment, in order for relation to be addressed as such: for a non-given and non-determinable common to take place. As long as one horizon was being projected onto one history, this experience might have signified the fight and death of the older forms. Today the forms of the past do not disappear. They are, perhaps, reaching up to us in different ways. The question, then, is this: Where is the limit that allows a process or a happening to be related to others as to an open audience (a *publicum*), which means addressing this very relation instead of disappearing in it? It is not a limit in the sense of allowing newness to arrive into history. It is, rather, a limit as enabling the space of appearance. The space of appearance of this excessive relating called “new” in art, is what is primarily affected by the current shift, and what has to be reexamined. We have to ask what constitutes an (open) audience and how it is being transformed, when the framing of subjectivities shifts. Excessive relating—excessive because exceeding the given—should be examined today as the question of audience.

Instead of a new “turn” of forms, the current landscape of performing arts is dominated by an immediate demand for political relevance, as well as by the correlative feeling of powerlessness. This can, however, no longer be grasped in terms of an opposition between autonomous and politically engaged art, because the framework of this opposition can no longer apply. We keep understanding all kinds of criticism of the Enlightenment according to the logic of the Enlightenment, as long as we bring what exceeds the given, in the service of future: we do so either in the name of excluded “blackness,” in the name of a fluid renegotiation of power, or of non-human techno-ecologies. Hence this persistence of the demand for equality under conditions of dissolution of the oneness of the common (oneness now denounced as colonial violence, anthropocentrism, total techno-economic commandment and dominance) requires that we revise our thinking categories: it requires that we revise its understanding of it as being in the service of future. We could then say that it is in fact the framing of what is a form that shifts, and with it the very notion of audience, the space of appearance, the space in which relation accesses an extreme limit and enables its free course, its emanation to be addressed.

Today, addressing the present, addressing a “we” as non-given common, giving it a form, means a relating—desire, the praxis of relating as such—as an emanation which is set (and kept) in motion by an alterity or a nothingness, that strangely cannot be attributed to “us”: neither providing us with a provenance (in the sense of “our” un-groundedness) nor with a destination (as purposiveness). This shift might be something that the urge for decolonialisation of arts and aesthetics feels when it denounces the oneness of Western-global horizon for its blindness, as well as something that techno-ecologies and affect ecologies feel when denouncing anthropocentrism.

At present, the human condition, making a new entrance on stage in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemics, intensifies the gap between power—the sovereignty-machine—on the one hand, and the dissolution of the transcendental (which means the subject-based) frame on the other. We don't yet know what rhythms and constellations of presence are about to emerge in the performing arts, which will now be punctuated by new kinds of suspense. However, we can take a stand for that which punctuates the emergence of forms, without projecting in it an Archimedean point.

Sandra Man and Moritz Majce – Anne Imhof: stage and audience

The taking-form of forms is thus not newness in the sense of overcoming the previous forms, and its potential—the excess of the given—is not (social) change projected into a horizon. If, speaking epistemologically, we do not take for granted the presupposition of a transcendental frame in order to define and analyse what constitutes a stage and its audience, these two terms, “stage” and “audience,” become a key for understanding the emergence of forms. Insofar as they are not pre-framed, they open a whole research field that can help us understand the shifts we are facing today. I will, however, restrict myself here to discussing two performances that can help me to show what I mean by excessive—and detached—relating.

The first of these, Sandra Man and Moritz Majce's *Narcosis*, presented in 2017 at Open Spaces Festival in Tanzfabrik in Berlin, performs in a very direct way “relating as stage” and “plasticity as audience.” *Narcosis* is constituted in two parts. The first part of the evening is a meditation on space, on the composition and the recasting of its elements. Two canvases on the long axis of the room show two gazing eyes, thematising seeing in theater: Ledoux's *Theater von Besançon* and Magritte's *The wrong mirror*. Between these eyes, in the middle of the room, the audience and the chorus come together. They take a seat: the chorus are seated on turning chairs, while the audience sits around the chorus. Instead of being only an object to be stared at, the chorus, who slowly turns the chairs in all directions, stares at the people in the audience, directly in the eyes, but in a special way: the gazes of the silent chorus address each one in a non-personal way, staring right into their eyes and beyond the person who is being stared at at the same time, as if addressing an otherness in each one whilst keeping the unfoldment of relating open, opening spaces in turning directions, and bringing the space into movement.

In the second part of *Narcosis* the arrangement changes: a single dancer is in the center, sitting nude on the ground. The audience sits around him, also on the ground, and the space is dark, with a fade spot of light on the dancer. A dance-solo inspired by Caravaggio's *Narcissus* begins and a voice starts speaking from offstage. It is a voice that addresses an undefined “you”: “I am looking at you;” a loving voice seeking the fragmented body, zooming in on its surface. From the image of Caravaggio's *Narcissus*, a “you” emerges, turning into a minimal dance-solo in the middle of the dark room. Reflecting on the water, the nude *Narcissus* in chiaroscuro extends in space in slow micro-movements of light and duration. Far from narcissism, this *Narcissus* exposes a relation to an otherness, coming to the foreground out of and in a self-relation: as perceivable surface at the place where, through darkness, light and shadow, relationality is exposed at the edge of manifestation. It is the praxis of self-relating as relating to an open other, addressing what in the

relation is an indefinable you, and thus what sets relating in motion and keeps it in motion, what keeps it flowing freely.

According to Schiller, freedom in appearance is beauty; the image turns into a dance, in which, as in breathing, the inside of the body turns to an outside, the outside to an inside. During this solo, images of nature are projected on the canvases: two videos showing a lake, one horizontal and very calm, one vertical and agitated, filmed by a drone. While the dance estranges the image, turning it into movement, the lake-videos expose to the audience another “other,” another “outside”: nature. Between listening to the offstage voice and looking, the audience is immersed into a stream of relating, sinking under the surface of forms—as in narcosis—and coming to the surface again, precisely at the point of manifestation: in the place where two hands or one hand and a foot touch each other in a vacuum, in the place where they come to the fore (as in the film shown at the end of the piece, projected on the canvas): hands, feet, legs, arms emerging again and again, with the audience dispersed throughout the room in between them, listening and looking, until the phrase “I am being numbed by myself” closes the piece.

This piece does not confront or fight a given arrangement of the world. Instead, it intervenes in our perception and restores it to its underlying plasticity or formability. *Narcosis* dives under the level of contents, identities and given forms, under the level of that which is being shown, down to the point at which “the eye rotates in its hollow.” It is not just a meditation on seeing. It opens up a space in which, for the duration of an evening, the audience can be an audience: it can be affected by the action of a gathering, which is deeply resistant to any given order. The piece addresses and enables a non-given-common as relation. It actualizes it in its audience as well as in the performers, and bears it along, bearing it jointly together.

The second performance I would like to discuss is Anne Imhof’s *Faust*, which won the Golden Lion for the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017 and has been largely discussed from the point of view of biopolitics and the question of power/powerlessness. However, the question that interests me here is still the question of the stage: what, in the factual enfoldment of this performance, enables the experience of relation as emanating, and, correlatively, what opens up a non-given relation in its audience? *Faust*, in Goethe’s tragedy, accounts for modern subjectivity: autonomy as tension between an absolute present and a becoming.¹⁷ In my view, Anne Imhof’s *Faust*, which borrows only its name from Goethe, offers the experience of a becoming that, instead of being projected into the future, lingers in the present moment and opens a surplus in it.

The German pavilion is converted so that it simultaneously gives the impression of a fortress and of complete transparency. The visitors stand and walk through the space on a second glass floor installed in the pavilion. The portico is enclosed by glass walls, creating two exterior spaces in which dogs—Dobermans—are placed. Performers “occupy” (in Imhof’s words) the building. They are sometimes underneath and sometimes on top of the glass floor, among the audience, or above them on pedestals, hanging from the uppermost area of the building on safety belts, or outside on the fence. There is no structured audience; instead, there is a crowd. People fill the space to its maximum, but despite this, each person is exposed to visibility: floating over the glass floor,

reflected in the glass while gazing at the performers on the other side of it, underneath the floor, or right beside us. We are in the midst of the contemporary technologically conditioned world; most of the people are holding smartphones directly in front of the faces of the performers, taking pictures of them. There is a latent violence, both in the transparency of the building and in the emergence of borders in the construction, creating limitations and exclusions, as well as in the processes of the performance, which in its full length lasts many hours. Small procedures, such as slow movements, walking out of a fall, a fire underneath the glass floor, singing, checking messages, an ambivalent violence, fighting or sexually embracing, as if going down a catwalk.

What is immediately striking is the intensity. The piece is a fist, a *Faust*. This “Faust,” which also figures as a logo on the clothing of some of the performers, is one of the main gestures in the choreography. Some of the critics saw an inexpressiveness in the faces of the performers: something zombie-like, between death and life. Imhof speaks of an “opening.” I saw a self-emptiness, which, with genuine attentivity, addresses nothing less than the emanation of the moment as relation. Under the surveillance of this installation, in the latent violence of the performance, the intensity of this “Faust” that immediately infects the crowd is an emptying of everything that does not address the emergence in the space and the moment. Over, under, and through the glass surfaces. In the very midst of “us.”

Imhof designates her work as a painting, not as a performance. The painterly quality that Imhof seeks in the performance can be seen in the quality or intensity that allows for the contact point of a surface to emerge, to come to the fore for itself. It is not about the autonomy of a subject; it is the autonomy of a contact point. The contact point that is in itself a living relationality, for example between spectators and performers, autonomously comes to the fore *as-such*, as the free action of its own emanation. A surface, when presented as such, is the excess over the surface, the gesture of its presentation itself, an open relating. Beauty, another word that Imhof uses to designate her work, is precisely a free emanating appearance, the beauty that marks this performance despite the darkness.

The relationality of exposing as well as of interacting—because we physically push one another in the crowd in order to follow the diverse actions of the performers—is traced back to the act of its own appearing. “There is no piece without spectators,” Imhof says, and she furthermore underlines how important it was for her to work with many performers. It mattered to her that they would initiate actions. A beginning takes place in all of the contact points of this performance that are exposed *as-such*, for their own sake, in the midst of an unstructured crowd, a crowd with no beginning and no end. As this crowd, “we”—we who are seen, visible and simultaneously seeing, taking pictures—are ourselves exposed to the contact point of these pictures. Coming to the fore as if on stage for its own sake, this contact point opens up a space of appearance: the space of an open emanation of relating. In our technological or biopolitical world, it allows the experience of an excess of the given, which, instead of indebting our attention to the future, to something pointed out, exposes its infinite emanation in the now. The contact point of relating, coming to the fore as such, is an autonomous, free act. It is not the freedom of a subject; instead, it is the relational excess that makes up and recasts our present.

Notes

¹ On the distinction of desire from bad infinity see Joan Copjec 2015. Besides desire, Copjec sees a “good infinite” at work also in the Freudian concept of drive as distinguished from instinct: drive as “out-of-jointness” presents an infinite in the order of finitude. Furthermore, Copjec remarks that Lacan, in his Ethics Seminar, ascribes to capitalism a bad infinite, an infinite deferral of the desire.

² For an in-depth analysis of what is epistemologically at stake when drawing philosophically on the difference between good and bad infinity, see Tatari 2017. The study offers a contemporary reading of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* in order to put into perspective the underlying epistemologies that frame performing-art studies and address the conceptual shift we are facing under the current technological conditions. For an interdisciplinary examination of this question see Tatari 2014. Furthermore, on the political stake of this distinction see, among others, Nancy 2010 and Nancy 2020a.

³ The same goes, for example, for Brecht’s *Verfremdung* or estrangement, a word with a rich theatrical history extending well beyond Brecht: it can but doesn’t necessarily have to be meant as reflexive distance; it can but doesn’t necessarily have to be interpreted on the basis of the modern subject and of the potentialities this subject projects into its horizon.

⁴ On this redefinition of the terms “stage,” “audience,” and “relation,” see Tatari 2017. By this redefinition, the book strives to open access to the history and the analysis of performing arts not inscribed in the logic of modern subject and its overcoming. It asks what can be considered as “stage” under different cultural conditions—from the detached exposition of a self-relation in classical drama to “stage” as intensification in immersive performances or to hybrid art-forms with no beginning and end.

⁵ On the coronavirus pandemic see European Journal of Psychoanalysis 2020, Agamben 2020a, Agamben 2020b, *Philosopher au présent* 2020a, *Philosopher au présent* 2020b, Dutent 2020. Furthermore, on Agamben’s theory see, among others, Agamben 1998 and Agamben 2016.

⁶ See Heidegger 2015.

⁷ From Kant’s definition of beauty as purposiveness without purpose to the definition of art in German Idealism as a form of an absolute, as well as in all the tradition originating in Kant, including Adorno, Heidegger and postmodern aesthetics.

⁸ See Morton 2017.

⁹ Even if Agamben avoids the terms finitude, death or nothingness and emphasizes instead the violent character of sacrifice as *contra naturam* activity, it is, according to him, the “ungroundedness” of human activity itself which constitutes the violent character of sacrifice, positing its ground by itself. The modern sacralization of life derives from sacrifice, which does “nothing other than abandon bare natural life to its own violence and its own foreignness, in order then to ground all cultural rules and social praxis in it” (Agamben 2000, 136).

¹⁰ “Everything” includes biological life in this case. For an analysis of this “answerability” even on the level of “flesh” see Santner 2016.

¹¹ “It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves—this would be like jumping over our own shadows. [...] If we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it, and the first prerequisite would be that he be able to speak about a “who” as if though it were a “what.” [...] This is why attempts to define human nature almost invariably end with some construction of deity, that is, with the god of the philosophers, who, since Plato, has revealed himself upon closer inspection to be a kind of Platonic idea of man [...] the fact that attempts to define the nature of man lead so easily into an idea which definitely strikes us as “superhuman” and therefore is identified with the divine may cast suspicion upon the very concept of “human nature.” [...] Modern natural science owes its great triumphs to having looked upon and treated earth-bound nature from a truly universal point, that is, from an Archimedean standpoint taken, wilfully and explicitly outside the earth.” (Arendt 1998, 9–11)

¹² “The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. [...] This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.” (Arendt 1998, 19)

¹³ See “Se” in Agamben 2000, 116–137.

¹⁴ There is a common misunderstanding in Arendt-studies: that Arendt sees in Greek or Roman an ideal, since she finds in them her key notions of the “space of appearance” and of the “common world.” Even Margaret Canovan, who wrote the introduction to the second edition of *The Human Condition*, remarks that Arendt “finds in ancient Greece an Archimedean point from which to cast a critical eye on ways of thinking and behaving that we take for granted” (Arendt 1998, vii–viii). Yet Arendt is unambiguously clear on her stance and her standpoint, which does not constitute an Archimedean point. This might even be the fundamental thinking gesture of this book. All criticism against Arendt’s understanding of the public sphere and of her contempt for the privacy of life should in my view be examined on this basis.

¹⁵ Arendt sees speculations of this type concerning an alternative course of history as “idle and even dangerous when used as arguments against reality and when meant to point to positive potentialities and alternatives,” notably because they “lack the tangible unexpectedness of the event” (Arendt 1998, 252). And, I would add, because they proceed from the scheme of a self, a “se” projecting improvements and progress onto a historical horizon.

¹⁶ Until the beginning of the 21st century, the relationality which is at stake in artforms was still perceived as it was under modernity: that is, it was perceived as a non-hierarchical and all-inclusive “we” to come—whether in Derrida’s and Agamben’s terms as always to come, suspended in the present, never given, open to its non-giveness, or as disillusionment with and denouncing of the utopias in which the 20th century still placed its trust, as in Lyotard’s “sublime,” vertiginous, postmodern art, or by permanently subverting given orders and hierarchies—for instance between spectators and actors, beholders and art objects, keeping open the non-given common, as in many positions ranging from Rancière to Butler and theories of performativity; or as non-anthropocentric subverting of the established hierarchies between humans and non-humans (as in new materialisms, in techno-ecologies and Object Oriented Ontologies). All these theories can—at least from a certain point of view and to an extent—be considered as variations of the modern scheme of conceiving art, history and the evolution of artforms in their relation to history as progress, history as a project for better realizing the demand for equality and art as progressively contributing to this goal—even if it is a goal impossible to achieve, whether as a tragedy or as an open horizon.

¹⁷ See Wellbery 2004, 546–51.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

STREET SMART OR SMART STREET? THEATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL POWER¹

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The appendix of Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Schutzbefohlenen* [*Charges: (The supplicants)*] (Jelinek 2013/2015) contains the following two sentences:

Die Eroberung der Welt als Bild, das war einmal, denn Bild ist ja herstellen. Die Menschen werden aber nicht hergestellt, und sie bleiben nicht, wo sie hingestellt werden.

(The conquest of the world as picture: that was once upon a time, because, after all, picture is producing/manufacturing. However, humans do not get produced/manufactured, and they do not stay where they are put.)²

Apparently Jelinek is doing something here she has done in many of her texts: playing with formulations that come from Martin Heidegger. In this case she obviously refers to the following passage from Heidegger's essay "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" ("The Age of the World Picture", 1977, 115–154):³

Der Grundvorgang der Neuzeit ist die Eroberung der Welt als Bild. Das Wort Bild bedeutet jetzt: das Gebild des vorstellenden Herstellens.

(The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word 'picture' now means the structured image that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before.) (1977, 134)

In this essay I want to reflect on a current crisis of pictorial framing, marking it as the other side of an ongoing change in the history of power relations, and simultaneously interrogate this crisis's

impact on contemporary theater. To do this, I will take Jelinek's poetic play on Heidegger as quoted above as a travel guide: In the first, more theoretical and historical, part I will derive three interconnected key issues or assumptions from her lines which will structure my whole line of argumentation. In the second part I will take both sentences as a headline or motto for the discussion of *Global Belly* by "Flinn Works" (2017), a performance which indeed touches on all three key issues. To show my cards, however, I want to name these issues right away. In shortest form they read as follows:

1) Today's crisis of pictorial framing differs vastly from the crisis of "World Picture" as it was addressed by Heidegger, since its background is the development of network technologies and a corresponding rearrangement of the logics of production ("herstellen").

2) One of the most significant symptoms of this difference is a current "deterritorialization of the street"—a process which, for historical reasons, brings with it an enormous challenge for contemporary theater.

3) Both of these aspects come together in a huge transformation in the history of power relations which can be described as an ongoing "environmentalization," a notion which I will understand in the sense of Michel Foucault here who introduced the term "environnementalité" in an—albeit rather sketchy or schematic—manuscript which belongs to his 1979 lectures on "governmentality." (Foucault 2008, 260–261)



To develop these assumptions more extensively I would like to point out first that, in the context of theatre studies, Heidegger's essay on the "World Picture" has frequently been used for problematizing the long-lasting traditions of the picture frame stage. One might recall, for example, the 2008 congress of the German Society for Theater Studies *Orbis pictus - Theatrum mundi. Welt/Bild/Theater*, where more than a few lectures brought Heidegger's "Age of the World Picture" together with the history of modern stage installations (Röttger 2010 and 2012). Especially the vastly questioned problems of frontal pictoriality were addressed here, i.e., the cut between audience and stage which informed the tradition of the *scène à l'italienne* since the early modern period. According to Heidegger, the emergence of the "World Picture" was grounded in the positioning of man as a viewer against a picture of the world, making him "die Bezugsmittel des Seienden" ("the relational center of that which is", Heidegger 1977, 128) within a newly-defined optical space. In this sense the "conquest of the world as picture" did also change "das Wesen des Menschen" ("the very essence of man", *ibid.*), giving rise to a series of characteristic divisions: subject and object, self and other, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, etc. Or in Heidegger's own words: "Daß die Welt zum Bild wird, ist ein und derselbe Vorgang mit dem, daß der Mensch innerhalb des Seienden zum Subjectum wird" ("That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subjectum* in the midst of that which is," 132).⁴ Therefore, when made in the context of theater, the claim that the "conquest of the world as picture" was "once upon a time" (Jelinek) ultimately reads as another way of saying that today, together with the interpretation

of (hu)man as subject, the epistemological value of the picture frame stage is at least highly questionable. However, one may wonder why to bother with this topic once more. After all, the problematic consequences of this specifically modern optical dispositif have been widely discussed ever since its historical implementation, beginning with the tremendous practical problems involved in the attempt to create a fictitious space as a picture, and including the struggle of the actors' bodies that are supposed to appear in this picture-space, as famously described, for example, in Denis Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor* (1773). And is it really necessary to once again repeat the critique of imaginary relations which after all informed countless historical attempts to overcome the picture frame stage and especially preoccupied the early-20th-century avant-gardes?

On a closer look, the quoted passage by Jelinek does not just re-state these well-known problems. Instead, by connecting the topic of "World Picture" (or rather its fading) with the issue of production ("denn Bild ist ja herstellen") it opens a complex contemporary question which is related to philosophy of technology and also concerns my first key assumption as depicted above. In order to develop this question step by step, I would first like to recall Heidegger's own localization of "World Picture" within the modern logics of "herstellen". Interestingly enough, what looks like a low pun in Jelinek's version actually concerns the core of Heidegger's method of thinking, since in his texts the connection between "Bild" and "herstellen" was in fact frequently conveyed through linguistic derivations: "Gebild" ("the structured image"), "welt-bilden" ("world-building" or "world-forming"), but also "dar-stellen" ("re-present")—words in which the optical aspects of the terms "Bild" and "Darstellung" merge with connotations of productive manufacturing ("bilden"/"herstellen"). This conceptual maneuver leads then to Heidegger's infamous problematization of the so-called modern "Ge-Stell" ("enframing"), as we find it for instance in his 1953 speech "Die Frage der Technik" ("The Question concerning Technology", Heidegger 1977, 3–35). According to this the modern "Gestell"—i.e., the logics of industrial production—"her- und darstellen" ("producing and presenting") converge (21). But what's more, the blending of "herstellen" and "darstellen" points also to Heidegger's general ontological understanding of technology as "poiesis" which according to him has two different interpretations: the modern "Herstellen" which is "herausfordendes Stellen des Natur" ("a challenging setting-upon of nature") and fits the representational frameworks of the "World Picture," but also the ancient (Greek) one which in Heidegger's eyes implied "ein anderes Stellen" ("another *Stellen*", 21): namely, a more careful mode of "Entbergen" ("revealing," 12), "das im Sinne der poiesis das Anwesende in die Unverborgenheit hervorkommen läßt" ("which, in the sense of poiesis, lets what presences come forth into unconcealment," 21).

Now, much has been written about the problematic aspects of Heidegger's contradistinction between the "challenging" modern production and then a pre-modern respective ancient revealing which allegedly meant "hegen und pflegen" ("to take care of and to maintain," 14–15). And for sure this opposition is highly questionable, even if Heidegger emphasized that the two interpretations of "poiesis" must not be treated as a dualism but, rather, "remain related in their essence" (21). However, in this essay I will not deal with the conservative and antimodern implications of Heidegger's understanding of technology once more. Rather, along with Jelinek's "once upon a time..." my main question is whether terms like "Gestell"/"Enframing," "poiesis" and also "World

Picture" as such are still in keeping with the times—particularly against the background of most recent technological developments, i.e., the conditions of network technologies and the "internet of things." Such questioning starts with very simple considerations: for instance with the fact that the German "Ge-Stell" (and its derivations) also points to an "An-gestellten-kultur" ("culture of salaried masses") which was certainly typical for the early-20th century, but since then has been vastly transformed due to the emergence of more recent forms of freelance self-exploitation, and, more generally, with the unfolding of today's "control power" (to recall Gilles Deleuze's much-quoted sketch of the "societies of control" (Deleuze 1995)). But even if such a question might seem naive at first sight,⁵ it nevertheless leads to more refined problems very quickly. To name just one, I would like to mention Donna Haraway's most recent attempts to introduce the term "sym-poiesis": "Sym-poiesis" is primarily intended to correct the concept of "auto-poesis," as it is used in the fields of Systems Theory (Haraway 2016). But at the same time it clearly questions whether Heidegger's "poiesis" is still (or ever was!) a proper term for the "Wesen der Technik" ("essence of technology." Heidegger 1977, 4).⁶ And the same holds true for the term "World Picture": If we connect it with the history of frontal pictoriality *and* with that of industrial production (and this is precisely what Heidegger and Jelinek are doing), we also have to ask if this term is able to describe today's more algorithmic image culture: Can the imagery of *Instagram*, *TikTok* or the so-called selfie culture still be addressed and moreover criticized in the logics of "World Picture"? Do the participants in this image culture still fulfill the criteria of the Heideggerian subjectum (or man), as being positioned against the picture of the world?

To sharpen these questions, I want to come to my second issue now, i.e., the process which I above named the "deterritorialization of the street." However, since this may sound a bit odd or cloudy at first, I will try to explain it in more detail. So what is meant by "the street" here?⁷

I would like to start with a closer look at the very time of formation of the *scène à l'italienne* (and thus the "Age of the World Picture"): i.e., the Italian Renaissance which established not only a close connection between theater and Single-point perspective but indeed grounded this connection in the newly defined field of the street as I am going to address it here. This grounding was enabled by two epistemological developments of the time. The first one concerns the epochal dynamics of the Renaissance which did not want to have its vanishing point in a transcendent vertical order—i.e., the Christian heaven—any longer. In this context, the central perspective appears as a technology which made it possible to define an intramundane horizon, to place this horizon on human eye level and also to project focusing vanishing points there. (This is in fact in a nutshell what Heidegger's *subjectum* as the "relational center of that which is" is about.) And now the first crucial point is that numerous pictures and drawings from this period again and again concretized the abstract construction of vanishing points by the image of a street which runs from the viewer towards the horizon. One can therefore clearly see how the projective energies of the perspective did indeed intermingle with a newly defined street. Moreover, it is fair to say, that in this sense the street itself became a projective and perspectival medium during the early modern period.

The second development concerns then the fact that Renaissance cities like Florence grounded their newly declared independence primarily in their state as mercantile city states. This is why

they defined themselves in relation to a particular external space: not the countryside, but indeed the city street as their self-created, artificial outside.⁸ Not only did the most significant external relation of those cities therefore neither involve heaven, as was the case during the Middle Ages, nor cosmic landscapes, as could be argued for the ancient Greek polis (a point I will come back to with *Global Belly*). The new orientation also brought into play all the energies, agents and milieus associated to the street: monetary transactions, market activities, goods traffic, and all sorts of mobility connected to commercial routes and transportation networks.

Now, from both these developments resulted a long-lasting condition which I would like to name the “double inheritance of the street.” On the one hand, being in league with the projective energies of the central perspective the street became a central element of the one-sided European world conquest from the early modern times on. Therefore the “conquest of the world as picture” was literally carried out on the street, and in this sense it was in fact the material base of the “World Picture” and its representational logics.⁹ But on the other hand the street, being the urban outside, always had another, non-representative, “nomadic” vector. This other side brings into play the sphere of vagrants, tramps, adventurers, and therefore all kinds and ways of living on the road. And it is most fascinating that both vectors of the street, the representative and the non-representative one, were indeed defining factors for countless and very different theater forms from the early modern period on. On one side the picture frame stage was profoundly shaped by the representational street vector: Not only did early scenographers like Sebastiano Serlio try to re-arrange street-views in the new interior stages. The optical theater apparatus itself is modeled after the arrangement “viewer – intermundane horizon” and in parts even explicitly informed by street terms, i.e., the “*Bühnengassen*” (the German word for the wings of the stage). Then again, the nomadic street vector was extremely important for all those (popular) theater forms that tried to avoid the institutional logics of permanent theaters. With special regard to the early modern period, we could think of the touring companies, comedians and artists as they have been described (in the German-speaking context) particularly by theater historiographers following Rudolf Münz: the *commedia dell’arte*, carnivalesque theater, later the Parisian fairground theater. However, one will hardly find a single case of theater relying just on one of the two vectors, i.e. being purely nomadic or purely representational. Rather, modern theater history is full of hybridisms which worked literally “both sides of the street”, like Molière whose comedies were staged at the royal court, but based on scenarios for his touring company.

If we then go a step further and take a look at the early-20th century, the first thing that comes into view is an eminent crisis of the optical dispositif as it was established from the Renaissance on— i.e. the very crisis of “World Picture” as it was addressed by Heidegger and his contemporaries. This crisis was characterized by the development of modern metropolises, by the rise of the masses, by the emergence of new media (film, radio) and by processes of acceleration (trains, the first automobiles etc.). In other words, one decisive background of this crisis was a huge transformation of a visual culture that had shaped the face of European cities from the Renaissance on, and in contemporary texts we find this transformation frequently described as a general loss of visibility: “Eine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute. Die eigentliche Realität ist in die Funktionale gerutscht” (“A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG

reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional," Brecht 2000, 164), as Bertolt Brecht famously wrote in 1930. However, what I want to draw attention to here is that this crisis was still deeply linked to the—albeit modernized—street: Not only was the street now as before the central bearer for most of the new vehicles that brought about the acceleration processes typical of the times. It also became the most important place of the modern masses: This is why early cinema was obsessed with street scenes, inventing a new iconography for the metropolises. Similar, theater reformers and avantgardists also relied in their attempts to overcome the picture stage frame heavily on the street relation once more: rediscovering older nomadic and popular forms (commedia, circus etc.), but also referring to the most modern street milieus of the time—cars, gangsters, boxers, as we find it paradigmatically in Brecht. Furthermore: Also the "double inheritance" of the street reappeared under the changed conditions. Where the street was connected to the projective energies of perspective constructions (its representational vector) it was now able to merge with even vastly exaggerated future projects as they were typical for parts of the historical avantgardes. In this context the street did also get involved with the totalitarian projects of the time: Just think of the importance of the street for National Socialism: the "Reichsautobahn," the SA, songs and lines like "Die Straße frei," etc. Nevertheless, due to its nomadic vector the street was simultaneously suitable for articulating the modern conditions of "transcendental homelessness," and also points to the new mass phenomenon of refugees as described for instance by Hannah Arendt.

In the context of this history, however, something else is to be considered, and this is now where the question comes into play how today's crisis of "World Picture" differs from that back then. What has to be taken into account here is the ever-increasing development of technologies that are able to access environments such as the deep sea, airspaces, the atmosphere and eventually all kinds of macro- and microspheres in novel ways. Thus, from the invention of sonar and radar signals via the implementation of satellites and remote sensors through to the latest achievements of smart or even "smart biosensor" technology and "affective computers" outfitted with "bionic senses,"¹⁰ the last hundred years did not just see ever-expanding possibilities of (bio)electronical government. Since technologies became more and more comprehensive in their ability to steer global movements from earth's orbit, they also led to an increasing transgression of the whole field of the street. And although some symptoms of this process were certainly already apparent in the early 20th century, it came to an explosive head only from its second half and particularly its end on. At least with the establishment of "Google Earth," the good (or rather bad) old Renaissance horizon has been effectively deterritorialized. One could describe this transformation also with terms Peter Sloterdijk has suggested for a "Philosophical theory of globalization" (Sloterdijk 2005): The street and all that is connected to it was the most important medium of the "terrestrial globalization," which transformed the globe into a "World Interior of Capital" from the early modern period on. Accordingly, its deterritorialization belongs to the dynamics of a later "electronic globalization" which not only eclipsed older optical media but started precisely under the condition that the terrestrial globe was being "completed" in the course of the 20th century.

Still, one has to avoid two possible misunderstandings here. I mentioned "Google Earth" and thus a software that still seems to address a viewer. But it is most important that the imagery used by

“Google Earth” is in fact not produced by optical techniques any longer: The remote sensor images this software is based on do not follow the mirroring and projecting logics of the telescope—comparable to the difference between scanning and reading—and what happens when we are using this literally “blind” imagery telescopically is not only that we disregard its process of formation. Moreover, we re-inscribe it into registers of representation which are in fact embedded or included in a much wider “media ecology” today.¹¹ This, in turn, concerns the second possible misunderstanding: I am of course not simply saying that we do not use streets any longer. Rather, what I want to draw attention to is that, under the condition of the satellite control system, the street is being embedded into a much wider environmental field. We could also make a historical comparison here and first recall how the role of the feet changed with the emergence of automobiles or the role of the hands under the conditions of the Fordist assembly belt—they became disintegrated partial objects which ceased to be the main point of interest for technologies of power and government, simultaneously losing their state as dominant elements of epistemological significance, but in turn allowed for all kinds of remediations and reterritorializations. But it seems not exaggerated to say that a similar thing happens to the whole milieu of the street and especially to its vehicle fleet itself today—which for instance explains why early digital times coined the term “data highway”, just as the early era of the automobile invented the unit “horsepower”, but also casts a light on the role automobile nostalgia plays in reactionary political movements like Trumpism.

So, summing up, this functional loss of the street and its (literally) driving forces is precisely why “the conquest of the world as picture” was “once upon a time.” The question, however, is what this means for theater which was so vastly informed by the street’s double inheritance in modern times. I am not just talking about the Renaissance or the early-20th century here. On the contrary: It is most peculiar that the street was still a defining frame of reference for many theater forms after 1945. It was for instance most important for youth and protest movements which culminated around 1968 – for Beatniks and Hippies who wanted to live “on the road”, for groups like the “Living Theater,” for the French Situationist International (“Sous les pavés, la plage”/“Beneath the paving stones, the beach”) and also for the German “antiteater” (Fassbinder). In 1968 Peter Weiss even stated: “The street is our mass medium” (see Kreissl 2000, 138). But moreover, even Frank Castorf’s “Volksbühne” was a theater that during the 1990s once more (perhaps for the last time?) gained its force from the street milieu, as formats like the “Rollende Road Show” and even its logo, the “robbers’ wheel,” already made clear enough. In any case: In the 21st century an opening to classical street milieus seems to work less and less and, if still relied on, produces mainly nostalgic effects. It is therefore an open question to which extent theater will still be able to invent new forms or even just to “stay in the running” by relating to this field: Not only because the projective energies of the street have been outrun, but above all since it becomes more and more clear that its nomadic vector is also being affected by this process.

What is still missing now is a commentary on Jelinek’s claim that “humans do not get produced/manufactured” and “do not stay where they are put”: formulations which apparently touch the issue of subjectivation and also of a possible dynamization or even liquefaction of human contours and standpoints. It is therefore not too difficult to again connect it to the question of the

“subjectum” as addressed by Heidegger: If the logics of the modern World Picture were in line with those of frontal pictoriality, of the “Ge-Stell” and also, as we have seen, of the street, then we have to assume that these logics are likewise being—or have already been—transformed today. However, I want to discuss this issue particularly against the background of a history of power relations here. Therefore I would like to approach the question why “humans do not get produced/manufactured” particularly by drawing on a term by (late) Michel Foucault: This is the term “environmentality” which Foucault introduced in a short, but extremely important manuscript belonging to his 1979 lectures on “governmentality” (Foucault 2008).¹²

To grasp this term properly one should first recall that Foucault used the concept of “governmentality” to describe a certain type of a power which developed during the 17th and 18th centuries: This type of power appears primarily neither as sovereign legal power nor by means of disciplinary techniques (as we find them with Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon). Instead, it seeks to govern and control living beings and things via their mutual embeddedness in all kinds of human and non-human relations. However, by coining the term “environmentality,” Foucault particularly aimed at forms of a then (i.e., 1979) most recent and just developing governmentality, explicitly reflecting on a contemporary “massive withdrawal with regard to the normative-disciplinary system” (260). Environmental governmentality therefore appears to be one of the main *modi operandi* of neoliberalism inspired by the Chicago School: i.e., a power strategy that does not so much rely on the exclusion of non-normalizable forces, but on the contrary aims at a

society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals. (259–260)

According to Foucault, among the main aspects of environmental technology are therefore: “the definition of a framework around the individual which is loose enough for him to be able to play,” “the possibility for the individual of regulation of the effects of the definition of his own framework,” and, above all, “not a standardizing, identificatory, hierarchical individualization, but an environmentalism open to unknowns and transversal phenomena” (261).

Back in 1979, when Foucault talked about the environmental shift, he addressed contemporary processes like the development of behavioral engineering and environmental psychology. Then again, if one re-reads his lectures today, one can easily see that all the aspects he named back then should later become well-known parts of the most recent neoliberalism shaped by digital networks. The crucial point is that, although environmental power started to emerge vehemently after 1945 at the latest and has its historic roots even much earlier, it has only recently been able to become hegemonial, having found its proper support in the said technologies. So it is no wonder that Foucault’s term environmentality has been taken up frequently in recent times for the analysis of “algorithmic governmentality,” “smart environments,” “affective computing,” and generally of a controlling power that has effectively shifted from panoptic surveillance to the “capturing” of series and clusters of pre-individual movements, gestures, traces and affects (Gabrys 2009; Hörl 2020;

Massumi 2009; Taylan 2017). What all these different analyses emphasize is the fact that an “environmental citizen is not governed as a distinct figure; rather, environmentality is an extension of the actions and forces—automaticity and responsiveness—embedded and performed within environments” (Gabrys 2009, 34). This means that environmental governmentality does not require subjects whose bodies are locked and enframed “under the surface of images,” as was the case with the panopticon (Foucault 1977, 217) and its theatrical equivalent of the actor attached to the picture frame stage. Instead, the dynamic processes of individuation to which environmental interventions apply fall below and/or exceed the threshold of perception defined by the “panoptic machine” (ibid.).

So, what I want to draw attention to by these remarks is the fact that it is not sufficient to address the issue of environmentality by still focusing primarily on the ideological effects of imaginary relations—respectively, in a theater context, the picture frame stage. After all, this kind of critique finds its main points of attack in the normalizing effects of panoptic traditions which environmentality itself started to treat as a relic of an age gone by. To put it more frankly: Instead of the “conquest of the World as a picture,” we are dealing today primarily with the “conquest of the World as environment” in the particular Foucauldian sense of the word. Again, this does not imply that today’s environmental world is without imagery. On the contrary: We are perhaps more than ever surrounded by images. But this imagery is not in itself optical any longer—just as the imagery of a *Zoom* meeting is not that of Bentham’s panopticon, but is, rather, the blind (and blinding) imagery of controlling power.

II

Against this conceptual background I will come to *Global Belly* by “Flinn Works” now. “Flinn Works” was founded by Lisa and Sophia Stepf, Konradin Kunze and Helena Tsiflidis in Kassel in 2008 and since then has constantly been working on topics of the globalized world with feminist and postcolonial approaches. The performances of “Flinn Works” could be counted among a form of theater that has recently been described as “Recherchetheater” (“research theater,” Feindel and Rausch 2016). Accordingly, *Global Belly* is based on a whole year of research in five countries. What makes this performance particularly interesting here is that it indeed presents us with a shining example for humans neither getting “manufactured” nor “produced” in the classical meaning of the word(s). *Global Belly* is about the logistical, legal, media and gender-political conditions under which the booming industry of transnational surrogacy operates today. Furthermore, it makes clear that these conditions have emerged together with environmental technologies which are capable of detaching the smallest components from individual bodies, allowing them to circulate globally and getting reassembled later.

A maximum of just 30 guests can take part in the performance which takes place in a room that is structured by two large video screens (in the center) and four huge advertising banners defining a circuit course with four separate stations. The guests are divided into four smaller groups and follow this course after being assigned different roles and positions four times. Each of the four stations describes another aspect of the highly complex logistics of today’s surrogacy industry, in

which sperm, eggs and newborns constantly circulate around the globe, and at each station we get to talk to another performer (Anne Hoffmann / Cornelia Dörr, Matthias Renger, Sonata, Lea Whitcher) who takes the part of a person involved in these logistics. One of them introduces himself as a homosexual friend of ours, joyfully pouring us Martinis and proudly telling us that he and his partner finally decided to order a baby. For this purpose both men's semen was mixed together and then got implanted into the donor egg of a US citizen whom our friend found by means of an online surrogacy platform. After that the fertilized egg was flown to India and implanted in a surrogate mother there.

At the next stop, we take the position of a group of Indian surrogate mothers who are presented with the results of their latest pregnancy tests. Here we meet a doctor (i.e., another performer) who tells us that one of us seems to be sterile, but another one is pregnant with triplets now. The doctor also explains that, since only one baby has been ordered by the clients, two of the embryos will be aborted (which is in fact a common practice in today's surrogacy industry). Then again, at the following stop we get to know an Anglican surrogate mother and anti-abortionist who presents her personal set of rules. She particularly emphasizes that the child will have to be carried out, even if prenatal diagnostics should reveal that it has trisomy 21. Finally, we meet a Ukrainian lawyer who informs us about the legal loopholes allowing the newborns to travel to Germany.

Now, taking up my three key issues again, I'd like to focus on three aspects of *Global Belly*. First, the performance indicates that there is also a striking gender aspect related to the Heideggerian concepts of "Weltbild" and "herstellen" regarding their mutual fading. Put frankly: Environmental technology exceeds also the techniques of classical sexual (re)production by establishing an eminently post-sexual dispositif. It is not an exaggeration to say that this touches Heidegger's idea of technology as "poiesis" in general. On one side, his German translation "das Anwesende in die Unverborgenheit hervorkommen lassen," is at least faintly reminiscent of a paraphrase for "giving birth" and therefore of the very process which is distorted beyond recognition by the procedures that the surrogacy industry depends on. Then again, it would be much more appropriate to describe this new kind of parturition literally as a variant of "sym-poesis," since there are in fact all kinds of human and non-human actors and ultimately the whole globe (or earth) involved—*Global Belly*. It seems fair to say also that also physical production is changing its character in this process. At least, the Indian surrogate mothers are by no means "producing" babies; instead, they could be better described as parts of a global machinic assemblage which does not so much subjugate but rather "enslaves" them (to quote an illuminating distinction here that Deleuze and Guattari introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987, 456–460).

This remark leads also to my second point. Above I mentioned the blind and at the same time non-(pan)optical imagery of control power which nevertheless is frequently used as if it would still follow the logics of projection. Accordingly, by exposing the media ecology which enables the managing of a global surrogacy business, *Global Belly* also shows to what extent such re-inscriptions and reterritorializations are crucial for the functioning of today's non-disciplinary capitalist economies. This is why we, as participants, do not just get in touch with the four "Flinn Works" performers here. Instead, we are constantly surrounded by various screens and displays

which affect us from different sides, making face-to-face-communication a more or less secondary effect. We are, for example, presented with a number of advertising trailers that praise the alleged progress of surrogacy platform capitalism, which also enables queer couples to become parents. We are allowed to Skype with the feminist-minded owner of a surrogate mother company in Israel, who then is called away from her screen by the lucky news of successful pregnancies in Thailand. Later the Anglican surrogate mother proudly presents photos of her already delivered children, which she regularly requests from her former clients. Then again, while drinking Martinis, the visitors can admire the egg donor's profile via smartphone: a neat blonde who has just the one flaw that she is a card-carrying Trumpist, which the ordering party unfortunately recognized too late. So all in all, we become components of a hyperconnective media environment which underlies our interactions with the performers and at the same time opens the local (theater) space to more global dimensions. But we also experience the extent to which all these interfaces and internet platforms are being used to fill the gap between the anonymous global circulation of non- or pre-human particles and the ordering couples' desire for children. Imagery, therefore, plays a significant role in the performance. However, it is even more interesting that this supposedly progressive imagery of parenting, beyond the frames of a classical nuclear family, is in fact completely in line with the logics of a not-normalizing environmental power as depicted by Foucault. It fulfills therefore exactly the criteria quoted above: It is "open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated;" it does not advocate "a standardizing, identificatory, hierarchical individualization, but an environmentalism open to unknowns and transversal phenomena;" and, above all, it defines "a framework around the individual which is loose enough for him to be able to play," opening up "the possibility for the individual of regulation of the effects of the definition of his own framework." In short, this imagery is by no means enframing, neither in the sense of the panoptic machine, nor in that of the Heideggerian "World Picture" and "Ge-Stell."

The third aspect, however, is the most complex one, and it also brings us back to the issue of the street. What interested me most when I attended *Global Belly* was that this performance does not so much refer to the secular perspectival street as we know it from the Renaissance on, but rather to its Christian predecessor. The circuit course of the performance is not just reminiscent of the medieval cycle play and the practices of a religious parade, but moreover—as the number of four stops clearly indicates—of an Advent wreath. As another element of the performance underlines, this is indeed no overinterpretation: The Anglican surrogate mother bears the name Mary, whereas her husband is said to be working as a carpenter, just as Saint Joseph did. This is, of course, an allusion to the legend of "immaculate conception" and thus to Holy Mary's "career" as the archetypical Christian surrogate mother. But above all, it connects the most current, nonreproductive and "sym-poietic" technologies of fertilization with the virgin birth of Jesus. And indeed, the biblical story tells its own version of a kind of childbearing that was pervaded by non-sexual and non-human forces, even if not in the form of globe or earth, but in that of a monotheistic and transcendent god.

Now, on the one hand this is perhaps the most ingenious move of *Global Belly*: By referring to the Christian street, the performance suggests that the desires and also the imagery which today's

surrogacy industry exploits are ultimately informed by the logics of Christian Advent and its salvation history. To wait for the coming of a baby that, since it is not “produced” within a modern sexual dispositif, is able to bring redemption to *all* couples and life forms, no matter their sexual orientation: This is the non-disciplinary ideology from which the surrogacy industry draws. Strangely enough, its counterpart is therefore a street which works not only post-perspectivally, but also recalls its pre-perspectival Christian ancestor. If we try to find an explanation for this surprising correspondence, we might perhaps find it in the fact that modern governmentality even in its most recent forms is still a descendant of Christian “pastoral power” (Foucault 2009, 115–190).

However, on the other hand, the performance, as being informed by the topology of the Advent wreath, is in a way on the same level as the clients, users and consumers. In other words: It still takes a street as a kind of starting point or base of operation, although mainly exposing and exploring its condition in the ages of “electronic globalization.” One can see this, by the way, in the fact that this is the only place where the performance seems to remain in line with the limited Heideggerian terminology. After all, a further translation of “poiesis” we find in Heidegger is “auf den Weg bringen” (“to start upon the way”) or simply “schicken” (“to send”) (Heidegger 1977, 24), terms which reveal the explicitly postal and, at the same time, the more hidden Christian character of his entire concept of technology. So it seems fair to say that *Global Belly*, at least at this point, does not really exceed the frame of the Christian “schicken” but rather exposes the fact that the surrogacy industry treats the globally circulating components of human babies ultimately as “Christmas mail.”

In my postscript I will return to this issue of sending and mailing. Here, I would like to pursue another question, which in my eyes arises from this context. It is important to remember that the Christian legend of Holy Mary, being a story of an intimate entanglement between God and a human girl, is for its own part only a derivative narrative. Especially in ancient Greek mythology, such tales can be found in abundance. The crucial difference, however, is that Greek mythology knows neither a monotheistic God nor a transcendent heaven. Instead, it is based in a rhizomatic cosmos which enfolds the world of humans or mortals (anthropoi). In more technical terms: What we find in Greek mythology is ultimately a topological inclusion of the secondary human world in a more general cosmic field pervaded by all kinds of non-human forces and energies. Interestingly enough, in this topology streets do not play a significant role—their spiritual career is indeed due only to the Christian implementation of the one and only transcendent father and his salvation-bearing son.¹³ This becomes even clearer if we think of ancient Greek theater. Unlike modern theater, tragedy (and also Aristophanic comedy) did by no means relate to an urban outside defined by the street and all that is connected to it. Instead, the “outside” here was cosmos, and this holds true even if the Greek polis’ awareness for its embeddedness in cosmic forces faded during the 5th century BC. Furthermore, it is fair to say that the most important bearer of cosmic awareness in Greek theater was the chorus, and after all that has been said and done here it should not come as a surprise that it was particularly the chorus that was excluded, or at least extremely reshaped, in later “street theater,” particularly from the early modern period on.

Now, against this background it is all the more noticeable that in *Global Belly* the question of the chorus is also more or less absent. Instead, the street parcoure of the performance makes us encounter a series of single persons who, although by no means individualized in the old standardizing, identificatory, hierarchical manner, are nevertheless far from being choric figures. Rather, they ultimately resemble the “dividuals” Deleuze portrayed in his “Postscript”: “control man undulates, moving among a continuous range of different orbits” (Deleuze 1995, 180). These are network people, not “chorus people.” It is therefore perhaps not by chance that the interactive roleplaying with the four performers might also be—at least for my taste—a less felicitous component of *Global Belly*.

But even if one may come to a different assessment here, these considerations allow us to question once again the status of the street as the “starting point” of the performance. If we put it very pointedly (and certainly in a risky way), we could say that the emergence of hyperconnective media and environmental technologies has also brought up and renewed questions of human embeddedness in “cosmic” forces—although we certainly do not impersonate these forces as Zeus, Apollo, Athene or Poseidon today. Then again, in the field of theater, this development is accompanied by a renewed interest for the chorus, being the very figure of theater that preceded its long connection with the street. However, it is an open question if theater today—even in its most experimental choric forms—is or will be able to really relinquish its street connection: if only because modern ideas of public space were deeply grounded in the history of the street.¹⁴

POSTSCRIPT

I started working on the issues depicted in this essay after attending the 2018 symposium “Wie Logistik und Masterpläne das Leben in der Stadt verändern” (“How Logistics and Master Plans Change Urban Life”), which the Forum Freies Theater Düsseldorf (FFT), one of the major independent production houses for theater and dance performances in Germany, hosted as part of its larger research series *Stadt als Fabrik (City as Factory)*. This research series has a very special aim: The city of Düsseldorf has recently sold the building close to the city center which hosted the venues of the FFT to an international hotel chain. Therefore, the FFT is about to move into another building which is located not far from the Düsseldorf main station. Since this building is quite huge, the FFT is not its only inhabitant-to-be: Being projected as a new “cultural hotspot,” it will also house the Düsseldorf theater museum and the urban library. Thus, the relocation of the FFT is part of a general “creative city” master plan the city of Düsseldorf wants to realize.

However, to understand the stakes of this “master plan” one has to know two things. First, the area around the Düsseldorf main station has a reputation for attracting homeless people, drug addicts and also refugees. Furthermore, the new cultural hotspot is close to the “Worringer Platz” which is a square in Düsseldorf considered a dirty corner and eyesore. In other words: The new “cultural hotspot” is ultimately part of an urban strategy to “upgrade” the area, to “redesign” the district and in the end to drive those people away who “disturb the cityscape”—which suddenly puts the FFT in the role of a potential gentrifying agent. (This is, by the way, a further example of how environmental governmentality works, this time in the context of urban policy: it’s not

“interpellating” subjects, but much more manipulating the environments in which they are embedded.) Therefore, by interrogating the role of city master plans the FFT ultimately aims to clarify its own future role. The second aspect, however, is even more significant in the context of this essay: It concerns the building itself which will house the new FFT. Formerly it was Düsseldorf’s main post office, an expansive building that was erected only in the 1990s as a hub for the distribution of letters. This building has been abandoned in the course of recent reconfigurations of logistical infrastructures, which have led to the construction of huge distribution centers in the urban periphery by *Amazon* and the Post’s own *DHL*. Thus, the new site of the FFT is a building that can itself stand in for the deterritorialization of the street, which in this case means a shift from the post office to *Amazon*.

Now, against the background of what I have developed here it is not difficult to put this shift in parallel to the other developments I talked about: Just as Haraway’s “sympoiesis” suits today’s technological conditions better than Heidegger’s “poiesis,” just as the street has been opened to rhizomatic “cosmic” dimensions, just as the panoptic logics have been substituted by a blind control imagery, also the older logics of postal mailing have been effectively overlain by those implied by *Amazon*. More pointedly: If the Heideggerian “Age of the World picture” was also the “Age of sending” and thus an “Age of the mail” and of the “post office,” its current crisis could literally be read together with the rise of the “Age of *Amazon*.”

However, at first sight this claim might again seem a bit strange. One could object that *Amazon* (and all the other delivery services) are of course still dependent on streets and moreover, even use them more extensively than ever, a factor that has in fact led to huge traffic problems in today’s cities. Then again, one could easily answer this by taking this development as an inevitable reterritorialization effect, comparable to that happening with the still projective usage of control imagery. Still, as a final remark I would like to mention two aspects of this reterritorialization process which could be the most crucial ones. First, one has to take into account that the traffic problems caused by *Amazon* and co is also the best argument for the development of current “smart city” projects: i.e., projects that aim at even radicalizing the tendencies of steering and controlling each and every movement from earth’s orbit. It is an open question what (also theater’s) street smartness will look like in times of smart streets. The second aspect is one I would like to illustrate with the help of an idea by Claire Lyster, an architect from Chicago who was one of the guest speakers at *Stadt als Fabrik* and who has written extensively about the question of how logistic “networks change our cities” (Lyster 2016). One of her suggestions to solve today’s traffic problem by *Learning from Logistics* goes like this: If *Amazon* is currently establishing more and more logistic centers in the urban periphery which not only stock myriads of different goods but also have the tendency to expand horizontally (since they are always flat-roof-buildings)—then why not build vertical residential towers right on the roofs of these so-called fulfillment centers? And if companies like *Amazon*, but also *DHL* and others, have started to deploy delivery drones in the last years, then why not use this technology even more effectively? If the drones picked up goods in the fulfillment center and then flew up to the residential apartments and delivered them through the windows, the traffic problem would be solved at one stroke. And the best part is: Due to cutting

edge algorithmic technology the drones would be able to react to the residents' desires even before they realize them for themselves.

I want to close this essay with this suggestion by Lyster, even if it may sound like science fiction: Not only does it offer the image of drones picking up objects of desire in a basement run by *Amazon*, itself a concise comment about what an unconsciousness structured like a learning algorithm could look (or rather function) like. It also points precisely to the conditions a future theater "beyond the street" would have to work with, for good or bad.

Notes

¹ This essay was written during a research stay as a Humboldt research fellow at the Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur und Kulturforschung" (ZfL), Berlin, 2021.

² I decided to translate "Herstellen" as producing and manufacturing here since we find both versions in the English translations of Heidegger. Sometimes Heidegger uses the expression "herstellende Verfertigung," which is translated as "productive manufacturing" (Heidegger 1977, 12). Furthermore, Jelinek's polysemous use of "Herstellen" also indicates the manual gesture of taking someone and putting him in a certain place ("manufacturing" is derived from "manus," the hand). And, finally, I would like to emphasize that Heidegger's use of "Herstellen" relied heavily on the role of the hand in producing (see also Jacques Derrida's classic text on "Heidegger's hand," Derrida 1987).

³ There are several versions of Heidegger's essay, the first one being a lecture held in 1938. In later versions Heidegger tried to mask some of his alignments to National Socialism (see Kellerer 2011). However, the sentences I will quote here can be found in all versions.

⁴ If one takes Heidegger seriously here the term "Mensch" is—other than the term subject—by no means limited to the logic of "World Picture," which may also explain why Jelinek is able to talk about "Menschen" in her second sentence. Besides, it seems most important that Jelinek uses the plural form, opposing Heidegger's fatal anthropocentrism which for example works in his notorious definitions of "man" (in the singular) as "world-building" ("Der Mensch ist weltbildend"), or still in his "Letter on 'Humanism'" which famously states: "Der Mensch ist der Hirt des Seins" ("The human being is the shepherd of being"). On the other hand, I read Jelinek's use of the term "Menschen" as a symptom of her resistance to a somehow too hasty and fashionable "post-human" discourse.

⁵ Frankly, such questioning may seem naive because within the Heideggerian logic the "Age of the World Picture" is not simply a historical period which can be "overcome," but ultimately denotes the conditions of metaphysics and representation in which the modern "Da-Sein" is necessarily always already entangled. So, in the end, it all comes down to the question of whether the structures of representation, subject and "Gestell" are founded in a basic metaphysical position one can never escape but only, if at all, differ from in a minimal manner (this is what the Heideggerian term "verwinden" aims at), or if there is an exterior to these structures which has its own logics and legacy. In this essay—and against the general background of a more Foucauldian and Deleuzian approach—I will argue strongly for the second option: mainly because in my eyes it is the only way to differentiate properly between the realms of representational powers (sovereignty/disciplinary) and that of non-representational governmentality and controlling power. In other words, and in extremely concise form: It is exactly the history of governmentality which Heidegger was not able to think, a problem that does not only touch the question of his entanglement with National Socialism but also affected his very last attempts to grasp the properties of a cybernetically renewed "Gestell." (For a more detailed discussion see my book *Chor-Denken. Sorge, Wahrheit, Technik*, particularly chapter IV on Heidegger and Foucault.)

⁶ This becomes clearest in the following passage from *Staying with the trouble*: "Finished once and for all with Kantian globalizing cosmopolitics and grumpy human-exceptionalist Heideggerian worlding, Terrapolis is a mongrel word composted with a mycorrhiza of Greek and Latin rootlets and their symbionts. Never poor in world,

Terrapolis exists in the sf web of always-too-much connection, where response-ability must be cobbled together, not in the existentialist and bond-less, lonely, Man-making gap theorized by Heidegger and his followers" (Haraway 2016, 11).

⁷ My thoughts on the relation between theater and street belong to a bigger research project I am planning together with Ulrike Haß. For more see Haß' 2019 lecture "Am Ende der Straße. Zum Gefüge des Stadttheaters" as well as my 2020 essay "Why Streets are no longer paved with Theater Gold."

⁸ I am paraphrasing a passage by Haß here who states that the Renaissance cities "als ihr Außen nicht das Land definieren, sondern die Straße, also das von ihnen geschaffene, artifizielle Außen" (Haß 2021, 221).

⁹ I also count the waterways and shipping canals within the field of the street here, since they follow the same projective logics (as is for instance reflected in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice).

¹⁰ In fact, biosensor technology exceeds older ideas of the cyborg. The latter was still primarily based in the binary (or symbolic) codification of analog organisms, but the first aims at optimizing digital computing by embedding it into biological processes for themselves. For more see Parisi in Herzogenrath 2009.

¹¹ Therefore, it would be too hasty to understand this special relation between imagery and apparatus only in good old Lacanian Fashion, i.e., in terms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, being intertwined in the form of a moebius strip, with the Real in-between and at the same time as the impossible outside. It seems more appropriate to say that we are dealing with all kinds of feedback loops and structural couplings between signifying and non-signifying machines today. Accordingly, in my eyes it is more productive to include the Lacanian moebius strip as such topologically in a general ecology of non-signifying semiotics. For more see Berressem in Herzogenrath 2009.

¹² It is most important not to mix up Foucault's "environmentality" with Heidegger's "Umweltlichkeit," if only because these terms have two completely different terminological roots (for more see Hörl 2020, Sprenger 2019). Furthermore, conflating those terms leads necessarily to a one-sided perspective on Foucault's references to Heidegger (not seldom in line with the radically shortened and highly problematic version of Foucault we find in Agamben).

¹³ The second important ancient street is then that of the Roman Empire, which was later also the main starting point for the "rediscovery" of antiquity during the Renaissance. We can conclude from this that the "Age of the World Picture" was in fact mainly informed by Roman-Christian traditions, and not so much by Greek ones. Then again, today's environmental shift could in a way also be addressed as a shift from Rome to Athens—which is, by the way, in my eyes also the background of Foucault's late interest in the ancient issues of taking care (epimeleia) and speaking truth (parrhesia).

¹⁴ The so-called web-theater, as it has developed due to the Corona pandemic, might serve as an example for theater trying to fully strip off its street connections. However, I honestly doubt if this is a sustainable model for the theater to come.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
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SELF OR GROUP TECHNOLOGY? AMBIGUITIES OF THE WORKSHOP FORMAT

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Introduction

The durational and workshop-like format *Life Forms*, which was presented at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin from April 25th to 27th, 2019, accepted and exposed what I call the *paradox of the workshop*.¹ Unlike many workshops following in the tradition of the 1960s neo-avant-gardes, *Life Forms* did not invoke a single event that united all its participants under the umbrella of one shared identity, but quite on the contrary, it allowed for all the involved subjects to relate both to themselves and to each other differently. In a Foucauldian sense it combined subjectivities and the relations between them to facilitate another subjectivity both on the level of the individual and the collective.

Inspired by my experience of attending *Life Forms*, I will investigate how the recent interest in the workshop format in continental European dance differs from the historical emergence of the workshop in the 1960s United States; I will consider this difference particularly with respect to the area of conflict that revolves around group technologies and technologies of the self. For this purpose, I will consult Michel Foucault's late investigation of ascesis and different kinds of subjectivity, Richard Schechner's approach to the workshop, as well as Ana Vujanović, Bojana Cvejić, and Marta Popivoda's research on *Performing the Self*.² In the final section of this essay, I will return to *Life Forms* and the question in how it reflects the paradox of the workshop.³



Life Forms (HKW, 2019), visitor photo by Stefan Hölscher

The problem of subjectivity in late Foucault

I want to start by outlining Foucault's later thought on ascesis as a government of self in contrast to a government of others. I will demonstrate that ascesis concerns neither an aesthetics of existence, nor the idea of 'freedom' as replacing Foucault's previous concern with historical a priori forms as conditions of possibility for experience (cf. Sarasin 2010), but, rather, subjects radically changing their relation to themselves and each other; it concerns a 'spiritual' relation which empowers them not to be governed in a certain way and has an impact on the webs of knowledge and power surrounding them.

After having conducted research on biopolitics and the history of governmentality in the late 1970s, in the early 1980s Foucault commits himself to ascesis, the history of various kinds of subjectivity, and practices of subjectivation. In a text entitled "The Subject and Power" (originally published as an afterword to the anthology *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in 1982), Foucault considers power relations with regard to biopolitics, defining them as "a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault 1982, 219) and highlighting that "something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures" (219). For the late Foucault, powers are reversible relations depending on actions acting upon other actions which need to be carried out in order to be effective. In the context of biopolitics in the era of governmentality, power relations involve diverse pastoral technologies and fields of knowledge which establish and uphold a structure encompassing those governing and those being governed; in Nietzschean terms, they establish and uphold relations between shepherds and their sheep.

Surprisingly, in the same essay from 1982, Foucault emphasises that the goal of his work “during the last twenty years” (208) had never been “to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis” (208), but instead “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (208). Referring to the modern episteme from *The Order of Things* (1966), he distinguishes between different “modes of objectification” which, from the late 18th century onwards, participate in the production of subjects, namely (1) linguistics for the speaking subject, (2) economics for the laboring subject, and (3) biology as “the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive” (208). According to Foucault, during the time of the late-18th century, the modern state arises out of the three domains of labour, life, and language, which transform human beings into biopolitical objects of knowledge and power. The modern state relies both on its totality and on the individuality of its citizens: On the one hand it brings forth the idea of individuality, on the other hand individuals can only be considered as such in their relation to the state, that is, in relation to the complex network of its institutions, and the divisions and segmentations amongst its members. Foucault draws a remarkable conclusion from this constellation:

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (216)

Foucault performs the same juxtaposition of a government of others and a government of self in his analysis of ascesis in Greek and Roman antiquity. Not unlike his homage to Immanuel Kant in the essay *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), what is at stake in ascesis is a radically changed relation to the self that the subject has to confront as a means of overcoming the “immaturity” imposed on them by the pastoral regime of shepherds and sheep. Foucault writes on Kant and enlightenment: “[W]e are in a state of ‘immaturity’ when a book takes the place of our understanding, when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience, when a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be” (Foucault 1997, 305). It is not my intention to qualify or not the ascetic relation to the self as a power relation—the actions of a single subject acting upon other actions of the same subject—but as a self-relation which implies a relation to others. This cannot be reduced to the pastoral networks of knowledge and power that constitute the modern subject before it is capable of changing the relations of these networks.

The workshop format between self and group technologies

My proposition is that workshops take place in a tension between the form of collectivity they involve and the individual positions they put their participants in. Historically they fostered group rather than individual settings, but in the present their means and ends have changed. Whereas the neo-avant-gardes workshops predominantly addressed the production of other subjectivities, today workshops are rather about the reproduction of one and the same subjectivity: That of the individual. This fundamental change corresponds to what Foucault describes as the logic of the

state, manifesting for instance in the contemporary professional development workshop culture. Seen from this angle, workshops establish both relations of individuals to themselves and relations in-between individuals that exceed their self-relations; they include not only a collective situation but also the formatting and formation of subjectivity in relation to that situation.

In the Greenwich Village Art Scene in New York during the 1960s, various makers in the field of performing and visual arts questioned the traditional hierarchy between training, rehearsal, and showing, respectively, between their practice as a process and the products of their practice. For many in experimental artistic milieus during the 1960s it was more important to develop collective forms and modes of dwelling in time and space than to commit themselves to rehearsing and training for a performance production that exceeded their togetherness in the workshop. In various artistic contexts around 1968—Andy Warhol's Factory, Judson Church Theatre, or Grand Union (cf. Hupp Ramsey 1991), but also Open Theatre, Living Theatre, or The Performance Group—a mode of subjectivity which does not derive from individuality but from togetherness emerged. As a group technology it had an impact on what Foucault describes as technologies of the self. From the 1970s onwards, this mode of subjectivity migrated from groups to the individual and expanded into other societal domains—from business workshops and life coaching to more or less esoteric frameworks such as tarot or yoga, all of which we are we are confronted with these days.

My argument is that whilst in artistic environments of the 1960s the workshop was primarily associated with the desire for a collective “truth” in terms of the relations between people, these days’ workshop culture is about the “truth” of single individuals. What experience do I make? Where does it guide me? How will I benefit from it? The concern for altered relations to others from around 1968 has been transformed into a common concern with the preservation and enhancement of the individual in and for late capitalist society. In the artistic milieus of the 1960s—I am only speaking of the U.S. here—Open Theatre's *The Serpent* from 1967, Living Theatre's *Paradise Now* from 1968, or The Performance Group's *Dionysos in 69* from 1969, proliferated alongside Anna Halprin's workshops on her dance deck in California, which was established already in the 1950s, the composition workshops conducted by Robert Dunn in Cunningham's Studio in the early 1960s, or the many films being shot in the ambit of Warhol's Factory.



Life Forms (HKW, 2019), visitor photo by Stefan Hölscher

Among Warhol's films is the 16mm film *Jill and Freddie Dancing* from 1963, in which two members of Judson Church Theatre, the dancer Fred Herko and the dance critic Jill Johnston (who wrote for *The Village Voice*), are shown on the rooftop of a building in New York as they are casually smoking, talking, drinking beer, and dancing. Giulia Palladini's polemical re-coining of the term "foreplay" can help understand how artists of the time questioned the separation of preparation and presentation in the doing and making of art: for them, infinitely extended and sustained foreplays in the sense of informally being and spending time together were more urgent than "coming" together in the framework of shows or showings (Palladini 2017).

The post-1968 expansion of the workshop format from art to other fields of society, as well as the new importance of the individual at the expense of the group, correspond with the historical shift in political economy from material products to immaterial processes which marks the new spirit of capitalism in postindustrial societies after they have been outsourcing their industries to the so-called Global South in recent decades (Chiapello and Boltanski 2007). It is precisely during this time that Foucault shifts his focus to subjectivity and the ways it is interwoven with power and knowledge.

Foucault's ascesis in the age of biopolitical governmentality

Although the government of self and the government of others are not identical, they are interwoven with each other. In his lectures on *The History of Governmentality* from 1977/78, Foucault analyses biopolitics as a power formation superimposing both sovereign power and disciplinary power by the end of the 18th century. Five years later, in his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* from 1982, he reconsiders his previous project and aligns it with his recent research on technologies of the self:

Although the theory of political power as an institution usually refers to a juridical conception of the subject of right, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality – that is to say, of power as a set of reversible relationships – must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self. Quite simply, this means that in the type of analysis I have been trying to advance for some time you can see that power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics. (Foucault 2005, 252)

Foucault's extraordinary understanding of "truth" is central for my empowering reading of ascetic relations to self and others. In his later lectures, "truth" is not something given that is achieved by gaining knowledge and ascending from the realm of sheer appearances to the high skies of true ideas, as in the Platonic model. On the contrary, Foucault describes "truth" as a commitment, a passion, and specific exercises which involve a radical change of the relation between subjectivity and its practical means and ends. Ascetic exercises are carried out by subjects distancing themselves from their objectification in structures of knowledge and power, and aim instead towards new group formations of a different self and different relation to others. Foucault locates

his concept of ascesis in a historical period both after Plato's idea of a perfect state in which an eternal order of things has to be remembered (termed *recollection*) and after the Christian understanding of ascesis as self-renunciation (termed *exegesis*). What Foucault finds in Greek and Roman antiquity differs from the understanding of ascesis as confession as it is still dominant nowadays, especially in business workshops and life coaching. The form of ascesis which interweaves group with self technologies in artistic workshops from the 1960s neo-avant-gardes, in Foucault's words, "involves coming together with oneself, the essential moment of which is not the objectification of the self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself" (333).

In the year of the original publication of "The Subject and Power," Foucault sketches out new forms of subjectivity and processes of subjectivation (as governments of self), opposing them to modes of subjection (as governments of others). Returning to ancient Greek and Roman texts, he indicates a lost "spirituality":

We will call "spirituality" [...] the set of [...] researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth. (15)

he remarks in his first lecture on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Furthermore, he accentuates the fundamental difference between the objectification of the subject and the subjectivation of a truth discourse which, according to him, is called into play in the period between Plato and the rise and spread of Christianity:

Let's say, schematically, that where we moderns hear the question "is the objectification of the subject in a field of knowledge (*connaissances*) possible or impossible?" the Ancients of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman period heard, "constitution of a knowledge (*savoir*) of the world as spiritual experience of the subject." And where we moderns hear "subjection of the subject to the order of the law," the Greeks and Romans heard "constitution of the subject as final end for [themselves] through and by the exercise of the truth." (319)

The precondition for what is described as truth is a "pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct" (406), meaning that "the presence of the person speaking must be really perceptible in what [they] actually say[...]" (405), which "must be sealed by the way [they] conduct [themselves] and the way in which [they] actually live[s]" (405 f.). Thereby, ascesis "is not a way of subjecting the subject to the law; it is a way of binding [them] to the truth" (317), and it "involve[s] arriving at the formation of a full, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself, capable of producing the self-transfiguration that is the happiness one takes in oneself" (319 f.). The problem of ascesis can be summarised in the following question: "How can the subject act as [they] ought, how can [they] be as [they] ought to be, not only inasmuch as [they] know[...] the truth, but inasmuch as [they] say it, practice it, and exercise it?" (319 f.).

In a later lecture from *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault tells his audience:

The form of this schema is neither recollection nor exegesis. Unlike the Platonic model, it neither identifies care of the self and knowledge of the self, nor absorbs care of the self within knowledge of the self. Rather, it tends to accentuate and privilege care of the self, to maintain its autonomy at least with regard to knowledge of the self whose place is, as I think you will see, limited and restricted even so. Second, the Hellenistic model unlike the Christian model, far from moving in the direction of self-exegesis or self-renunciation, tends, rather, to make the self the objective to be attained. (257)

The self as the objective to be attained and subjective truth as something according to which one has to conduct one's life together with others are far away from a self being objectified in structures of knowledge and power. In his essay *What is Enlightenment?* from 1984, Foucault will appreciate a short text by Kant with the same title that was originally published in 1784 and contains similar constellations to the ones he had been dealing with in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Following Kant, Foucault defines enlightenment as "a modification of the preexisting relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason" (Foucault 1997, 305). For Kant and Foucault, one can only exit from one's state of immaturity "by a change that one will bring about in [oneself]" (306), which implies a task and an obligation. According to Foucault, enlightenment is less a historical moment towards the end of the 18th century or a specific relation to the present—which at the end of the 18th century was the present of the French revolution toward which Kant felt 'enthusiastic', as Jean-François Lyotard shows in a brilliant essay (2009)—but a relation to oneself that implies "to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (Foucault 1997, 311) that ties oneself "to an indispensable asceticism" (311). Associating Kant's elaborations on enlightenment with the observations Baudelaire made in the 19th century, Foucault, in the year of his sudden death, carves out another understanding of modernity: "Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover [themselves], [their] secrets and [their] hidden truth; [they are] the man who tries to invent [themselves]. This modernity does not 'liberate man in [their] own being'; it compels [them] to face the task of producing [themselves]" (312). The production of precisely this other subjectivity was at stake in many artists turning to the workshop in the 1960s.

The workshop past and present

From this perspective, the supposed "truth" of a collective realisation, which was at stake in the artistic formatting and formation of other kinds of subjectivity during the 1960s, forecasts our present, in which the authenticity that the workshop promised in the 1960s is revealed as an illusion, i.e., the assumption that there could be a space and a time independent from individualism, the market, and capital. Nowadays, it is our togetherness and the subjective relations we establish between us as individuals that are considered processes and products. They become our "artificial hells" in which we are forced to participate actively and not only passively (Bishop 2012).

Therefore, when some pioneers of the neo-avant-garde privileged the subjectivity of being in groups over being individuals, nowadays this same tendency is used to enhance individuals for a global market which demands flexibility and the ability to continuously adjust within projects. All too often, we participate in workshops in order to advance our skills or to network rather than make an experience that changes us as individuals or makes us relate differently to others. Not only in business workshops or life coaching events, but in a multitude of dance workshops people primarily relate to each other as individuals. In contrast, when Richard Schechner, notably the founding figure of Performance Studies as a field of research whose emergence was closely linked to the cultural revolution of 1968, addresses the workshop in "Drama, Script, Theater and Performance" (1973), he puts a lot of hope in this kind of association amongst people:

The world, which used to be made up of thousands of distinct cultures, is fast becoming global. The consequences of this emerging global megaculture are barely known. In industrial societies – east and west – "workshop" has developed as one way of recreating, at least temporarily, some of the security and intimacy of small, autonomous cultural groups. The workshop is a way of playing around with reality, a means of examining behavior by recording, exaggerating, fragmenting, recombining, and adumbrating it. The workshop is a protected time/space where intra-group relationships may thrive without being threatened by intergroup aggression. In the workshop special gestures arise, definite sub-cultures emerge. The workshop is not restricted to theater, it is ubiquitous. In science, it is the "experimental method," the laboratory team, the research center, the fieldwork outpost. In psychotherapy it is the "group," the rehabilitation center, the "therapeutic community." In living styles, it is the neighborhood, the commune, the collective. (When the workshop is repressive rather than facilitating, as in many "total institutions" such as asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools, it is a most violently abusive way of treating human beings.) The aim of the workshop is to construct an environment where rational, arational, and irrational behavior exist in balance. Or, to put it biologically, where cortical, brain-stem, motor, and instinctive operations exist in balance, leading to expressive, symbolic, playful, ritualized, "scripted" behavior. It is my opinion that workshops are more important than most people dream of. And if I may end on a somewhat fanciful note: I associate the workshop environment with those ancient, decorated caves that give evidence of singing and dancing, people celebrating fertility in risky, sexy, violent, collective, playful ways. (Schechner 1988, 110)

Unfortunately, I cannot be as optimistic as Schechner; half a century later, the workshop's differences to training, rehearsal, and showing in the artistic field, and its differences to the assembly line in the factory and political economy have become much more ambiguous than it may have seemed at the time of the workshop's emergence around 1968. Whilst Schechner makes a clear distinction between facilitating workshops and repressive ones—the latter ones he locates in "asylums, prisons, hospitals, and schools" (110) alone—this borderline has become blurry over the last few decades. What was originally conceived as a group technology empowering and facilitating "small, autonomous cultural groups" (110)—in the best case replacing the individuality of entertainment- and drama-based theatre with the collectivity Schechner culturally appropriated from the rituals of so-called "tribal" culture—nowadays has been turned into various technologies

of the self. These technologies of the self, however, have little to do with what Foucault described in terms of ascesis; late capitalist society promotes individuals over groups whenever people gather in what would probably better be discussed separately as “works” on the one hand and “shops” on the other hand.

At the beginning of the 1970s, inspired by the rituals of “tribal societies,” Schechner contrasted the workshop format with work, e.g., wage labour or instrumentally driven activity in general. In *From ritual to theater and back: The efficacy-entertainment braid* (1974), he states: “Industrial cultures separate and standardize functions and expressions; communal societies combine many functions and expressions in extended, complicated events. Industrial cultures specialize in sequencing univocal actions while communal cultures generalize by means of events that are multivocal” (Schechner 1988, 155). Schechner hoped to overcome individualism by contrasting industrial with communal societies, and theatre as an individualist means of entertainment and representation with ritual as a way of actualising collective relations in-between their participants by means of their efficacy—which for him implied the transformation of subjectivity away from the individual toward the group. In that, Schechner was driven by a deep trust in performance as a process that is opposed to showings and their separation from preceding trainings and rehearsals, as well as their internal separation of performers and audience. What he rejects is the causality and chronology of trainings (the transmission of technique from one individual to others through exercises), rehearsals (the structuring of a scripted process by repetition), and showings (the entertainment of individuals).



Life Forms (HKW, 2019), visitor photo by Stefan Hölscher

In the same text from 1974, Schechner states:

[S]ince around 1965 what has been shown to the spectators is the very process of developing and staging the performance—the workshops that led up to the performance, the various means of theatrical production, the ways the audience is brought into and led from the space, and many other previously conventional and/or hidden procedures. (131)

However, what Schechner did not take into consideration when he proclaimed the protection of the workshops' "time/space where intra-group relationships may thrive" (110) is that this frame as the formatting and formation of subjectivity was, from its very beginning, not only linked to groups, but also to the individual positions that it put their participants in. Already around 1968, the workshop as an environment for the production of subjectivity was not only about collective experience and the relations one bears to others, but it was equally linked to individual experience. From the start, the workshop was in danger of reproducing the bourgeoisie figure of the individual rather than producing forms of subjectivity of the kind that Foucault envisioned when he talked about ascesis.

Nowadays, workshop organisers and attendees in the artistic and in other social fields, while claiming to privilege processes over products, might just in fact be witnessing the rendering of processes into products. They forget that the formatting and formation of collectivity goes hand in hand with a formatting and formation of subjectivity as Foucault analyses it in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. In this context, Jon McKenzie describes our current state of affairs as a society of performance (McKenzie 2001), and Bojana Cvejić recently emphasised, along the same lines, that we do not observe a spectacle from a distance anymore, but are embedded in processes unfolding alongside the very relations between us, and hence we have been turned from public citizens into private users (Cvejić 2016). My suggestion is to understand the paradox of the workshop as a collective practice that is neither a training or rehearsal, nor a showing, but the very process that promises to be its own product, producing both a collectivity and individual positions, similar to what is Foucault's stance on ascesis.

For Schechner, the workshop is closely linked to what he calls "actuals." In his essay *Actuals* (1970), he develops an understanding of "actualizing" which is closely linked to the workshop format and denominates a "special way of handling experience and jumping the gaps between past and present, individual and group, inner and outer [...]" (Schechner 1988, 32). An actual has to do with (1) process, (2) situations, (3) contest, (4) initiation, or "change in status for the participants" (46), and (5) a concrete usage of space (46). According to Schechner, actuals are as much contrasted to dramatic theatre (as an individualist and just entertaining entity) as the workshop is to the idea of showings in front of a supposedly passive audience. In contrast—and long before Jacques Rancière presented his influential lecture *The Emancipated Spectator* (2004)—workshops for Schechner are supposed to activate collectives, not produce passive individuals. As actualisations of a togetherness, they are the empowering of people and the transformation of situations; they initiate change. They ought to be collective realisations of a supposed communal experience which would be different from individualist experience and the daily life reality in industrial societies at an earlier point in the unfolding of globalisation.

What, then, is the difference between our present and the alternative modes of association that the generation of 1968 was searching for? Why the paradox of the workshop? And what does all of that have to do with Foucault's ascesis? Around 1968, artists were not simply looking for alternative ways of working together and collaborating on common goals and agendas within a given market—this is the situation of today's freelance artists, who attend workshops in order to

gain skills and engage in networking—but, instead, and much like Foucault at the beginning of the 1980s, they tried to change subjectivity as such, and the order of experience that it is based upon (e.g., Janevski and Lax 2018; Martin 2006). In Schechner's day and age, workshops perhaps could still be considered "caves that give evidence of singing and dancing, people celebrating fertility in risky, sexy, violent, collective, playful ways" (110), but today it is difficult to separate the cave from its outside, from post-industrial societies and the real subsumption of life, from the rendering of the processes and events of life into products.

Life Forms at Haus der Kulturen der Welt

In *Life Forms*, over the course of three days, we were welcome to come and go as we pleased. Scholars and artists from different backgrounds appeared in the middle of the crowd, starting conversations in varying tones, modalities, and numbers: Among them were Lisa Baraitser, Luis Campos, Maria Chehonadskih, Louis Chude-Sokei, continent., Hu Fang, Maya Indira Ganesh, Wesley Goatley, Melody Jue, Noël Yeh Martin, Luciana Parisi, Sascha Pohflepp, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Marina Rosenfeld, Kaushik Sunder Rajan, Jenna Sutela, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Gary Tomlinson, and John Tresch. They reappeared several times, but always in different constellations. The conversations were framed by Xavier Le Roy and Scarlet Yu's choreography of fragments from animal motives that Le Roy had developed ever since the creation of his group show *Low Pieces* (2009–2011). As time passed, we experienced how we became-other depending on how we related to others. We recognised this in the way that the scholars changed their way of talking or how they stood or sit in space in relation to the ensemble of people around them. As an audience member, one did neither merge with the event, nor did one become part of a uniform collective. One related both to oneself and to the group, continuously balancing between these two different levels.

What does this imply for today's workshops? Can there be a workshop without a commitment and passion for truth in the above mentioned Platonian and Christian sense? My proposition is to think of workshops as ascetic sets of exercises, practices, and technologies of the self and the group, which enable subjects and groups of subjects to exit structures of objectivation so as to subjectivize themselves, and by doing so bring forth new forms of subjectivity. Workshops as ascetic practices would signify an emancipation from the individuality that subjects are ascribed to by the pastoral logic of shepherds and sheep. In ascetic workshops, modes of subjectivation would be at play, which may help to find ways out of our 'self-incurred immaturity' and current powerlessness. Asceticism would involve the task and obligation to invent exercises that empower the construction of new relations between the subject and their means and ends. Under the condition that one binds oneself to a subjective truth and follows a commitment and a passion for that truth, new forms of subjectivity may emerge, which is perhaps even more urgent these days than by the end of the 1990s, when there was no pandemic and dance moved on to pastures new the last time, at a time when the general political situation was a bit more tranquil than in 2021.

Notes

¹ See https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2019/lebensformen/lebensformen_start.php. Concept and realization: Katrin Klingan, Nick Houde, Janek Müller, Johanna Schindler, and Christoph Rosol, in collaboration with Bernard Geoghegan.

² For a summary see <http://www.anavujanovic.net/2016/09/performing-the-self/>. I am thankful to Bojana Cvejić for coining the term group technology in allusion to Foucault's self technologies during a workshop she conducted at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Giessen University, Germany, 2012.

³ The present research grew from my working together with Kai van Eikels in the frame of the research project *Collective Realization – The Workshop as an Artistic – Political Format*, located at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, funded by Fritz Thyssen Foundation. A previous version of this text has been published in *Peripeti* 17.31 (2020).

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Biography

Dr. Stefan Hölscher is a postdoc within the framework of the Fritz Thyssen research project *Collective Realization – The Workshop as an Artistic-Political Format* at the Institute for Theatre Studies at Ruhr University Bochum (Germany). His PhD *Capable Bodies – Contemporary Dance Between Aesthetics and Biopolitics* has been published by transcript in 2015.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

OPERATIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY: DANCE AND LOGISTICAL CAPITALISM

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"Hey, the morning rush has started. Get to this area, that's where demand is biggest."

"Hey, the concert's about to let out. You should head over there."

"Make it to \$330. You're \$10 away from making \$330 in net earnings. Are you sure you want to go offline?"

These are three of the many messages ride-hailing service company Uber regularly sends through the company's app to their drivers (Scheiber 2017). They were developed by the company in collaboration with behavioral scientists as a technique to increase and control the work of their self-employed drivers, directing them into service areas where rides are profitable and advance the company's comprehensive coverage of the city. These nudging messages are the techniques of what one could call the company's choreographic politics—choreographic in its effect of directing and regulating the trips of Uber drivers, and choreographic in that it is constituted by movement. Through the use of tracking algorithms, Uber captures and analyzes the movement patterns of their entire fleet, including measurements of their drivers' accelerations, abrupt stops, etc., in order to optimize each ride for profit (Scheiber 2017). In concert with Uber's other modes of business operation, the messages are part of the choreographic power deployed by the company.¹

Uber's methods for controlling and regulating the movements of their drivers is just one of the newer iterations of a regime of choreographic power. The concept of choreographic power, or choreopower, denotes the execution of power on and by movement. In this sense, choreography

describes a “technique of power” (Foucault 1995) that is at work also beyond the realm of dance. It is found in various fields and on all scales ranging from logistics to migration or colonialism. It comprises bodily movement as much as global movements of trade or displacement.² As an operational politics, it controls movement from the inside, regulating and modulating it by its very own logic. Instead of subsuming processes to the external regulation by pre-given scripts, goals, acting or moving subjects, operational politics is based on the logic of process and its regulation via immanent techniques (Massumi 2015, 212–16; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 14–15). In regard to movement, operational politics started to gain hold in the field of logistics in the 1960s. Over the last decades, these operational choreographies proliferated into all realms of society, creating a logistical regime that comprises modes of thinking as much as modes of existence and action. It governs the movements of economic production as much as the way we perceive, live, and move.

Dance—seen as a practice in which new modes of thinking, moving, and acting as well as new forms of subjectivity are explored in a physical manner—is an integral part of this logistical regime. With the emergence of logistical capitalism during the second half of the 20th Century, choreographers started to engage with the logic of operations. Since the 1960s, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and others turned away from movement as a form of expression on stage, focusing on the question of how to use choreographic technique as operations to modulate (rather than express) modes of collectivity and individuation. Addressing dance practice from the perspective of logistical capitalism shows how this shift from performance as product to performance as process is still subject to the regulating powers of choreography (be it in dance or be it in everyday life). The shift from theatrical presentation to operation alters the logic of choreography itself, foregrounding its operational politics as it surfaced in late-20th-Century logistics and dance. The study of operational choreography show how dance engages with logistics in a double way: First, dance explores the potential of operational modes of choreography to produce forms of practice, collectivity, and individuation that challenge the capitalist logic of operations at work in logistics. Second, the performative work of the choreographers becomes itself an investigation into the operational politics of the logistical regime, studying its logic on a bodily level.

By combining the analysis of choreographic power at work in the logistical regime and the engagements with operational politics from the field of dance, the following questions will be addressed: How do choreographic techniques operate immanently in actions and movements, governing them from within? And in which way does this immanent operational politics of these choreographic techniques challenge or reaffirm logistical capitalism on the level of movement?

The Logistical Regime

Most often, the term logistics is associated with global developments in capitalist production: distributed production chains, the perfect flow of goods and money as well as the regulation and distribution of the workforce in so-called “free-trade zones,” ports and distribution hubs. These all mark developments in the economic system termed by Anna Tsing as “global supply chain capitalism” (2009, 149). This world-spanning, or better, world-producing choreography, is more than a set of algorithmic operations contingent upon missing or precarious labor rights. Logistics

encompass the macro as well as micro scales of movement: small-scale actions, bodily performances, affective dynamisms and rhythms. These choreographic powers affect all dimensions of life, even without the need to up- or downscale their operations. As multi-scalar movements, logistics' supply chain is already part of the rhythms of work, bodies, and everyday life, regulating their flow immanently.

In the first half of the 20th Century, Fordism searched for perfectly optimized paths and rhythms for productive movement. In his analysis of labor as choreographed movement, Mark Franko has shown how in the 1930s the movement of American factories were segmented, analyzed, and perfectly trimmed in order to improve efficiency (Franko 2002; Taylor 1998; Gilbreth 1921). Beyond the factory, patterns of repetitive movement emerged between the workplace, university, apartment, supermarket, restaurant, and bar and segmentation and efficiency of movement spread into the city (Chombart de Lauwe 1952). The discipline of movement permeated all working conditions, exercising a form of choreographic power aligned to what Foucault described as the "disciplinary regime" (1995). In this way, Fordism can also be called the regime of the perfect way. Through segmentation, each gesture, each turning of the head, each walk in the city, the supermarket or the airport could be extracted and analyzed in detail. This is the regime of fragmented and mechanical rhythms of everyday life. Pattern synchronization and the segmentation of rhythms injected discipline into movement's operation, and discipline ruled the movements of the everyday.

In the 1960s, the logistical regime began establishing a new regime of choreographic power based on the continuously adaptive rhythms of production and delivery (Cowen 2014, 34).³ Changes in supply and demand as well as the costs of production were permanently evaluated and created a constant re-adaptation of the circulation of movement. Shipping routes were changed in real-time alongside shifts in the location of production in order to create a perfect (seamless) circulation of flow. Movement was constantly in the process of auto-correcting itself (Rossiter 2016, 5), creating and at the same time being created by an ever-changing factor of process-oriented optimization. In the ever-changing flux of movements, logistics profited most from the flexibility of its ability to adapt. Irregular movement and asynchronicity were no longer problems, but had rather become sources of value, allowing for even more on-time modes of production and distribution. Daily routines of work and living were backgrounded by the search for better modes of circulation. In the mode of constant adaptation, movement took over and flow became the generator of surplus value.

In the choreography of the disciplinary regime, the individual was center stage. The operations of logistics, however, exceed any individual action. Movement affects movement itself on a dividual level, creating a highly adaptive system in which the individual becomes a mere differential operator creating profit by connecting disparate flows. The labor of the messenger, the Deliveroo courier, the cab or Uber driver is paradigmatic in the logistical regime. Their work is a constant re-positioning. The slightest alterations in weather, traffic, demand and supply alter their rhythms and routes. A restaurant's sudden popularity, a breaking rain shower, a cancelled concert or a technical problem in the subway are events that directly affect the entire logistical system and the

multitude of individual positioning decision taken to best serve the customer. Searching for the most lucrative position and the fastest route becomes a constant re-adaption of navigational strategies. The rhythms of work need to adapt to its environment: Rather than moving on a pre-given trajectory and against the milieu's conditions, logistical movement moves *with* its environment—the environment of everyday living.

The movements of work can now include the necessities of everyday life. Suddenly, shopping, meeting friends, and going on vacation are movements that can be integrated into the choreographies of work. Together they create chains of operations, adapting and regulating each other's flows, and thus replace the politics of segmentation and the synchronization of work and life. Every movement can now become a factor in rendering logistical navigations. In composition, the multiple choreographic operations form the logistical regime.

Operational Politics

The shift towards an operational logic within the logistical regime renders choreographic control immanent. Rather than simply applying an existing politics onto the field of movement, the choreopower of logistics affects a new logic of politics: the logics of operations. As shown above, this logic is based on the very processes it regulates. In logistics, operations are the immanent regulation of movement by movement.

For Brian Massumi, a logic is operative “because it governs a pragmatic working out” (2015, 212). Instead of giving an inherent meaning that demands an interpretation, the operative logic calls for production (ibid). It is even “doubly productive” (213). First, it produces a solution to the problem it raises. Second, the operation comes with a mode of production, that is “a set of mechanisms ensuring the accumulation of the surplus-value produced, making it available to be fed back into the processual circuit at strategic points” (ibid). Both are two sides of one process of production: the logic of operations.

Take the case of logistics. One can call the first side of operations the “production of flow.” It is characterized by the construction of streets, warehouses, ports, etc., and the calculation of optimal shipping routes, the avoidance of accidents, and the minimization of unexpected delays. Tax and security regulations, working rights and border regulations are similarly considered here. The second side of operations is the system of labor created by the logistical regime (e.g. Uber, DHL, FedEx). This system controls the workforce as well as the everyday life of workers, creates precarious working conditions easily exploitable by logistical companies, etc. Both these aspects are effects of one single process. Both feed into each other while nevertheless partially differing and contradicting each other. But instead of producing inefficiency, Massumi points out that this “differential between its part-concepts” (2015, 214) is the very motor of the operative logic. Operative logic acts precisely across tensions: “What gives consistency to the process is the tendential direction in which the formations possessed of it move together, across their tensions” (ibid.). Logistics' tendency is perfect flow and smoothness. Smoothness itself is an abstraction, never to be reached. In fact, if reached, the operations of logistic would be over: the system would

simply stop since everything would be immediately available.⁴ Thus smoothness and perfect flow are the “limit” (215) of logistics. But, as limits, they are not outside operational logic. In the logistical regime, perfect flow is part of the choreopower at work: “It abstractly folds into the operative logic’s working-out” (216). Smoothness is the immanent outside (Deleuze 2006, 84) of the logistical operation.

Next to productivity and the limits of smoothness and perfect flow, the “engine of the process” is essential to an understanding of the operative logic (Massumi 2015, 216). While each operation starts from a problem, it would be a mistake to conflate the problem’s solution with the operation’s conclusion. The effects of an operation cannot fully be determined in the beginning. The problem sets an operation in motion. “What is set in motion needs apparatuses to move through, and these supply the efficient causality. But the formula is still really potentializing. It in-forms process with the potential that comes to be expressed in the emergent cases of solution” (ibid). Rather than being a given to the process of operation, causality has to be produced, or, in other words, the causality of an operation is an effect of itself. Massumi terms this “quasi-causality” (ibid). Circulation (in the logistical sense of a value-producing movement) is the quasi-effect of logistics. To produce circulation, multiple events of movement have to be synthesized. Without the operation of synthesis, movement would just exist in a bubbling field without any direction or causality. By capturing these movements and making them operational, the logistical regime creates causality, making it possible to produce, ship, and trade goods and create value—value by and of movement. What we call movement in its usual sense and what here is called circulation is the synthesis of multiple movements in their nascent state actualized and ordered into causality by logistics’ operational logic. The logistical regime as it became dominant over the last decades is a choreographic politics in-act, or, to use another term by Massumi, logistics operates by the “ontopower” of movement—a power that *makes* move (12). Rather than regulating movement as an already given, the operational choreopower of logistics modulates movement in the act of its making, immanent to the process of its actualization.

Logistics’ operational logic is a productive power at work in movement. It acts as an immanent power, creating causality: movement as a directed, goal-oriented action. At the same time, the operational logic presents movement’s causality as a fact of necessity: movement’s “natural” condition. In the words of Stefano Harney: “[L]ogistics tracks us because it assumes fugitivity. Indeed, what is called surveillance might also be called preemptive logistics” (Cuppini and Frapporti 2018, 97). This pre-emptive logic of quasi-linear movement and economical effective circulation is based on the double production of its choreographic operation: It produces movement as economically productive and at the same time an apparatus that sustains and values its economics. In this sense, the messages sent by Uber to its drivers are operators in the logistical regime. They use their psycho-choreographic power to synthesize movement and produce circulation to create value for the logistical regime, in one word: capital. While its limit, the perfect flow of movement, is far from being achieved in the circulations of global or urban traffic, its “force is that it is too powerfully abstract to be—but still causal enough to express itself (and to make history in the process)” (Massumi 2015, 218).

The operations of performance

While the logic of operative politics has been key for the advancement of a logistical capitalism since the 1960s, it can also be found beyond the realm of capitalist production. Simultaneously, in the fields of theater, dance, and performance, the logic of operations gained the interest of choreographers and theater makers who started to explore this logic on a bodily level and by their own means. Already in 1934, Walter Gropius described his vision of a theater as comparable to a “cargo station [Verladebahnhof]” (Gropius 1968, 159, trans. modified). He turned away from the Logic of theatrical expression and its architectural manifestation in the form of a stage as platform, presenting movement and action to the audience. Instead, Gropius imagined the theater and its stages as a space of circulation and operation, a logic he architecturally designed into his plans for the “Total Theater” of Erwin Piscator (161). “A network of aisles,” he writes, “should make it possible for actors to cross the playhouse to and from the stage levels, either individually or in groups. Openings at both sides of the stage can facilitate the flow [Durchfluß] of processions from the outside over the stage and back out again” (159–160, trans. modified).

Gropius’ Total Theater halted in the planning stages, but in the 1960s choreographers were once again interested in the operative logic in theater, choreography, and performance. Concurrent to the advancement of operational techniques in logistical work and everyday life, choreographers such as Anna Halprin, Yvonne Rainer, Alan Kaprow, and Steve Paxton were exploring and exercising the logics and potentials of operations in their practice. They started to move away from a system of given and well-defined choreographic techniques meant only to be incorporated and mastered in a most perfect manner. These choreographers’ interest was to invent new techniques, techniques without any pre-given goal or ideal mode of execution. They searched for techniques for improvisation and experimentation that would be productive instead of reproductive. For that, their work shifted away from the logic of theatrical expression, directed towards the audience of a performance, and towards a logic of operations. Experimenting with the operational logic at work in choreographic techniques, they used their artistic work to question the politics of the logistical regime. Being situated in logistical capitalism, dance, as well as every domain of society, was increasingly regulated by operational techniques. By addressing choreography’s own logic of operations, they raised the questions: “What do operations do?” “What do operations produce?” Using the pragmatics of choreography, they started to invent their own (counter-)operational politics. But instead of addressing the operative logics of their choreographies as resistant *per se*, they aimed to produce performances as “processual operators” (Guattari 1987, 84). Their choreographies became tools to explore the immanent possibilities and impossibilities “to produce a feed-back effect and open new lines of virtuality” (84).

Collective Operations

Continuous project – altered daily was a project initiated by Yvonne Rainer in the late 1960s as an attempt to create a setting in which choreographic techniques become “processual operators.” The existing structure of a rehearsal process, with its linear set of goal-oriented techniques designed

to create a virtuous performance and a public presentation of that achievement was replaced by an open structure of continuous experimentation and alteration. The performance itself was to become an open space for the audience to participate in this ongoing process—a temporary window rather than the final product. In a performance note, Rainer states, “[CP-AD] was an ongoing effort to examine what goes on in the rehearsal—or working-out and refining—process that normally precedes performance, and a growing skepticism about the necessity to make clear-cut separation between these two phenomena” (Rainer 1974, 129). Every “performance,” if this is still the correct term, was the continuation of the collective process itself, embedded in techniques of learning, experimenting, rehearsing, and teaching. For Rainer, this process was as much an advancement of her work as a choreographer and performer as it was a development of her teaching activity at that time (Rainer 2006, 317). By bringing techniques of teaching into her artistic work, she shifted from a performance- and presentation-oriented work to the techniques of collectivity and transmission. And while *CP-AD* was attributed to her person and authored in her name, after two years she would transform the work into *The Grand Union*, a collective of artists without any director.

CP-AD consisted of 6 dancers, plenty of movement material and different choreographic techniques. Each of the dancers contributed movements and techniques to the process, and it was the aim of the group to let these materials circulate among all bodies in different solo and group performances. The movements introduced to the process by the dancers did not consist of ready-made scenes. Most of the choreographic material came in the form of “tasks” or “problems.” Both could be articulated verbally or in material form. Together they formed an operational choreography that constantly connected and combined techniques and movements. Every technique became a new processual operator that modulated the movement again. Together they created an assemblage or ecology of techniques.

In a text published only a couple of years prior to *CP-AD*, Gilbert Simondon describes the ecology of techniques as well as the ecological dimension of techniques themselves in relation to breeding and farming: “Cultivation techniques [*les techniques de culture*], moreover, act primarily on the environment, which is to say on the energy resources at the plant’s disposal over the course of its development, rather than on the plant itself, as a living individual” (Simondon 2015, 17). Here, techniques are less actions directed upon the living individual, in this case the plant, but on its environment; or, to use another term of Simondon’s, on (and in) its “associated milieu” (Simondon 2017, 59). To change an individual or an individuation, one needs to change the milieu it is emerging in. Each individual is produced by its “associated milieu.” Yet, at the same time, the milieu is produced by the act of individuation. None of these processes precedes the other. Only in relation to its associated milieu is individuation possible and the techniques nest precisely in this relation in a constant modulation. Techniques are therefore directed toward the milieu and thereby modulate the act of individuation in the very differentiation it produces. “Every technical gesture engages the future, modifies both world and man, as the species whose environment that world is. The technical gesture does not exhaust itself in its utility as means; it leads to an immediate result, but also provokes a transformation in the environment, which rebounds onto living species, man included” (Simondon 2015, 19). The process of individuation and its milieu are

in constant alteration and adaptation—spatially as much as temporally. Therefore, the techniques at work in this process act on the given as much as they address the future.

Simondon thinks the relation to the milieu as an adaptation to the future and the milieu as-if: Individuation needs to address the problem posed by the milieu as-if this adaptation has already taken place, remembering that this adaptation changes not only the process of individuation but the situation in its totality—the individuation and its associated milieu. Adaptation necessarily becomes a speculative operation, set to work by speculative techniques: “Everything takes place *as if* the corporeal schema of the human species had been modified, *as if* it had dilated, had received new dimensions; the order of magnitude changes; the perceptual grid is broadened and differentiated; new schemas of intelligibility are developed” (Simondon 2015, 21, my emphasis). Here, adaptation is not directed towards the actual, but—to use Deleuze’s vocabulary—towards the virtual, a virtual process of individuation as much as of the milieu. Every technique at work in the milieu needs to fold the virtual into its operations, or, as Massumi pointed out, this virtual dimension is precisely its operational logic: “It in-forms process with the potential that comes to be expressed in the emergent cases of solution” (Massumi 2015, 216).

Going back to the techniques of breeding as well as to the milieu of *CP-AD*, they precisely operate on and with the virtual of the process. The virtual makes their techniques speculative and therefore inventive. Limited to the actual, Rainer’s project could not be altered and would fall back to the repetition of the same. In the mere actual, breeding—be it of a plant or of a performative process—would not be possible.

The techniques at work in the processes of individuation are in no way limited to the individual body. As *CP-AD* shows, they move transversally through multiple bodies and individuations. For Simondon, this transversal dimension of individuation is important, terming this process “transduction” or “transindividuation” (Simondon 1992, 307). The potentiality of a milieu does not cease with the act of individuation; it neither starts with nor resolves in an individual.⁵ Transindividuation moves beyond one milieu, feeding into other milieus (of other individuations) and thereby modulating it. Its techniques operate—like transindividuation itself—between bodies and between milieus. No technique is just performed or incorporated by or even directed towards an individual body; techniques are transversal operations at work in the very collectivity that is the choreographic process of the “rehearsal.” They are “choreographies of tensions” (Egert 2019, 446–449) in which the smallest operation can immediately re-compose everything.

In the light of individuation and its milieu, no body is simply part of the process of individuation or the milieu—it always emerges in the relation between both. Their status (individuation/milieu) as well as the relation between them is rather operational than foundational: Every individuation can be the milieu for another individuation, and every milieu consists in itself of multiple individuations, which again are associated with (other) milieus. While the “rehearsals” of *CP-AD* are the milieu of the “performance,” the performance is itself the milieu of the performers and their bodies. Nonetheless, these bodies are not just the effect of the performance but of multiple techniques, of which only some are part of what one usually calls the “performance.” And, of course, each body

is itself the milieu of multiple individuations. These bodies are, like the performances, co-emergent with other bodies, new milieus, and individuations. All of them are processual operators in the process entitled *CP-AD*; together they create new constellations, calling for the invention and alteration of techniques. *CP-AD* becomes a field of operations, modulated by, as well as modulating, its techniques and processual operators. In other words, Rainer made her work operational, advancing an operational understanding of bodies and choreography on the level of performance. These bodies operate by techniques to relate to their associated milieu, folding its future potentiality into the act of their individuation. These future-based techniques are the very motor of the process's creativity. And at the same time, they are one of the most powerful operations in the system of logistical capitalism.

Linking *CP-AD* back to the milieu of its emergence (i.e., the early advancements of a system-based logistical system of production), the speculative dimension of operations was as much the possibility of artistic experimentation as it was the focus of capitalist capture (in its latest iteration as Uber's messages to possible future options for lucrative rides).⁶ Which effects and modes of individuation the politics of operation bring forward and *how* they address the future's potential was not pre-scripted. Do they render this future uncertainty operational and calculable in the present (as in logistical capitalism), or can they fold the future into the present while keeping its openness?

Rainer's choreographic experiments are precisely situated in this tension between operation's emancipatory potential and its contribution to the advancement of logistical capitalism. They were part of an emerging logic of operations and a culture of logistics beyond the realm of global trade and the circulation of goods. Exploring the operation of a changing political situation, the relevant questions posed in Rainer's choreographic work at the end of the 1960s were: What are the new (i.e., operational) techniques in the time of a changing capitalist logic? What other modes of individuation and existence are possible?

Turning towards the milieu of performance and ecology of techniques as described above, the question of collectivity became key for the choreographic work: How can a collective improvise, and how can one improvise collectivity? Or, in terms of the operational choreographic practice set at work in *CP-AD*: How can collectivity be practiced pragmatically, without the act of theatrical presentation and without an already defined form? That is, how to practice collectivity with and into the future? For Rainer, collectivity was more than just the setting of choreographic improvisation—it became itself an improvisation technique.

By shifting the focus away from the theatrical performance to the operational process of their work, Rainer and her collaborators used choreographic techniques to experiment with collective modes of individuation. While the shift from performance to process was in no way *per se* countering the developments of capitalism, the work of *CP-AD* nested in the process of capitalism's transformation to explore and challenge its operational logic. Logistical capitalism's aim to create seamless circulations of goods, money and people was based on the production of logistical subjectivities, constantly adapting to and advancing the flow of movement. Instead of stopping the

circulation of movement or trying to withdraw the process of individuation from the logic of operation, *CP-AD* radicalized individuation by pushing it beyond the individual. Inventing and experimenting with techniques for transindividuation, *CP-AD* opens the individuation to the milieu. Across milieus and bodies *CP-AD* renders choreographic techniques transindividual, producing operational collectivities as much as, ecological modes of subjectivities.

Operational Collectivities

Over the decades and with the advancement of logistical capitalism and its operational politics, the questions, aims, and needs of choreographers and their work changed. Choreographers such as William Forsythe and Merce Cunningham invented new operational techniques and promoted their institutionalization. “Somatic practices” such as Body Mind Centering, Alexander Technique, and others dominated for the last decades the field of operational work in dance, giving ground to the development of techniques that are performed individually and taught and sustained in daily routines, workshops, and training sessions (Schuh 2019; Vujanovic 2017; Hölscher 2020). Focusing on pragmatic and operational settings, with the workshop as one of its most prominent formats, their politics can neither be called critical nor affirmative *per se* towards logistical capitalism. Using and experimenting with the very same modes of operation, these practices shift away from the question of (re)presentation and ask: What do choreographies do? What do they produce? Given the productivity of their operational logic, the question is: What modes of individuation and transversal techniques (e.g., transindividual, ecological) do these operational choreographies produce? How do choreographers work the logic of operations without subsuming their practices under an existing system of control and profit? These questions articulate the pragmatic politics of operational choreographies of dance in times of logistical capitalism and its techniques of constant evaluation and adaptation.

The work of Yvonne Rainer and The Grand Union used the logic of operational choreography to turn the performance into a space of rehearsal, experimentation, and transmission of techniques: in one word, a workshop. For them, the rehearsal/performance-turned-workshop created a milieu to experiment with choreographic techniques so as to produce collective forms of individuation. They opened up an experimental space, in which they tried to shift the individual-based capitalist logic of the 1960s into one of transindividuation. While the operations of logistical capitalism advanced over the decades and moved from the realm of the individual to that of the dividual (Deleuze 1995, 180), the workshop still offers a choreographic format to experiment with the techniques of operational politics.⁷

Since 2016, choreographers Juli Reinartz and Tea Tupajic followed up on this interest in operational choreographies and developed a workshop entitled *The Perfect Robbery*.⁸ The leading question of the workshop is clear and simple: How to rob a bank? The rest is detail: Timeframe, 5 days; bank to rob, nearby and easy to reach; date of robbery, fixed and shortly after the workshop. The goal is set, but the techniques needed to achieve it had to be invented. Reinartz writes:

The task of the four to six days is to collectively plan a bank robbery. The planning includes on the one hand the investigation of the immediate environment of the selected bank, including the local specifics and time schedule of the branch, the coordination and perfection of the process, the design of escape tactics and the discussion of possible defense strategies in the event of an arrest. On the other hand, it also includes the discussion about the social and legal significance of a chosen strategy and the question of its aim: Should it be an end in itself or finance another project, who benefits from which tactic? How? And can everyone live with the personal consequences that result from it? (Reinartz 2020, 217)

While the goal—to rob a bank—seems simple, the techniques, decisions, skills, etc. needed to pull it off are multiple and stem from many different areas of life. The workshop on how to rob a bank quickly becomes a workshop in techniques of navigation (how to move [invisibly] through the city); of psychology (how to create sympathy and empathy in the general public); of finance (how to invest and launder money); of martial arts training (how to avoid injuries during the robbery); of jurisdiction (how to behave if caught and/or investigated). All these techniques feed into the workshop and foster the process.

On the other hand, the workshop also nests itself in the practices of everyday knowledge and modulates its operations. Embedded in the realm of the everyday, the workshop becomes a springboard for modulating techniques and thereby feeding them into the wider realm of society. Here, choreographic practices operate beyond the collectivity of present bodies, making the workshop a space for immanent planning. Even though it is directed towards the outside, towards the operations of finance as much as towards the traffic of the city, towards the life of the participants as much as towards the working conditions of the people in the bank, it is not—as Reinartz states (2020)—a workshop in public space. It is rather a workshop *with* public space: the workshop is an operation, which renders public space (as much as finance, traffic, etc.) speculative again.

Reinartz and Tupajic use the planning of a bank robbery to introduce a speculative dimension into the choreographies of the city, its ways of moving and its architecture, but also into its institutions such as the bank, the system of finance, its capitalist working conditions, etc. Being speculative and operational at the same time, probably the best term to describe the choreographic operation is *speculative pragmatic* (Manning and Massumi 2014, 89–90). On the one hand, the scenario of a robbery is absolutely alien to the reality of the participants (its speculation). On the other hand, its parameters (set time, place, building, people involved, etc.) are ultra-specific (its pragmatism). *The Perfect Robbery* directs every speculation towards a specific yet unrealistic goal. Enabled and fostered by the situation of the workshop in the realm of dance, an exceptional setting is created resulting from the interweaving of artistic and potential criminal action. Challenging not only the logic of criminal action but also of artistic production, the question raised is: “Which lines of flight yield when we use the realm of art for precisely such projects, that would not be possible outside of it?” (Reinartz 2020, 214).

The speculative pragmatic dimension of *The Perfect Robbery's* choreography works with and by the workshop's operational logic. Operations are infused with a speculative dimension that challenges the linear pragmatism and (quasi-causality) of an action. The workshop uses the technique of planning to potentialize the future orientedness of its process and opens up a speculative dimension of the everyday and its pragmatics. "*The Perfect Robbery* is intended to question reality by means of the collective planning of a fictitious event, to challenge its social processes and thereby create new realities. Fiction and reality become mutually inclusive. They condition and expand each other. We are therefore concerned with the effectiveness of fiction on reality and with the new configurations of reality that open up in it" (215). Here, speculations are not just limited to the realm of the fictional but operate across fiction and reality, thereby introducing a future potential in both realms. This speculation in and with the operations of the participants' thinking, their knowledge and everyday practices makes the workshop a tool for political action. The act of planning invites participants to question the actual and rehearse a logic of collective speculation (that is, it revokes the quasi-causal logic of its operations). The politics of planning the perfect robbery should not be mistaken with a robbery to serve another political goal (as seen especially with terrorist groups such as the German *Rote Armee Fraktion, RAF*). The workshop engages with a politics of planning itself.

For Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, a politics of planning is key for an operational logic that is not subsumed to the powers of logistical capitalism. Reappropriating it from its dominant neoliberal usage, they argue for planning as a collective and existential activity. "Planning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futural presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible" (Harney and Moten 2013, 74–75). The politics of planning is an existential politics; it is existential and future oriented, modulating the future from the inside. In this sense, it is the opposite of policy: "What we are calling policy is the new form command takes as command takes hold. It has been noted that with new uncertainties in how and where surplus value is generated, and how and where it will be generated next, economic mechanisms of compulsion have been replaced by directly political forms" (74). While policy also acts on an operational logic, it captures the existential operators from the outside, overcoding them with the logic of logistical capitalism.⁹

What makes *The Perfect Robbery* an act of planning is its collectivity.

The Perfect Robbery thus became a project in which the collective planning of a hold-up strategy is primarily concerned with reassembling the participants' relationships to one another, their political and social assumptions and their knowledge economies. Whether the plan is feasible at all is important, but not necessarily interesting. After all, the central point of our planning lies in the process and not in the success of its strategy. (Reinartz 2020, 215)

The workshop is an act of collective trans-individuation. Like Rainer and The Grand Union, the modes of collective existence are key to the experimental techniques deployed in the workshop. Rather than simply setting a pre-given form of collectivity as the workshop's goal, collectivity is part of its process. The goal—to rob a bank—is used to invent the techniques for the invention of new

collectivities and new modes of collective existence. In reference to Moten and Harney, Reinartz writes, “[i]nside, in the negotiation of a common goal, rather than in the common identity of a collective, *The Perfect Robbery* raises its hopes” (213). To produce collectivity, the workshop uses the double productivity of the operative logic at work in its choreography to create a solution for its problem (the robbery) and to create a milieu for this solution to take hold in (its collectivity). In the act of planning, the workshop becomes a processual operator of collectivity and collective modes of individuation. Here, collectivity is a collectivity in the making: an operative collectivity, based on an assemblage of techniques.

By reformatting individual techniques from such diverse fields as psychology, hacking, navigation, jurisdiction, etc., and linking them in new ways, a collectivity emerges based on this ecology of techniques. While the ability to navigate the city by bike or car was an individual skill of the quotidian commute, it is now part of a collective process (escape). The knowledge of financial regulation—previously used to maximize one’s individual earnings—is now part of the collective’s process of planning (money laundering). Thus the workshop’s planning renders the techniques of the individuals into collective ones. At the same time, it changes their operative logic, making them an act of planning on the level of existence. The collective of *The Perfect Robbery* is one of movements and choreographic techniques, rather than one of individuals.

The future-orientedness of planning, its collective practice as well as its strong engagement with everyday knowledge prevent the workshop from self-enclosing itself. It is situated in the spatial givens of the city, in the specific knowledge of the participants, and in the speculative timing of the robbery open the workshop constantly to its milieu. The autopoietic operations of valuation and feedback, dominating logistical capitalism and control are confronted with a heterogenetic process (Guattari 1995, 33), that differentially remodulates the workshop’s and its participants’ associated milieus. Without imagining itself outside an operative logic, *The Perfect Robbery* initiates collective acts of planning in and with transversal operational choreographic acts that challenge the regime of logistical capitalism on the level of its modes of choreographic practice.

The control of movement at work in the regime of logistics—ranging from the calculation of shipping routes to the messages sent by Uber to its drivers—show how choreography cannot be limited to the realm of dance. The regime of a choreographic politics and its techniques of choreopower became one of the most powerful operations in “global supply chain capitalism.” However, the advancements of operational politics since the 1960s did not boost logistics alone. To unfold its full power, operational politics simultaneously affected working conditions and their accompanying modes of living, including the production of dance and performance. Today, operational choreographies and the immanent modulation of movement can be found in global trade and its working conditions as well as in dance performance.

To address dance as part of the logistical regime should not be mistaken as a simple subordination or determination of its movement by logistics. At the very same time that dance is seen as part of the logistical regime it also becomes a possibility for experimenting with the operational logic in movement and the choreopower installed by it. The choreographic techniques in dance were

always powerful operations of movement. Over time, the regimes of controlling and regulating movement changed. Choreographies, such as the above-mentioned works by Yonne Rainer and *The Grand Union* or Juli Reinartz and Tea Tupajic, addressed the logic of operations that dominated (or became dominant during) the time of their work. Shifting away from the level of presentation and towards the level of existence, their concern was one of exploring techniques for collective action and other modes of individuation.

The political question raised by these performances is: How to modulate and reformat choreographic operations in times of logistical capitalism to abstract them from the mechanisms of profit? Rather than affirming process as such, and thereby adapting to the logic of operation as a freedom from the power of representation (which it certainly is, but with limited effects), the questions imposed on choreography by the logistical regime are: What power and what potential inhabits these operations? How can this potential be exercised beyond its reductive capitalist use? How can techniques be invented that—while being immanent to the choreographic regime of logistics—allow for other modes of existence and speculative-collective forms of individuation? This is the existential politics of performance and the political task of operational choreographies.

The author wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the German Research Council (DFG) of the research project: “Choreopower” (329683971).

Notes

¹ For similar practices at other companies, such as food delivery services Deliveroo and Foodora (now Lieferando), see Ivanova et al. 2018.

² For a more comprehensive study on the concept of choreopower, see Egert (forthcoming).

³ Deborah Cowen (2014, 34) describes the shift towards a “system approach” in logistics as a shift away from a logic of cost-reduction to a logic of value-adding. With the “systems approach”, the government of movement by movement and its milieu took center stage. No longer was movement adapted to fixed external factors such as territorial givens, i.e., factories or warehouses. Quite the opposite: the locations of productions and consumption (i.e., dispersed factories, free trade zones, airport shopping malls) were now the effect of a system of movements. Factories as well as distribution centers were built where routes of transportation crossed. Instead of the territory, the flow of movement was key to maximizing profit.

⁴ Massumi writes, “The operative logic serially works itself out through the cases of solution, each of which, while fully reaching the tendential destination that is the ulterior limit of the process, nevertheless gives it an actual expression” (2015, 214).

⁵ Simondon writes, “To seek the principle of individuation in something that preexists this same individuation is tantamount to reducing individuation to nothing more than ontogenesis. [...] The process of individuation must be considered primordial, for it is this process that at once brings the individual into being and determines all the distinguishing characteristics of its development, organization and modalities” (Simondon 1992, 298–300).

⁶ Danielle Goldman shows in her study (2013) how improvisation was an integral part of dance in the 1960s (i.e.,

Contact Improvisation), as well as political activism of that time (i.e., the Freedom Riders). While acts of speculation and experimentation became key for logistical capitalism, they were also at work in modes of non-capitalist production and forms of resistance.

⁷ On the changes of the workshop as a format in the performing arts since the 1960s see Hölscher (2022). In reference to Michel Foucault's work on the technologies of the self, Hölscher focuses on the "workshop [...] as ascetic sets of exercises, practices, and technologies both of the self and in the sense of group technologies" (2021, XXThis issue).

⁸ A first iteration of the workshop took place in Berlin in 2016. Since then it was hosted in several places, among them Jerusalem and Tromsø.

⁹ Planning as a political activity happens as Moten and Harney argue in all realms of society and is especially prominent in community organizing. In the realm of the arts, planning is often reduced to the practice of creating fictitious worlds or narratives. Following Guattari's concept of art as existential experimentation (1995) and Massumi's concept of play (2014), planning in dance is here addressed as a mode of "lived abstraction" (Massumi 2014, 27), in which the "as-if" forms the existential territory instead of being limited to the realm of imagination or representation.

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Biography

Gerko Egert is a performance studies scholar. He is currently postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Justus-Liebig-University, Giessen where he works on a project entitled “Choreopower. On the Politics of Movement”. His research deals with philosophies and politics of movement, human and non-human choreographies, dance and performance, process philosophy and (speculative) pragmatism, especially in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Gerko holds a PhD from Freie Universität Berlin (published 2016, English transl. 2020). His publications include: “Choreographing the Weather – Weathering Choreography” (TDR 2016) and “Migration, Kontrolle und Choreomacht” [Migration, Control and Choreopower] (ARCH+ 2020). He is co-founder of Nocturne, a platform for experimental knowledge production (www.nocturne-plattform.de). www.gerkoegert.net

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

STAGING NEOLIBERALISM

SEBASTIÁN CALDERÓN BENTIN NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.

Steve Tesich, "A Government of Lies" (1992, 13)

Introduction

This essay looks at the intersection of live performance, propaganda, and political economy. In particular it examines new forms of concealed or disguised propaganda that deploy live performance as a medium or as source material for media circulation. I examine the role of two forms of disguised propaganda, astroturfing and staged media, deployed in the United States and Britain on behalf of private interests during key political moments. These performances reveal the continued commodification of civic space and participation which not only provide new opportunities for citizen disenfranchisement but also produce an increased distrust of knowledge and information, particularly when it comes to democratic forms of deliberation and communication. Moreover, these performances not only mark new sites of commodification and privatization characteristic of neoliberalism as conventionally understood, they also reify a particular neoliberal epistemology which positions the market as the arbiter of truth. In this sense, astroturfing and staged media are emergent forms of neoliberal performance that while achieving their own tactical ends as discreet forms of propaganda, also subsume the cognitive and communicative conditions necessary for democratic deliberation to the dictates of the market.

Pricing the Public

On October 16, 2017, the New Orleans City Council held a two-hour meeting to hear public comments regarding the proposed construction of a new gas-fueled power plant by the energy corporation Entergy. The company had submitted its construction application in 2016 and its proposal had been working its way through the city's review process for the last sixteen months. On the day of the hearing, the first opportunity to listen directly to local citizens regarding the project, dozens of residents and activists showed up cramming the council chamber in a matter of minutes. Though the hall was packed with city residents eager to share their opinions on the construction project, only one out of seven councilmembers, Susan Guidry, was present during the entire meeting, two others, LaToya Cantrell and Jason Williams, left early on (Stein 2017).

Despite moving through the city's review process, Entergy's proposal remained controversial. A coalition of local environmental and community groups including the Alliance for Affordable Energy, the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, 350 New Orleans, and the Sierra Club issued a joint report on the day of the hearing detailing multiple medical, environmental, financial, and civil rights reasons for rejecting Entergy's new plant proposal. Supported with testimonies by an urban sociologist, a mechanical engineer, a coastal geologist, and an environmental physician, among others, the report concluded that Entergy's proposal "does not serve the public convenience and necessity, is not in the public interest, and would have a racially discriminatory effect" (Wiygul, Brown, et al. 2017, 7). In contrast to these arguments, dozens of citizens supporting the project flooded the council chamber, many wearing bright orange t-shirts that read "Clean Energy. Good Jobs. Reliable Power," as well as holding signs with the slogans "We Need Power in the City" and "Power Station = JOBS!!!!" Two grassroots organizers supporting the project passed out the t-shirts to fellow advocates during the hearing. Gary, one of these organizers, explained that they had coordinated with others via Facebook as part of their own coalition, the Council for Responsible Governance. Reflecting on the disastrous aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005, he warned that "if there's another emergency and this power plant isn't built, there's a good chance we won't survive it" (Stein 2017). Repeated power outages, increased hurricanes, and the potential for new jobs were some of the arguments presented by advocates of the project that day, even though infrastructure experts, environmental organizations, and consumer advocacy groups highlighted the fact that recent power outages in the city were not due to lack of energy generation. In fact, "98 percent of outages between 2011 and 2016 were due to failures in the distribution system," something which a new plant would do nothing to resolve. Moreover, the low-lying altitude of the proposed construction site in east New Orleans made it particularly vulnerable to flooding, something which had happened to a major plant during Katrina, forcing it to go offline for six months and causing \$17 million in damages. Despite these arguments, the promise of a new plant struck a chord with many residents, something that became visibly apparent during the hearing since the majority of those who spoke expressed support for the proposal. As another supporter at the hearing explained, "I'm no expert, but what I do know is that this summer has not been fun, the anxiety is real" (Stein 2017). The afternoon meeting ended at around half past seven after more than 65 different community members were given the opportunity to speak and

present their arguments before the council and the journalists present (Johnson and Coman 2018, 13-17).

Having seen the groundswell of support the project had garnered that day, environmental and opposition groups made a concerted effort to bring more of their activists to the next and last public hearing four months later, hosted this time by the City Council's Utility Committee. Supporters of the plant, many wearing their orange t-shirts again, arrived early to secure seats in a now smaller room. To the surprise of many, the meeting room doors closed 45 minutes before the hearing was scheduled to start leaving almost 50 to 60 opposition activists locked outside (Jewson 2018). This caused further consternation given that the Utility Committee was planning to vote on the project that very day. If approved, not only would the plant be built in and therefore pollute a predominantly African-American and Vietnamese neighborhood, but it had also been estimated that "the average residential customer's monthly bill would rise by \$6.43 a month once the plant is built" (Williams 2018). Despite these arguments, after hours of oral testimonies and speeches the Utility Committee voted 4-1 to approve the \$210 million gas-fired power plant, a vote which was ratified on March 8, 2018 by the City Council in full.

The live debate, passionate testimony, and creative insignia involved in these municipal hearings belong to a well-known tradition of civic performance. That is, they embody a type of deliberative performance which, in its idealized form, seeks to affirm the legitimacy of the state's actions by staging a democratic public sphere scripted along certain normative conditions of argumentation, including "the thematization and reasoned critique of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking (combining impartiality and respectful listening), sincerity, formal inclusion, discursive equality, and autonomy from state and corporate interests" (Dahlberg 2005, 112). Through varying iterations of this socio-political script, from small town hearings to national public inquiries, official deliberative performances reify liberal governmentality as the normative condition of the modern state (Foucault and Burchell 2011, 102-3). While ubiquitous in capitalist societies, deliberative performances are thought of as non-commodified public events where political argumentation and expression can flourish beyond the limits of market logic. In multiple instances, this form of market insulation has provided enough space for vigorous dissent, struggles for justice, and collective transformation. The quasi-theatrical nature of these deliberative performances has also caught the attention of artists. From Augusto Boal's *legislative theater* to Lois Weaver's *long table* to Aaron Landsman and Mallory Catlett's *City Council Meeting* (2012) to Milo Rao's *General Assembly* (2017), theater and performance artists of various kinds have picked up on the possibilities of these forms of civic enactment, appropriating and expanding them for their own political and aesthetic ends (Boal 2005; Weaver 2015; Landsman and Catlett 2013; Wihstutz 2019). These artists have played with and at times radicalized the imaginative, democratic, and collaborative potential of deliberative performances not just as extensions of liberal authority but as embodied prefigurations where questions of justice, equality, solidarity, and liberation can play themselves out. In these ways, theater can expand the parameters placed on deliberative performances by liberal governmentality, especially when we consider the central role of collectivities within performance histories, including the *jiutai* in medieval Nō and the *khōros* of ancient Attic tragedy (Billings et al. 2013; Salz 2016, 24-31).

In the aftermath of the City Council's approval, however, some of the normative assumptions behind the legitimacy and efficacy of the city hearings came into question when a critic of the plant, Danil Faust, noticed that a local acquaintance of his, Keith Keough, was wearing one of the "Clean Energy. Good Jobs. Reliable Power" t-shirts during the October 2017 meeting, something which surprised him since he knew Keough was not usually politically active. Speaking with his friend soon after the meeting, Keough revealed to Faust that:

He had been paid to attend and wear the orange t-shirt in support of the Power Station. Keough introduced Faust to another individual, "John Doe," who told Faust that he was also paid to attend the 10-16-17 meeting on Entergy's behalf. Organizers required Keough, John Doe, and others to execute non-disclosure agreements ("NDA") as part of the process of being paid to attend the meeting on behalf of Entergy's NOPS Power Station project. [...At the second committee] meeting, Faust was able to speak where he relayed what he had learned from Keough and John Doe. In turn, Faust's claims were chronicled by local media. (Johnson and Coman 2018, 24–25)

Following Faust's inquiries, *The Lens* reporter Michael Isaac Stein published an investigative report on May 4, 2018 revealing that those fifty or so orange-clad supporters crowding the first hearing in October 2017 had been paid \$60 each for appearing at the event, while many who spoke in front of the council were paid \$200 after having been auditioned and given talking points (Stein 2018a). Keough explained that "the group was paid to clap anytime someone denigrated renewable energy such as wind and hydropower" (Stein 2018b). Gary, one of the organizers for the self-described Council for Responsible Governance, revealed to be a fictitious organization, was actually an employee of the company in charge of bringing people to the event. The company, Crowds on Demand, was founded in 2012 and specializes in hiring actors to pose as paparazzi, fans, or protesters for various events (Schneider 2015). Crowds on Demand had been hired by Entergy's Virginia-based public relations firm, the Hawthorn Group, which orchestrated the artificial grassroots campaign as a way to secure rapid "public support" in preparation for the public hearings and the council's vote. For the first hearing, Entergy paid Hawthorn \$32,142.11, including actors' fees, t-shirts, as well as Crowd on Demand's coordinating expenses (Stein 2018b). For the second meeting, the Hawthorn group billed Entergy \$22,478.40 to make sure enough supporters attended the meeting early on so as to crowd out opponents of the plant coming from east New Orleans. As an internal email by Entergy's head of regulatory and governmental affairs lays out, "I received confirmation that the room will open at 8:30 am. Let's get as many of our folks there ahead of the bus from NO East" (Stein 2018b). The revelation of these deceptive practices in the media quickly stalled the plant proposal and outraged many citizens until the council's vote was rendered void by a Civil District Court in early 2020. However, after appealing this decision, the City Council was eventually given a green light to proceed with the construction because, as Judge Dale Atkins from 4th Circuit Court of Appeals wrote, "it is only the council's decision which ultimately has binding effect [...] no remedy is necessary where no violations occurred" (Williams 2020). In effect, the strict contractual question hinged on the council's final vote, irrespective of the deceptive practices at play around it.

On top of the scandal brought on by Entergy, the Hawthorn Group, Crowds on Demand, and the City Council's actions regarding the plant hearings, Judge Atkins' ruling set an implicit precedent legitimizing the use of covert propaganda as a valid condition of the deliberative process in the city of New Orleans. As a legal precedent, this marks an explicit departure from the classic liberal democratic script of public deliberation, which at least in its nominal understanding holds on to ideals of "sincerity" and "autonomy from state and corporate interests," elusive as those may have always been given the role of cultural hegemony in the construction of relations of domination in capitalist societies (Gramsci 1971, 7-10). With the city government and the judge's decision, however, even these conditions are done away with as commodified civic performance and market relations can now quite literally script citizen deliberations around state policy. According to this new logic, the fact that Entergy actors were performing their support for the plant as an expression of their wage relation did not invalidate their arguments, as Deputy City Attorney Corwin St. Raymond defended in court, "paid actors, if they live in Orleans Parish, have every right to voice their opinion" (Jewson 2018). And yet the fact that this wage relation was kept purposely hidden by Entergy demonstrates an awareness by corporate actors of the popular antipathy this new vision of "democratic" participation produces.

Disguised Propaganda

From a performance perspective, the tradition of paying people to act out as a way to augment and direct public opinion and sentiment is not particularly new. Already in the early 19th century we see the use of *clagues* in France, planted audience members assigned to cry, jeer, laugh, or clap during theatre productions (Szubartowska 2016), or *plañideras* in Mexico and Peru, hired weepers for funerals whose powerful effects eventually led to their regulation by state authorities (Warren 2011; Muñiz 2002). In this context, as the direct result of public relations work, the performances carried out in the hearings rooms of the New Orleans city council under the direction of the Hawthorn Group and Crowds on Demand can be best understood as a form of propaganda, that is "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell 2012, 7).¹ Unlike propaganda where the identity of the propagandist is made explicit, so called identifiable propaganda, in this case the identity and message of the propagandist is hidden and displaced from the institution of the corporation to the individual performer in the guise of everyday citizen. The improvised troupe of actors impersonating concerned citizens thus become what Victoria O'Donnell and Garth Jowett call a deflective source for the propagandist's message (26). This strategy belongs to a tradition of covert, concealed or disguised propaganda (Farkas and Neumayer 2020, 711-712), a practice which reaches as far back as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* written by the secret police of Czar Nicholas II in 1903 as part of its anti-Semitic campaign. The fraudulent text, published initially in serialized form in Russian newspapers, claimed to be the written minutes of a secret meeting by Jewish leaders discussing world domination (Jowett and O'Donnell 2012, 18). Most commonly, during times of war disguised propaganda has been used to spread disinformation and erode enemy morale as was the case during World War II with covert German radio stations broadcasting in English and French, as well as secret British operatives

feeding stories to newspapers and radio stations inside the United States to encourage it to join the war effort years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Doherty 1994; Jowett and O'Donnell 2012, 18–19).

If the performances in New Orleans can be understood as contemporary forms of disguised propaganda, they were also vertical and agitative. That is, they were organized from the top of the corporate hierarchy down to the subcontractors and actors on the ground and were specifically designed to agitate the city council towards approving the plant proposal by showing widespread popular support for the initiative. Disguised propaganda aimed to provide the appearance of grassroots support is commonly referred to as *astroturfing*, in allusion to AstroTurf, the premade artificial grass carpeting used in sports. While *astroturfing* is now most commonly deployed in digital form (Walker 2009; Farkas and Neumayer 2020), particularly given the possibility for anonymity and automation afforded by social bots on Facebook and Twitter, in this case *astroturfing* relied on a staged performance. As “grassroots” propaganda disguised and presented via live performance, *staged astroturfing* has grown more common (Oldham 2014), most notably in 2015 when then-presidential candidate Donald Trump was revealed to have hired a casting agency, Extra Mile Casting, for \$12,000 to fill his Trump Tower election campaign launch with actors “at \$50 a pop” (Couch and McDermott 2015; Mathis-Lilley 2017). In a similar response to Judge Atkins, upon reviewing a complaint against Trump’s use of covert propaganda during a presidential campaign, the Federal Election Commission concluded that “because of the seemingly modest amount at issue, we recommend that the Commission exercise its prosecutorial discretion and dismiss the allegation” (Gardner 2017). In the face of these regulatory and judicial responses, the pattern that emerges is one where private actors such as the Trump organization and Entergy take the initiative in *astroturfing* their events and state regulators end up sanctioning their use thus normalizing the commodification of civic participation as a viable institutional strategy for those able to afford it.

The use of performance as part of Entergy’s PR campaign was also in response to the terrain they chose to infiltrate given that hearings are by their very nature live events. It would have done little use to have an army of bots on Twitter when the actual trenches were the New Orleans city chambers. Performance thus spoke to the particular medium through which deliberation was to be enacted. However, the signs, chants, slogans, and speeches staged at the hearings were also designed to be captured and circulated by members of the news media as well as anyone sharing images of the events on social media. As such, these performances were also staged to converge with mass and social media. As Henry Jenkins notes, convergence explains “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins 2006, 2). By converging with broadcast and digital media these staged performances circulate as image-events while maintaining the authenticity of the *vox populi*. This authenticity is indebted to live performance since, unlike written accounts and social bots, performance works through enactment and embodiment. This makes viewers feel less as interpreters and more as witnesses to a scene; that is, performing bodies are not an account of popular support, they are a literal manifestation of such support. In disguised form, this allows for the propagandist’s message to feel even more present, palpable, and self-evident. Thus,

performance endows propaganda with certain methodological and ontological advantages. First, it is able to marshal acts of physical occupation, self-presentation, and oratorical skill which allow the propaganda strategy to adapt to the site of communicative action, in this case the hearing room. And secondly, because performance can embody and refract meaning through various forms of enaction, simulation, and impersonation, it can anchor and direct the propagandist's message with a unique veridical force. When these advantages are offered to market actors as just-in-time services, we see the value of companies such as Crowds on Demand in assuring their clients how "if you need to hire protesters, we can get a crowd on the street, sometimes within 24 hours time [...] we provide a cost-effective way to lobby government to pass or defeat legislation, push for approval of projects, and influence government in a grassroots manner" (Demand 2021). As an emergent strain of disguised propaganda, staged astroturfing thus relies on performance to increase its range, capacity, and credibility through deceptive scenes that easily converge across electronic media as they are recorded, posted, and shared.

Open Borders

The convergence of live performance with social media as part of disguised propaganda was also deployed in the lead up to the 2016 Brexit referendum in Britain, where years of government-backed austerity policies exacerbated economic stagnation and labor precarization following the 2008 financial crisis (Bailey 2018, 50–55). Over time, these conditions along with postimperial nostalgia (Dorling 2020) provided fertile ground for increased levels of anxiety and discontent which, amid a barrage of propaganda and disinformation, found expression in the rallying cry "Take Back Control" as part of the Leave campaign during the 2016 election. In June 2016, just a few days before the referendum, an "investigative video" was posted on the Leave.EU campaign's Facebook group page. The pro-Brexit Leave.EU campaign was founded in 2015 by Ukip donor and multimillionaire Arron Banks, who made his fortune working with Lloyd's of London before starting his own insurance businesses empire. Upon creating Leave.EU, Banks contracted the U.S. lobbying and referendum consulting firm Goddard Gunster, which had previously worked on Boris Yeltsin's state privatization and market liberalization reforms in the 1990s (Littler 2019, 20). In 2012 the firm had astroturfed the public advocacy group "New Yorkers for Beverage Choices" on behalf of the American Beverage Association as part of a propaganda effort to resist capping the size of sugary drinks sold in New York City (Phillips and Pasick 2013). Banks recalls the firm's most vital advice to his new founded pro-Brexit campaign, "what they said early on was, 'Facts don't work,' and that's it. The Remain campaign featured fact, fact, fact, fact, fact. It just doesn't work. You have got to connect with people emotionally. It's the Trump success" (Fletcher 2016).

With just a few days remaining before the vote, the Leave.EU's video, titled "This is how easy it is to cross the Channel illegally" was posted on Facebook. The short two and half minute video opens with medium close-up shot of a middle-aged man with military-style cropped short grey hair and a goatee beard looking at the camera while standing on a blue rigid-hull inflatable boat. Behind him lies a waterway followed by a seawall and rows of red-roofed houses, to the left stands a twirling black and white lighthouse beneath a cloudy grey sky. "So, we've reached the RB [response

boat] here at Graveline in France,” the man explains to the camera, “in a moment my three would-be refugees or asylum seekers or whatever you want to call them will board this boat and we’ll make our way back over to the UK. So far, we’ve had absolutely no attention from anybody whatsoever and the whole thing’s looking good” (Dunn 2016). From a high angle, a long shot shows three men boarding the boat. As soon as they’ve boarded, the video cuts to a side shot from the moving vessel as it races through the Channel’s waters, various tugboats and larger ships can be seen in the distance. From the back of the boat the camera then pans across the bow, in front the three men’s hoodies blow in the wind and the pilot can be seen seated in front, as the camera pans to the starboard side the white cliffs of Dover gleam in the sunset. Our narrator then turns the camera back on himself, “OK, so behind me the UK. To get here a two-and-a-half-hour trip in moderate weather. No great shakes, an easy feat by anyone’s standards. With me I brought three people who want to get into the UK. They’re here now, and they will get in. We’ve been unopposed all the way over from the other side. Nobody’s fought to stop us or do anything about it. That is how easy it is to bypass immigration and border in the UK” (Dunn 2016). The camera cuts again showing the backs of the “would-be refugees” as the boat keeps racing ahead, the Channel’s waves skimming past. As the boat slows down, our narrator continues, “OK, so this is Folkestone Harbour. No harbour master, no police, no customs, no nothing. I could be running my own touring business here; I can get people in and out that easily.” With the boat finally docked, we see the three men disembark, their faces obscured with hoodies and caps, the pilot holds on to the concrete pier as they climb out. Standing next to a plaque that reads “VISITING MOORING: You Must Contact Port Office On Arrival,” our narrator explains, “so I pulled into Folkestone Harbour, as you can see ‘Visiting Mooring,’ nobody’s going to stop me, nobody’s going to think that this is unusual. This is broad daylight; I can do this whenever I like.” A final medium close-up shot shows our investigator on the stern of a different boat, concluding, “so, three guys dropped, from a rib [rigid-hull inflatable boat] into the UK, unopposed, absolutely nothing stopping me from doing that, not even a raised eyebrow from the people watching” (Mowat 2016; Dunn 2016).

The video was an instant success, rapidly racking over 600,000 views on Facebook. It seemed to provide photographic evidence to support how “marauding Africans’ foregathering at Calais” and “‘swarms’ of refugees arriving from Syria” could enter British soil (Powell 2017, 230–1). As the performance of this “mock migration” converged with electronic media, the clip was reposted across social platforms making instant headlines in conservative newspapers. In the *Daily Mail*, the video was posted on its website and accompanied with the header “UK’s open borders exposed: Brexit campaigner films himself ‘illegally’ crossing the Channel to reveal just how easy it is for migrants to get into Britain” (Dunn 2016). Echoing the sentiment, the *Daily Express* announced, “Shocking video shows how ‘easy’ it is for people smugglers to cross Channel illegally” (Mowat 2016).

It was not until three years later that a fuller picture emerged about the performance captured in the video. In April 2019, a Channel 4 News investigative team led by Fatima Manji identified the video’s narrator as Phil Campion, a former SAS (Special Air Service) officer, who since leaving the British special forces years ago has been “working on the private military circuit” (Campion 2020). When asked in an interview if the Leave.EU campaign had contracted him directly to produce the

video, Champion responds “no, it was a friend of a friend” (Manji 2019). So even though the video premiered on Leave.EU’s Facebook page, Champion insists on obfuscating the identity of those behind its production, a common feature as we have seen with disguised propaganda. After asking him again to elaborate on how exactly he was hired to produce the video, Champion explains that he was asked if crossing the Channel would “be possible and would you be prepared to go and prove that this can be done? And I said yes, it would be possible, and yes I can prove it can be done, and how much are you going to pay me to do it?” (Manji 2019). When pressed by Manji on how much he was actually paid to produce the video, Campions balks, “I’m not telling you.” As with *Crowds on Demand* what we see here is the emergence of an opaque yet thriving covert propaganda market. Moreover, upon reviewing the boat’s built-in GPS tracker and satellite data, Channel 4 News was able to determine that the boat actually *never* left British waters. Instead, the boat first travelled from Dover to Deal, where Champion’s final message about a lack of “raised eyebrows” was recorded. The following day the boat traveled from Dover to Folkestone Harbour carrying the three men, who got off without ever stepping on French soil. After dropping them off, the boat then returned to Dover and, without any of the “would-be refugees,” crossed for the first time to Gravelines, France. When the boat returns the next day to Britain it heads directly back to Dover, never dropping anyone off at Folkestone after leaving France (Manji 2019).

When confronted with the ship’s logs and GPS data Champion seems puzzled, he nervously insists that he didn’t edit the footage himself, he just handed it over, seconds later he announces, “the interview finishes here.” Later in the report, Manji explains that another ex-SAS officer for hire, Jonathan Pollen, was involved in editing and posting the video for the Leave.EU campaign. In emails obtained by Channel 4 News, Pollen boasts how he will use his SAS links to provide secret government intelligence to Leave.EU since as a reserve member he will be “getting access to other UK security agencies related to IRM [Information Risk Management], GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters], and 5&6 [Sections 5 and 6 of Military Intelligence] which all tie in quite well” (Manji 2019). Further investigations revealed that Pollen was employed by Bank’s private security and intelligence firm Precision Risk & Intelligence Ltd (Bennet 2016; House 2020). Given these and other revelations of inappropriate campaign behavior, Leave.EU was fined £70,000 on May 2018 for breaking election laws and a year later they were charged, along with Bank’s Eldon Insurance group, an additional £120,000 over private data breaches after a report concluded that “more than a million emails sent to Leave.EU subscribers contained marketing for the Eldon Insurance firm’s GoSkiippy services” (“Brexit: Leave.EU and Arron Banks’ firm fined £120,000 over data breaches” 2019). These operations reveal the intense overlap in covert propaganda markets between corporate and political interests and the seeming interchangeable use of one as a vehicle for the other, an expression of universal equivalence when seen from the perspective of the commodity form.

A mixture of Champion’s performance and Pollen’s editing, the Leave.EU video presents us with a second case of disguised propaganda. Relying similarly on staging, this *mise en scène* is designed squarely for the camera and therefore best understood as a form of *staged media*, that is, a video where even though “the visual content has not been doctored or edited [...] the situation depicted has been pre-planned or selectively filmed” (Reuters 2021). Used for pecuniary and/or propaganda

purposes across social media, this performance-based type of manipulated media exists alongside deceptive video practices that rely alternatively on a loss of context, misleading editing, computer-generated imagery, and synthetic manipulation (i.e., “deepfakes”). Deceptive media like the Leave.EU video, however, depend on performance to stage prescribed events in front of the camera and in doing so appeal to its veridical force as an embodied medium. As Patrice Pavis argues, staged performance is “a sign that makes reality” (1998, 334). Unlike the case of Entergy, where propaganda was about *identity-based deception*, that is, corporate messaging impersonated by citizen/actors, the Leave.EU video was focused on *message-based deception*, that is, depicting crossing the Channel as “no great shakes.”² Nevertheless, when it came to identifying the propagandists behind the video there was still a good deal of obfuscation involved, as Manji’s interview with Champion reveals. Through the use of performance, therefore, the Leave.EU video stages an audiovisual tour of “open borders” captured and edited for circulation via social media so as to converge across print and broadcast news days before the referendum in the hopes of agitating the viewer towards a pro-Brexit stance.

Truth Markets

In analyzing the Brexit vote, Kathy Powell notes how “the roots of dissatisfaction and lack of opportunity lie in decades of neoliberalization, that deepened inequalities of class and between regions, and incrementally embedded a consensus around market conformity. That conformity diminished the field of political contestation, as markets were protected from democratic redistributive pressures” (2017, 228). The increased protection of market conformity that Powell associates with neoliberalization echoes the entrenched expansion of market relations we see expressed in the commodification of civic participation and military services as part of Entergy and Leave.EU’s propaganda campaigns respectively. In their production and circulation, these acts of propaganda are not just stage illusions targeted at spectators or image-commodities created for clients, they are also market-making performances that innovate, endorse, and expand growing covert propaganda markets across and beyond the digital realm. The encroachment of these new markets within the lived and mediatized space of civic discourse, a space already dominated by market relations (Herman 2008; Bennett 2016), includes the emergence of specialized firms such as Crowds on Demand and troll farms (News 2016). These firms draw their expertise not just from entertainment, digital journalism, and public relations, but increasingly from military intelligence and psychological warfare, what Champion calls “the private military circuit” (2020).³ They also reflect forms of labor, production, and consumption that parallel broader economic shifts characteristic of neoliberalization: the “gigification” of work, entrepreneurial citizenship, promotional culture, just-in-time manufacturing, and vertical integration. The value of these markets lie in their ability to disguise and direct propaganda within civic spaces and news information circuits through the use of astroturfing and manipulated media as well as emergent forms of “native advertising,” “news fabrication,” and “rumor bombs,” to name just a few (Harsin 2018; Tandoc Jr, Lim, and Ling 2018). Hence, while we can account for disguised propaganda since the time of Czar Nicholas II, it has never been marketized to this extent. The corollary to this expansion is an increased sense of distrust, confusion, and misunderstanding among citizens that

puts into question the epistemic conditions upon which civic debate and democratic deliberation can take place. As Jayson Harsin argues, “what we find is (again, perhaps especially in the United States but with many signs of globalization) a regime-of-truth change. With such fragmentation, segmentation, and targeted content, perhaps it makes more sense to speak of “truth markets” deliberately produced within an overall [regime of posttruth]” (Harsin 2015, 330). Driven by new modes of marketization and commodification, the proliferation of truth markets suggests a structural link between the performances under consideration and neoliberalization in the sense that these forms of staged propaganda both reflect and reify a certain neoliberal belief in the market as a *normative precondition* for “democratic” communication. And yet, this same precondition sabotages the cognitive capacity for civic debate and deliberation through ever more sophisticated modes of deception and manipulation. How then do neoliberal thinkers envision the role of collective reasoning, truth-seeking and debate while at the same time embracing the expansion of market relations in all areas of social life? Is there something within neoliberal thought that helps explain this new horizon of communicative action?

Among a variety of scholars who have devoted themselves to different aspects of the neoliberal question (Foucault 2008; Cooper 2019; Davies 2017; Gershon 2011; Brown 2015; Slobodian 2020), the research that most directly addresses neoliberalism’s relation to knowledge and epistemology has been developed by Philip Mirowski and Edward Nik-Khah (2017). In *The Knowledge We Have Lost in Information*, they trace the way information and knowledge have been conceptualized, designed, and implemented by neoliberal economists throughout the second half of the 20th century, in particular those involved in the Walrasian school, the Bayes-Nash School, and the Experimentalist School, all of which remain heavily influenced by the work and thought of Friedrich Hayek, one the founders of the Mont-Pèlerin Society and a key architect of neoliberal thought (Mirowski and Dieter 2015). From the beginning neoliberalism developed not just as an economic school but a “constructivist political program,” requiring active intervention, organization, and participation by economists on matters of state policy and market design (Mirowski and Nik-Khah 2017, 57). From a historical perspective, this constructivist imperative explains the way neoliberalism’s adherents continue to seek out an active role in the world, entrenched across government agencies, university departments, think tanks, and policy groups (Djelic and Mousavi 2020). For our purposes, a key observation drawn from the various approaches to market design that emerge out of Mirowski and Nik-Khah’s history of information economics and the algorithmic logics that derived from it is the “gradual transition from economists’ regarding information as an unalloyed good to praising ignorance as the appropriate state of a dedicated market participant” (2017, 32). More and more in neoliberal economic thought humans were framed as inherently cognitively defective, unable to arrive at truth even with the aid of traditional modes of scientific inquiry and informed argumentation. At the same time, neoliberal economists began to see the market as a superior epistemic entity akin to an information processor, able to surpass the limits of human ratiocination. Mirowski traces how this view emerged across some of its most prominent early figures:

Hayek was first to promote seriously the market as information processor, and he was first to realize this would provide a refutation of socialism that would handily

fit on a 3x5 card. For him, socialist planning presupposed the planner knew more than the market; since that was impossible, so, too was socialist economics. It was this first commandment that spawned many of the other attitudes of the [neoliberal thought collective], such as its uninhibited contempt for intellectuals (Hayek's "secondhand dealers in ideas" [1967, 178]), ridicule of experts, and disparagement of education in general. Others chimed in, after their own fashion. For instance, few remember that the single cause Milton Friedman felt so passionately about that he bequeathed his entire fortune to support it was the privatization and debasement of public schools. Nancy MacLean (2017) has recently stressed how destruction of state-sponsored education was central to the trajectory of James Buchanan. Much of George Stigler's work rested on a notion of optimal ignorance of the masses. Friedman, as usual, dumbed down the Hayekian message for those with limited attention spans: "Businessmen, who may be bankrupted if they refuse to face facts, are one of the few groups that develop the habit of doing so. That is why, I have discovered repeatedly, the successful businessman is more open to new ideas [...] than the academic intellectual who prides himself on his alleged independence of thought" (Friedman 1978, xi, xiii).

Given this epistemological position, the commodification of civic debate through covert propaganda markets, staged or otherwise, marks an expression of neoliberal logic not only as a philosophical position but as a concerted intellectual and institutional project aimed at re-shaping social life. From a neoliberal perspective, complaints and anxieties around deception, manipulation, and epistemic fragmentation appear quaint given that truth is determined by markets not by people. As Mirowski and Nik-Khah put it, "truth is the output of the greatest information processor known to humankind—namely, The Market [...] it is The Market alone that effectively winnows and validates the truth from a glut of information" (2017, 7). Hence, we see an exponential growth in truth markets,⁴ evidenced by algorithmic news feeds, media echo chambers, and evermore interactive celebrity cults. Consider the entrepreneurial tone with which "speaking your truth" reinforces individuation as a privileged epistemic position. While exacerbating longstanding postcolonial structures of violence, these neoliberal advances mark a further dehumanizing rupture away from bourgeois liberalism given that the production and maintenance of information commodity chains requires the constant superseding of human agency in favor of the market as the principal arbiter of knowledge.

This political epistemology sets up an aporia for neoliberal thinkers given that they are human and thus in no position to confirm or validate their own truth-claims and arguments in front of others through research, study, and reasoning. Nevertheless, they are also keenly aware that their worldview will not simply roll out through "pure" market logic. Neoliberals maneuver through this contradiction by bracketing their epistemic position when it comes to themselves. That is, they celebrate their intellectual and political agency in private, while publicly critiquing those who challenge the role of markets as ultimate arbiters of truth. This kind of dissociative thinking ends up producing two tiers of reality, a privileged esoteric sphere of cloistered expertise and a fragmented public sphere of consumer-entrepreneurs navigating different truth markets. We see this epistemic cleave play out in the covert propaganda of Entergy and Leave.EU where some are in the know but most are left in the dark. The same can be seen in the neoliberal approach to

climate change, where widely interviewed think tank experts, such as Marc Morano in the U.S. and Benny Peiser in Britain, are not actual climate scientists but rather professional propagandists (Oreskes and Conway 2012; Kenner et al. 2015). And yet, these experts engage with scientists on an equal footing in the mainstream press because, from a neoliberal position, scientific knowledge alone is not enough to monopolize the growth and circulation of an ever more diverse “marketplace of ideas.” As Mirowski notes, “once the neoliberal image of the market as both means of conveyance and validation of ideas took hold, then it consequently shaped and informed changes in the very means and conduct of argumentation in general” (2019, 10). These continuous acts of subterfuge and dissimulation are thus not seen as a problem but as welcomed expressions of an epistemology that equates information processing with truth. Hence, they continue to manifest themselves in a myriad of ways, from influencer marketing to internet bots to climate pseudoscience, which in aggregate begin to produce the systemic condition some have termed “post-truth” (Keyes 2004; Harsin 2018; McIntyre 2018; Cosentino 2021).

Conclusion

Amid these developments popular commentators are starting to realize that this trend cannot be easily undone through nostalgic appeals for depoliticized expertise or whack-a-mole fact-checking (Ohlheiser 2020). At a minimum, everyday practices of market creation, such as staged astroturfing and manipulated media, must be seen in tandem with the growth of neoliberal hegemony, especially when these markets establish themselves as effective channels through which truth and befuddlement can be both asserted and induced. As these cases illustrate, acts of covert propaganda not only legitimate the commodification and marketization of the field of perception through public relations activities and military intelligence expertise, they also reify neoliberal epistemology by producing new and emergent truth markets *through* performance. Covert performances are valuable propaganda commodities since they can catalyze reality effects in ways other forms of spin, publicity, and disinformation cannot. Note how in both cases live and mediated performances were deployed days or even hours before key political events were to take place. As such, performance delivers a unique form of *accelerated* propaganda by providing an embodied scene upon which preexisting discourses (“migrant invasion,” “reliable power,” and so on) can be certified without having to wait for the usual repertoire of political bromides and talking points to take effect. Instead, performance casts reality effects through staging and screening techniques that provide seemingly tangible evidence and ocular proof upon which directed conjecture can bloom. It is the combination of these reality effects and their symbolic appeal that constitutes the veridical force behind staged forms of concealed propaganda. As neoliberal epistemology reifies itself through these performances, new truth markets open up. The more people find themselves trapped in them, the more they seem to behave as deficient cognitive agents, thus producing the very definition of the human that neoliberals hold.

Notes

¹ For a historical analysis of the emergence of term “propaganda” in 17th century Europe as part of Counter Reformation efforts led by the Catholic Church see Prendergast and Prendergast (2013).

² For a discussion between these two forms of deception see Hancock (2012, 290).

³ The marketization of intelligence services through the use of military contractors, private prisons, surveillance companies, and cloud services has been amply documented by scholars and journalists (Ramsay 2018; Bing and Schectman 2019; Shorrock 2009; Piven 2019).

⁴ On truth markets see also Kalpokas (2019, 123–130) and Mavelli (2020, 69–72).

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

ANOTHER IMAGE OF EXISTENCE

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA AND VALENTINA DESIDERI ON THEIR PRACTICE OF POETHICAL READINGS, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND THE NEED FOR A RADICAL REEVALUATION OF MODERN POLITICS. AN INTERVIEW BY EVE KATSOURAKI AND GEORG DÖCKER

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
VALENTINA DESIDERI UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
GEORG DÖCKER UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON
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First having met each other in 2011, Valentina Desideri and Denise Ferreira Da Silva have since been collaborating on a practice of sensing and/as sense-making that they have come to term Poethical Readings, a *mot-valise* and an artistic endeavour that blends the notions of the poetic and the ethical in order to work toward an “ethics with/out the subject” (2015). Desideri and Ferreira da Silva employ tools for a poetics as well as a non-Kantian aesthetics of radical imagination that figures as an ethics unbound from the illusion of the transcendental subject and its violent onto-epistemological operations while at the same time acknowledging the lasting power of this modern illusion (hence the with/out). At the centre of this approach is the attempt to create, via tarot, hand-reading, reiki and other devices, a situation in which the imaginary as well as the somatic may be triggered so as to unleash the creative and possibly re-restorative or healing potential of paying attention and attending to deep implication. The aesthetic experience, here, engenders not so much a state of Kantian self-affection, but a state of alter-affection. Likewise, on a practical level, Desideri and Ferreira da Silva emphasise the importance of establishing relations by regularly inviting to “The Sensing Salon,” a gathering for collective experimentation with Poethical Readings.

Poethical Readings speak of both the philosophical project of Ferreira da Silva and the artistic project of Desideri, although their collaboration on Poethical Readings is very much designed to overcome if not the differences, then the hierarchy of philosophy and art. In her philosophical efforts from the past 15 years (outlined in the monograph *Toward a Global Idea of Race* from 2007, as well as in crucial articles such as “No-bodies: law, raciality and violence” and “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics,” both from 2014), Ferreira da Silva has been ruthlessly dissecting modern, post-Enlightenment thought and its construction of history, science, critique, aesthetics, as well as modern law, politics, and economy, as the paradigms that determine the value of life. Most importantly, she considers the functional opposition of self-determined, transcendental subject or “transparent I” vis-à-vis “affectable I” (2007, xv-xvi) as the device that modernity employs in its racial division of white and non-white/non-European persons, collectives, territories, and global regions for the purpose of the creation of capital. At the same time, Ferreira da Silva counter-acts the disavowal of non-white lives as mere affect bundles and things by invoking and perverting Kant's Thing as a limit phenomenon of knowledge that points toward the potential of a body or rather flesh establishing a different matter and ways of mattering differently from the value operations of the subject. Poethical Readings, if understood against the backdrop of Ferreira da Silva's philosophy, figure as a practice of sensing and knowing that, instead of perpetuating critique's and aesthetics' complicity in modern racial violence, generates sense and sensations that appreciate the Thingliness of existence while understanding that it cannot ultimately speak of and for it.

Desideri, in her artistic practice as well as in her dialogues with authors such as Stefano Harney, has likewise been working toward a loosening of the grip of the subject. Since 2006, she has been conceiving deliberately ambivalent healing practices such as *Fake Therapy* and *Political Therapy*, whose settings most crucially refer to the genealogical reference of Lygia Clark's artistic-therapeutic and psychoanalytical body work from “The Structuring of the Self” (1970s/80s). The somatic work of Desideri's practices can be said to perform a curative dimension that manifests in what she and Harney once called a form of “self-sabotage” (2013, 170): a process in which the self is encouraged to overcome or undermine its own mechanisms of self-control by accepting the sensuous stimuli it receives as those relating instances that first constitute it as a self. “Love” is another word that Desideri (as well as Harney) chooses to circumscribe this experience (2013, 164, 168). It can easily be understood how this artistic approach resonates with Ferreira da Silva's philosophical considerations, as both investigate an episteme and an ontology or deontology of the self and the other in their irreducible and ethically charged entanglement.

Our motivation to talk to Desideri and Ferreira da Silva for this journal issue was derived from the interest in how Poethical Readings can be understood as a resistant practice that is capable of both addressing socio-political issues of violence and domination as well as creating a situation in which the micro-physics of power and the subtle relations at work in a reading are carefully attended to. The interview was conducted in the autumn of 2020, roughly six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, which strongly influenced the questions and reflections from the exchange. It is a document from a specific moment in time that speaks of the use of Poethical Readings during a societal crisis.



Georg Döcker: Valentina, in a talk about your and Denise's Sensing Salon from December 2019 at Centre Pompidou in Paris you explained: "At a moment of crisis, you open up a reading." A few months later, we saw the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic unfurl, which keeps affecting the health situation, sociality, and economy of communities all over the world as we speak. Denise and you consequentially reacted with a public reading: on July 5, 2020, the two of you set up a Poethical Reading about the possibilities of the present moment using tarot cards; the event was live streamed via the platform EhChO. Could you both tell us how this reading came about and what your connection is to EhChO, an online platform that presents and archives materials of different media to act as tools in relation to the pandemic specifically in the so-called Global South.

Denise Ferreira da Silva: In a way, we started reading for the COVID-19 pandemic before it was announced. Early in January 2020, at the Sensing Salon event at Hangar, in Lisbon, we gathered a group of people on a four-day study group on the human (the event was commissioned by Natasa Petresin Bachelez for the *Not Fully Human, Not Human At All* program, cf. <https://kadist.org/program/lisbon-valentina-desideri-and-denise-ferreira-da-silva-sensing-salon/>). During our conversations, we realised that the approaching three-planet conjunction (Saturn, Pluto, and Jupiter), which was to happen in March 2020, would bring about substantive changes. Even though the announcement of the new virus from China had already happened, we did not connect the two. We did however dedicate quite a bit of time to talking about the conjunction. That was January.

As we prepared for the Hamburg exhibition (which opens in October 2020 at Kunstverein, and as a part of Natasa's program *Not Fully Human, Not Human At All*), we decided to read directly for how the global pandemic is affecting the human. In short, the reading streamed via EhChO was not the first reading on the COVID-19 pandemic. What is more interesting, I think, is that EhChO in itself is a response to a moment of crisis; not so much an answer, but a refusal to be paralysed when nothing seems possible.

Valentina Desideri: Yes, and in this moment of crisis, we began gathering and supporting the kind of artistic creation that can provide an image of the crisis—of its complexity, of the relations that

compose it, of the multiple perspectives of those inhabiting it while creating a means for solidarity. In this sense, we could also think of EhChO as working as a kind of reading in itself.

Ferreira da Silva: EhChO.org came out of a proposal Amilcar Packer made to me and Valentina. He is an artist based in Sao Paulo who was witnessing how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting black, Indigenous, and LGBTQI+ artists, all of whom had already had so many doors closed to them since Jair Bolsonaro's election. With the pandemic everything came to a halt. Now, both Amilcar and Valentina are PhD students in my institute at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and are members of the Critical + Creative Social Justice Studies Research Excellence Cluster. What we did with the help of Diego Crux (an artist and web-designer based in Sao Paulo) and Giovanna Andreotti (an undergraduate student at UBC) was to set up EhChO as a cluster initiative. In response to a crisis, an academic group reconstituted as also an artist-activist collective, but it is really none of them.

EhChO definitely gathers many of the aspects we highlight when describing how a Poethical Reading session unfolds: it is a proposition that registers a crisis; it was proposed by one person to a group; it expanded the group (to include the artists) and in doing so it reconstituted the original (academic) group into a collective, which does not fit into any given descriptor: it is no longer only academic, it is not artistic, and it is not activist.

Desideri: From Amilcar's suggestion, we constructed EhChO as an online platform which functions simultaneously as an archive, a forum, and a site of production that enables material and immaterial exchanges. As a contribution to the platform, me and Denise decided to do a reading, which was the reading from July 5, 2020



Eve Katsouraki: As every reading starts with a question, you decided, on that day of July 5, to ask: "What is the present moment offering to life?" How did you settle on this question and how do questions more generally arise when you do readings?

Desideri: We settled on this question, because we wanted to see what kind of orientation the reading could give us. Sometimes we ask “what” a situation is, an image of what is really happening; but in this case we felt that we knew what is happening: yet another and more vicious and global expression of racial capitalist extraction. Critique already helps us to explain how that operates, but in the midst of it perhaps we felt the need to ask “what else becomes possible?” through it. We wanted to ask that question because the reading is collective, and we knew we would do it with many Brazilian friends and colleagues tuning in, which is also why we did it in Portuguese.

Ferreira da Silva: As I mentioned before, we had already done a few readings using the different tools for the current moment, the pandemic, and how it is impacting everything. Folks, friends, and acquaintances had approached us, asking for a Poethical Reading. That had not happened since before we started the practice itself. That is, early on, when Valentina and I were studying the tools and assembling Poethical Readings, we did readings for folks who were staying at PAF (the residency Performing Arts Forum in St. Erme, France), on a few occasions. After we started the practice, with the exception of usually a couple of participants in the Sensing Salon July gatherings at PAF—we have had three week-long of such meetings, so far—we were not doing individual readings outside events.

In any event, that July 5 reading was, in a way, in response to what had come out of these recent individual readings, which indicated to us a shift in the practice. Not a change of it or in it, but it seems—now at least—a change in how it plays out in this particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic, one in which our usual critical tools seem to be more insufficient than ever. The question reflects that in the sense that it became evident to us that the readings done after the onset of the pandemic have been indicating a move to something else, instead of just a question about how to fix things.

Desideri: We have been doing Poethical Readings since 2015/2016, and at first they allowed us to generate more complex images of the questions at hand. As we went on, we realised that the sociality they generate, the conversation, the holding space for not knowing and vulnerability that happens both in the readings and the Sensing Salons was very important. Now, as Denise said, there had been one more shift in which our practice began to also serve as orientation.

Döcker: Let's reconstruct the dispositif of the July 5 reading which you used in order to investigate the question: there is the table which serves as some sort of a stage, and there are the cards laid out on the table; there are your hands, your fingers, holding up cards and pointing out symbols or image fragments on the cards, or connections between them; and then there are your gazes scanning the cards, and of course there is your parole—overall, an entire web of material as well as imaginary and discursive relations, a spatial and gestural as well as language choreography. Take us through some of this: as you improvise meanings in relation to the question, what is the experience of the hands, for example, what does the haptic and gestural dimension produce?

Desideri: For me, the gestures of the hands while reading are a kind of weaving. They help plot both attention and narratives, lines of thought; they take back narrative lines that got loose, point at details which are potentially meaningful. It is as if they would be constantly summoning

participation from all those present, which helps collectivising the reading, even if, in the case of the July 5 reading, the others were only remotely present.

Ferreira da Silva: This is a very interesting question because it calls attention to something we say about how we read, but have never, because we can't, described. The reason we can't describe — in the way you've just done—is because, as we say, every reading is singular. However, if one attends solely to the elements—not the particular moves (from one card or position in the Celtic Cross to another) but to the elements (hands, fingers, gestures)—as you just did, then, yes, of course, there is something that can be called from the audience's or guests 'point of view an "experience of the hands" but for us, I think, it is more like a "practice"—which is a rehearsal, which each time involves different movements and contents. The hands and fingers and the touching and raising of the cards add an extra image to the image before us, the spread of the cards. Unlike the spread, however, the gestures are not fixed. With the gestures we rearrange the spread without having to move cards. Attention is crucial. There is an interrelation between attention and sense-making through the gesture. As our hands move and our attention jumps from the card in position one to the one in position nine, and we connect them, we are opening up other layers of signification. One of the things we say to folks when doing private readings is that we always read together, with them (whomever comes to a reading) and with others who have read before and other previous readings as well.

Desideri: The spread, as well as the single cards, are images. The gestures we do to sometimes foreground one, the story we tell about the image or a detail someone else observes in an image all conspire to the reading, to our collective sense-making. As we talk, all the meanings we mention (of the cards, of the position, of one or another way of reading it) accumulate and co-exist.

Ferreira da Silva: I think this is where intuition plays its role. It is like studying. We study the spread and, because we have done it so many times, we now can "see" connections and possibilities that are similar to previous ones we have seen, but which, of course, play out differently in another spread.

Desideri: Perhaps we can think of intuition as some kind of instantaneous GPS that flashes a pathway of meaning within the spread that you have then make sense of and articulate, and perhaps walk...



Döcker: In the reading from July 5, two cards seemed to gain particular importance: the Emperor and the Wheel of Fortune. At one point, you talked about “the practice of not being the Emperor,” and the Emperor symbolising, to some degree, the subject/Subject, or the self-determined and transparent I, to put it in Denise’s terms. In this context, the Wheel of Fortune and its motif of change seemed to indicate the kind of movement necessary to practice precisely the renunciation of the subject position. Instead of asking you how to go there in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would first like to ask you what the idea of practicing not to be the Emperor might imply if applied to the situation of the reading itself, or the position of the reader. Would it be apt to say that the exteriority of the cards is crucial in having meaning and sense emanate not from the capacities of the subject, but somewhere else?

Ferreira da Silva: I think that, perhaps because our initial question for the practice was “How to image ethics with/out the Subject?”, one could say that the whole thing was already prefaced by the Emperor and the Wheel of Fortune. Of course, it is not the case. To your direct question: yes, the exteriority of the cards, the spread itself as a grid, and the fact that the meanings of cards and positions precede the question and our reading for it—from the very beginning we bet on all of that. And then we start doing readings and see how it takes place, that is, the displacing of the self-knowing, self-determining entity.

Desideri: The Wheel of Fortune indicates that a change is taking place and it does not depend on anyone. You may be going up or down, it’s a change that is beyond you. And yet we read to get a sense of how to deal with the change, of what this change is about. The Emperor at the centre of

the image indicates that the figure of the Subject as the Emperor is at stake. What is interesting to me is that the Covid crisis is in a way making us practice “not being an Emperor.” The Emperor is the figure of power who is able to decide with certainty and authority, and in this pandemic in particular, not being able to know if one is carrying the virus or not as just one example, means that we have to deal with uncertainty and are figuring out ways of living with it. Also the card that indicates us asking the question (position seven) in that reading is the Two of Pentacles, which is a person just juggling their coins... kind of trying to deal with opposite elements in the most gracious manner.

Ferreira da Silva: The Wheel of Fortune is the 11th Major Arcana in tarot, its number is X (10), and this $1 + 0$ marks the card as both before the beginning (0) and also the beginning of counting (1). You can read it from the perspective of the 1 (as the beginning of a journey) or the perspective of the 0 (as the infinite, where there is no beginning or end), or as 10 (which is completion). However you choose to read it, when the Wheel of Fortune turns it never tells you where the change comes from or what brought it about. It is change without an efficient cause.

Desideri: It's funny, you cannot look at the images without beginning to read together. I love the kind of engagement that reading enables, it's a kind of deep sociality, not just between us but with the images themselves, their meanings, their possible interpretations. It makes visible the sociality of signification in a way.

Katsouraki: There is clearly a ritualistic element to working with a deck, picking up a card—and I'm assuming working with spirit guides according to the tarot tradition? Or is this an area you have reconfigured to something a lot less connected to spiritualism, to a more theatrical practice that rethinks the very idea of guiding?

Ferreira da Silva: We have definitely departed from the tarot tradition of working with spiritual guides. Or put differently, we depart from the tradition of working with what is called spiritual, as opposed to material. We do, however, make use of forms (rituals and symbols) associated with the spiritual to engage in collaborative sense-making exercises, under the assumption that the elements for sense-making are outside (as well as also in) our minds, that we don't have control over meanings, that the forms (the spread or the image of the card) host connections we don't think about, and that previous readers (from whom we have inherited interpretations of cards and spreads) are also part of any reading we do because we have learned from them. I would say that the approach is material.

Desideri: Perhaps because of my experience of working with dance, movement, and somatic practices, what is called “spiritual” was always embodied and material for me, so that opposition did not hold. Take for example a dance score, or an instruction in a somatic practice, that is just a piece of language (form), an image, a description of a sensation, but once you practice it enough, or sometimes in the very moment you hear it, it becomes an actual embodied sensation, something you can feel, recall, activate, do. And with the readings I feel it is a similar process, simply practicing those forms, studying the images together, staying present with what is there allows for sense-making to happen.

Döcker: Valentina, I remember participating in readings that you did within the framework of Political Therapy, in Riga, Vienna, and other places. Watching you, I saw you being particularly immersed into the action of mapping out notions on a big piece of paper, where you would draw all kinds of connections between words and ideas. Similarly, in the reading of the tarot cards on July 5, Denise and Valentina, you were both engaged in a play or game of navigating relations. It seems to me that there is a particular pleasure, if not potentially a jouissance involved in this activity, one that may have to do with what Artaud described as the anarchic principle of poetry: "poetry is anarchic insofar as it calls into question all relationships between objects and all relationships between forms and their meanings. It is also anarchic insofar as its appearance is the consequence of a disorder that brings us closer to chaos" (1976, 235–236)—How do you experience and conceptualise this reshuffling of relations at the brink of chaos with respect your poethical practice as a poetic practice, and perhaps with respect to the workings or non-workings of power, powerlessness and desire in the process of imagining and thinking?

Ferreira da Silva: I like how you picked up movement in how we do this. Recalling how we do this, without a script, yes, there is no choreography per se. We come to the reading with the previous readings, and by now we know that it will have a sense of how it will unfold. But we don't have any strategy for keeping things going just in case... there is no "just in case." All there is is us responding to what comes to pass. So, yes, Artaud's description of poetry as anarchic captures what unfolds in a session. There is another term for power, which is capacity. And I think that, as a term, it does not convey control or force. What happens in a session is just this unleashing of a collective capacity for making sense of situations, events, et cetera without anyone claiming control over it, because the session does not allow for such a position of control. Yes, I think it is something between poetry (cards and spreads and their many possible meanings) and dance (the reading itself and all the elements that play in it) that takes place.

Desideri: And I think there is a sense of pleasure in that capacity which reading unleashes, it is perhaps more of an erotics than a desire. When we read I sense this abundance of meaning, an opening of the imagination that is not only mine, this social capacity. It is not so much that the image or connections that we draw are more beautiful or accurate or true; it is the way we go about it, the fact that we study those relations with all of our senses, with the cards, and with each other that generates movement. Most of the time what is produced by a reading is indeed not a new or better sense or meaning, it is rather a sense of release from the question.

Ferreira da Silva: And regarding the ethics in the poethical, I see its ethical orientation in/as the practice itself. I think that EhChO which, as Valentina suggested earlier, is itself a reading, indicates what becomes of ethical responsibility in the kind of sociality Poethical Readings practice.

Katsouraki: I would like to come back to an issue that you raised earlier on: you mentioned that in your most recent readings during the time of the novel pandemic, you could see a shift in the reading's social function, which you referred to as giving orientation. Could you tell us more about what you mean by orientation and how you experience this demand for orientation?

Desideri: Beyond offering a more complex and layered image of the situation we read for, the readings now seem to also give a sense of what could be done or how to deal with the situation.

As the orientation is found by reading together, it doesn't feel like it is us or it is the tool in itself, the tarot for example, that is giving orientation to people. Rather the tarot, with all its archived and encrypted information, functions as a tool that brings us together in study, something we read with and through and that is able to give us a sense of how to go on. And yet, the reading does not really give a direction, it just provides orientation. Direction gives a spatial sense, an arrow, a pointed finger, whereas orientation provides a set of coordinates, a vocabulary and a grammar to sense your own position, to make sense of what is going on.

Ferreira da Silva: One way of describing the shift would be to say that before people would come for a reading with a question or with a sense of having run out of ways of dealing with some question in a moment of crisis. Now it seems that existing itself is a crisis. Under such conditions, in which those asking the question no longer trust on having "somewhere" else to go or in that "another time" will come and it will be all over, the readings become more about what else becomes possible, what other ways of existing can be imaged now that that other way seems impossible. Of course, this is a moment; there is another side to this pandemic. Whether there will be a treatment or a vaccine or we just live with it, there is another side to it. What I mean is that now—in the meantime—before we have a sense of how life will be, there seems to be an opening for considering existing differently. The Poethical Readings we have done so far indicate that.

Desideri: Given the fact that existing itself is a crisis, now all the questions openly and directly implicate all of us, those reading and those asking the questions, so there is a sense of looking for orientation together. I mean, every question does, but now it is really evident. This shift may also be due to the way the readings have been evolving, because readings also accumulate, they have progressively become more collective, the tools have been shared, and that creates a kind of intimacy and trust in thinking together.

Katsouraki: Overall, looking at the public reading from July and other readings that you did in the wake of corona, what did they produce for you? Did they offer perspectives as to how to insert yourself into the battle of force relations of the current moment, socially, academically or otherwise? And perhaps more generally, could there be something like a "poethics" of coping with the pandemic?

Desideri: I must say that doing readings with people in such a moment of generalized crisis had been the most nourishing thing. The activity of reading together, of sharing a space of not knowing, of being vulnerable and open, of asking questions and allowing the imagination to wander... that way of being together feels right at the moment, and also important, because when I am reading with others it feels like I am practicing a different sensibility that is really just an ability to sense together and figure out a way of continuing to exist together.

Ferreira da Silva: Regarding this political moment, the issue of racial violence that has been central to my work for over 20 years has come to the fore with the Black Lives Matter protests, which is a good thing. But with the Trump administration, there has been an authorising of racial violence, which is facilitating the return to the fore of fascism. This political context requires ways of making sense that do not fall in the usual dichotomies and also deal with the failures of linearity. I find that folks see Poethical Readings as a way of opening up for thinking about something that does not

appear to make sense if we think in terms of progress, development, et cetera. A way to make sense of questions such as: how do we find ourselves dealing with fascism again? I would say that there could be a poethics of existing otherwise, which includes getting rid of whatever makes it possible for us (humans) to exist in a way that does so much harm to humans and more-than-humans alike.

Desideri: And in the way we go about sensing the question and thinking about it, we also form relations, connections, find other paths, build solidarity and make existence possible, already and all at once.

Katsouraki: You brought up Black Lives Matter, Denise. Looking at the killings of black and brown bodies by white police and white supremacists on the streets and in favelas that many describe as the beginning of a new civil war, and looking at how black and brown communities have been disproportionately affected by the corona pandemic particularly in the US and Brazil, do you perceive the current developments as a reaffirmation of previously existing racial subjugation or do you see new forms emerge within it? Do we see the prolongation of the history of the dominance of the white transparent I that only conceives of black populations as affected and infected bodies which occupy the place of death—or do you see a discontinuity in current events?

Ferreira da Silva: Both police killings and state's neglect are to me the same operating logic of obliteration, which is the core of racial subjugation. What I think has shifted is the role racial violence is playing as part of the "normal" operations of the state. And that I think is happening not only in the Americas, but also in Europe, with this open return of fascism. More importantly, I don't see racial violence operating in terms of the transparent I versus its "racial others." When I describe things this way it is only because raciality produces its subjects this way. What is more interesting to me is how raciality and its subjects figure in the post-Enlightenment political architecture, how it facilitates extraction and expropriation, in sum, how it is so crucial for capital accumulation.

Döcker: Brazilian philosopher Vladimir Safatle, in an essay on the COVID crisis and Brazil (2020), ventured the argument that the Brazilian state has entered the phase of a suicidal state, of a suicidal fascism, which could be summarised, very briefly, as the fanatic excess of sovereignty indulging in the creation of the condition of possibility of its self-destruction (erasing its self-preserving drive). The ultimate power of the sovereign, in other words, is perhaps not to determine itself, but to kill itself. Does the self-determined subject, or its collective political formulation come to an end after all, by its own doing?

Ferreira da Silva: One could only hope. However, unfortunately, as far as the state is concerned, and given that capital does not seem to do without the recourse to total violence, I am afraid that the state will not go away totally anytime soon. However, it will—as the Brazilian state has already done—also allow total violence to be deployed by others as a mode of managing those who are not of interest of global capital. When Bolsonaro decides that everyone should carry guns in Brazil, this is what I see.

Desideri: We could also look at determination as a kind of death in itself, as it reduces, delimits, and fixes what exists within categories. The work of self-determination of the sovereign is in a way

always deadly, because it functions as an enclosure, it determines through exclusion and obliteration. So maybe the state is not killing itself, but rather preserving itself, preserving its capacity for (self-)determination, just the categories it is determining are shifting.

Döcker: When you say that the present political situation, both with respect to the COVID pandemic and racial violence, has become one in which mere existence is at stake, you also seem to be evoking core aspects of the foundations of modern political theory, not least that modern politics in Hobbes is the invention of the necessity of the people or the political subject on the putative ground of the threat of existence in the state or rather non-state of the multitude. Are we witnessing, in your opinion, a radicalisation of the very concept of politics, these days? A radicalisation of how the body that is not a part of the people is addressed?

Ferreira da Silva: This question requires and deserves a long answer. Let me just say that, in regards to Black Lives Matter, my thesis has been that an effect of blackness (as a category) is that it authorises the collapsing of the state's protective function and that in the same movement it authorises the deployment of its self-preserving function. This has been my reading of racial violence, in particular police brutality but also in the analysis of whole apparatus of George W. Bush's "war on terror."

With COVID-19, we have this other aspect of the state, which I think is another indication of what I had noticed back in 2007/2008, in responses to the global economic crisis. Then and now, we can see how the economy seems to be replacing the people as the subject of state protection. Of course, this is a simple way of describing what is happening. But I think that it is early to have a good sense of what is happening. So I don't know if it is a radicalisation of the concept of politics. There is a question of how we think about existence and the need to ask the question about power.

Katsouraki: How do you think the question of power would need to be formulated today?

Ferreira da Silva: I think we need a different image of existence. To go back to Hobbes, what if our account of the political did not start with the state of nature? Another way of saying it is: what if our accounts of the conditions of possibility or of emergence of the existing moments (juridic, ethic, economic, symbolic) did not start with an allegory of an original state of violence? Such question, I think, could be the point of departure for both critique as well as the kind of transformation needed if we are to put a stop in police brutality, extraction, and expropriation, these endless wars of capital, and start doing whatever we can to keep this planet livable for those (most of us) who cannot dream of a (and do not want to) escape to Mars (like the Musks of the world).

Döcker: You stress the importance of a new image of existence, and you highlighted the importance of imaging and image production in your readings. Much like the subject, the image has been the object of criticism in philosophical and artistic discourse, particularly in French theory from the second half of the 20th century onwards—the image as a totalising representation of the world, the image as a power mechanism of the inclusion and exclusion of what is and what is not visible or what even has the capacity of being visible, et cetera. What is your understanding of the image? Perhaps, could your approach be related to a more tentative notion of the image as in, for instance, Lisa Nelson, who, in a meditation on

images in dance, pondered that “maybe ‘image’ [...] just means ‘organization’ like how something has articulatable [sic] organization, not whether it’s clear or fuzzy, but just how one can kind of pause it and describe it in language”? (2018, n.p.)

Ferreira da Silva: In borrowing Benjamin’s dialectical image, we focus not on what a particular image or composition conveys but on the possibility of re/de/composing which is always there. Or, to say it differently, the focus is on that every image is a re/de/composition or a singular simile, which, as such is always also some other possible or never actualisable (always virtual) re/de/composition.

Desideri: On one hand we use Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image, as the reading tools we use allow us to image the situation we are reading for, that is they halt time and expose the dialectics at play as a re/de/composition. And on the other hand, that image is not totalising, we are also fully immersed, or rather deeply implicated in the image ourselves. So recalling Lisa Nelson, the image remains somehow a located composition, a possible organisation, or an expression.

Döcker: As a final question, I would like to come back to the notion of practice that undergirds your work. In a conversation between the two of you which was published in Valentina’s Hand Reading Studies, you touched upon the implications of readings as a practice. Denise, you said: “I would say: it is a practice. We use so many different tools when reading. Reading is a practice. It is actually a praxis: there is a view of how to live that is tied to it (which is a kind of knowing) and also it is something that you do (a kind of doing) – so reading could be a way to recall (or actualize) the connection.” (2015, 14) I would be interested in how you navigate the genealogy of praxis and particularly its beginnings in Aristotle, according to whom praxis was the action of the free citizen of the polis, the subject of speech, whereas the non-subject of the slave was excluded from the realm of praxis, as the slave was relegated to the realm of poiesis and labour that was to serve the subject of praxis and therefore was not sufficient in itself. Could you tell us how your notion of praxis, and “radical praxis,” as you call it, deviates from this heritage, if it relates to it at all? Or put differently: is “radical praxis” perhaps the radically different praxis of the one who is subjected to the category of the slave, and if so, what does, what would it look like?

Ferreira da Silva: When I think of praxis, Gramsci comes to my mind before Aristotle. I mean, I am already thinking of a political praxis and the emphasis on the ethical has to do with a concern and commitment to existing otherwise. But, in any case, the praxis is political/ethical praxis. What I am saying is that we have already violated the distinction and broken from the heritage. I guess you could call it the radically different praxis of the slave, in so far as the slave is not fully determined by the relation with the owner. That is, in so far as there is something about the slave that remains inaccessible to the owner. But this is not to be taken as the interiority of the slave.

Desideri: A radical praxis perhaps is a way of doing and knowing that is able to undo those kinds of binary categories as praxis/poiesis, which are distinctions that are instrumental to the (re)production of the world as it is. And it is radical insofar as it gets underneath those distinctions, with its resilient and tentacular roots, reaching into the (under-)world, where it grows and partakes in the making of another image of existence.

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Biographies

Denise Ferreira da Silva is a philosopher, writer, and filmmaker. Her academic and artistic works address the ethico-political challenges of the global present. She is the author of *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007), *A Divida Impagavel* (2019), *Unpayable Debt* (2021) and co-editor (with Paula Chakravartty) of *Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime* (2013). Her artistic work includes the films *Serpent Rain* (2016) and *4Waters-Deep Implicancy* (2018), in collaboration with Arjuna Neuman; and the relational art practices *Poethical Readings* and *Sensing Salon*, in collaboration with Valentina Desideri. She lives and works on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam (xwməθkwəyəm) people.

Valentina Desideri explores art making as a form of study and study as a form of making art. She trained in contemporary dance at the Laban Centre in London (2003–2006), later on did her MA in Fine Arts at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam (2011–13) and is currently a PhD candidate at the Social Justice Institute at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. She does Fake Therapy and Political Therapy, and is one of the co-organizers of *Performing Arts Forum* in France, she speculates in writing with Stefano Harney, she engages in *Poethical Readings* and gathers *Sensing Salons* with Denise Ferreira da Silva, she is part of the *Oficina de Imagem Política*, she reads and writes.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

CANCELLED TIME: COVID-19 AND THE POWER OF TIME IN PERFORMANCE AND POLITICS

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Preliminary remark

Please note that this article was written in the autumn of 2020. It responds to the situation of theatre, dance, and performance in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I.

The aim of this essay is to make a contribution to the discussion of the genuine interruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced to the realm of contemporary performing arts. While the outbreak of the novel corona virus has manifested first and foremost as a global threat to the physical, social, and economic dimensions of well-being and survival, the continuity of theatre, dance, and performance too has been put under severe strain. In the autumn of 2020, as I am writing these lines, it is still too early for the assessment of long-term consequences, but it has become clear that the art of theatrical performance has undergone some significant, even if perhaps temporary changes. One of the crucial challenges that I see for theatre studies, performance studies, and performance philosophy is to commit ourselves to the thought of the political potentials that might reside in the COVID-related alterations to the operations of performing arts. These political stakes might not be obvious or self-evident—quite on the contrary, the relative disregard for the fate of theatre, dance, and performance by administrations from

around the world would seem to suggest that their status is socially and politically irrelevant—but all the more there is a need to construct an argument for the eminently political value of the situation of performing arts in the early stages of the corona crisis. In other words, I would like to concern myself with the nexus of performance and politics at the onset of the pandemic, and more precisely, I would like to suggest that this nexus can be drawn up by an analysis of the temporality of politics and performance during the pandemic.

My hypothesis, in this regard, is that the first months of the pandemic have witnessed the event of what I would like to describe as the complex of *cancelled time*. This temporal intervention folds into two different expressions of time, one of which corresponds to performance, whereas the other one relates to politics, or rather certain political, if not anti-political forces, namely the proto-fascist tendencies in countries such as Brazil and the United States of America. Whereas the spheres of performance have undergone the occurrence of a *time of cancellation*, coming to pass as mass cancellations of performance events in theatre venues from Brussels to New York, the administrations of Jair Bolsonaro or Donald Trump headed for nothing other than the *cancellation of time*, or the demise of a future horizon for their respective populations and states. Although the *time of cancellation* in performance and the *cancellation of time* in proto-fascist politics are not causally related, I choose to discuss them together and subsume them under the notion of *cancelled time* so as to make a case for the promise of resistance that the former holds vis-à-vis the latter.

This argument will be unfolded in four steps: first, I will consider the current state of COVID debates in public forums, academia, and performance milieus, from which I will derive the need to talk about cancellation as a distinct issue (II). From there, I will engage in an analysis of the particular case of Ruhrtriennale, one of Europe's biggest performing arts festivals, which was entirely cancelled in 2020. The discussion of Ruhrtriennale and two of its cancelled performance productions will lead to a possible understanding of the *time of cancellation*. In the absence of an existing theory of cancellation in performance, I will make use of the opposing positions of Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben as a way to underline the ontological preconditions of addressing the time of cancellation (III). Next, I will develop the contrasting notion of a *cancellation of time* through an analysis of the temporal strategies that contemporary proto-fascism tends to employ in the face of COVID-19. For this task, I will rely on a commentary from Brazilian philosopher Vladimir Safatle, who describes the current condition of his home country as that of a "suicidal state," a notion that he borrows from Paul Virilio. In rereading Virilio, but also Deleuze and Guattari's notes on fascism, I will add to Safatle's account with respect to the temporal aspect of the suicidal state of proto-fascism (IV). Finally, the conclusion will attempt to highlight how the politicisation of performance's *time of cancellation* might serve as an antidote to the politics of the *cancellation of time* (V).

II.

Taking a look at the state of public debate in the first six or seven months of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of its chief features revolve around an unparalleled production of ad-hoc commentary as well as the cementing of previously established principles and opinions. Indeed the most striking aspect of the unfolding of critical discussion has been the mere intensity and speed of output: within a matter of days or weeks, virtually anyone with a public profile, from philosophers to sociologists to theorists from cultural studies and the arts, drafted opinion pieces, put out essays or blog entries, answered questions in live or written interviews, and participated in teach-ins or discussion rounds in soon to be ubiquitous Zoom calls. Giorgio Agamben, Naomi Klein, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour, Sergio Benvenuto, and Paul B. Preciado were among the quickest and most vocal to respond, although it was Slavoj Žižek who beat everyone to the punch by publishing a book-length account less than a month into the new COVID state (cf. Žižek 2020). At the same time, journals, magazines, and online platforms hurried to set up discursive frameworks such as “Letters against Separation” (e-flux) or “Notes from Quarantine” (Texte zur Kunst), which comprised series of intimate as well as political interjections from the time of confinement during the first period of national lockdowns and beyond. Soon enough, theatre institutions as well as theatre and performance journals initiated similar formats, with Schauspielhaus in Zurich, for instance, having commissioned articles on “Lockdown Theatre” for their website, while Performance Studies international’s own Global Performance Studies invited “Responses to COVID-19.” It did not take long either until publishers released initial anthologies and monographs on the corona pandemic, some of the very first ones having counted *The Politics of Care* (Verso) and *Die Corona-Gesellschaft* (*The Corona Society*; Transcript). The editors of the latter anthology from Germany epitomised the situation of analytic overdrive in a fairly cynical testimony when they exclaimed that “[m]ehr Motivation zum Schreiben gab es selten!” (“there has rarely been more of a motivation to write!”) (Volkmer/Werner 2020, 12).

In the teeth of this discursive frenzy, some academics remained sceptical of the value of the plethora of short-term diagnoses. Literary scholar Joseph Vogl remarked that “[j]ede so-genannte Krise erzeugt Deutungsnötigung und Deutungsnot. [...] Alles wird von allen gesagt und dann noch einmal wiederholt, überboten und variiert” (“every so-called crisis creates the necessity and the affliction of interpretation. [...] Everything is being said by everyone and is then repeated, outdone, and modified.”) (2020, n.p.; cf. also Gehring 2020). Perhaps the most striking, because utterly unpretentious refusal of discursive participation stemmed from the COVID forum of *The Drama Review* editors, in which Anna Deavere Smith declared: “I am taking another stance with all of this which is not to know. If I do come up with any wisdom I will let you know, but for now I am speechless” (in *The Drama Review* Editors 2020, 193). Elise Morrison, in the same forum, reported that she could not deliver much writing although she had hoped to:

Despite my hopes to contribute to *TDR’s* Covid Forum, it has been impossible to find the time and mental space to craft something meaningful [...]. The shift to providing full-time childcare for my two young children [...] has radically limited my ability to work these past months. That, coupled with the shifting ground at work,

as my colleagues and I adjust to the impacts of the pandemic and respond to the deeply necessary calls to enact antiracism in our departmental culture and practices, has taken all I have to give right now. (in *The Drama Review* Editors 2020, 222)

Morrison's short account of her inability to write is particularly instructive: in making transparent the challenges to her everyday life as well as the racial injustice that was intensified by the killings of George Floyd and other black bodies in the midst of the pandemic, she portrayed the stakes of the current condition in a manner that makes a lot of longer commentary on the status quo seem somewhat redundant.

Overall, however, comparable acknowledgments of the limits of analytic prowess were relatively rare. For the most part, critical debate seemed to be getting ahead of itself in wanting to determine the multiple effects of the pandemic sometimes before they could even be felt. Having been confronted with a global crisis of unforeseeable consequences, it seemed that the position of knowledge production itself was displaced: it was not enough to propose an analysis, but neither did it seem appropriate to dabble in the shaky business of prognosis. Instead, it seemed necessary to assess the future now as if one was already there, slightly ahead of time so to say, which would allow the anticipation of the near future so as to be able to act on it. This tendency could be observed particularly in political commentary with an emancipatory or revolutionary charge, where it seemed vital to understand the meaning of the crisis prior to its full manifestation so that it could be stirred into the direction of equality and justice as it would further unfold. In March 2020, for instance, Judith Butler asserted with certainty that "[s]ocial and economic inequality will make sure that the virus discriminates," while urging that the lack of universal health care generates a "time of the pandemic" in which "none of us can wait" (2020, n.p.). The point is not that Butler's statement was right or wrong, but that its rhetoric, along with that of many similar declarations, suggested a shift in the conditions according to which it could first be considered meaningful or true. The truth of the moment needed to be known before the moment had arrived, and hence the status of truth and knowledge as such was readjusted with respect to its pragmatic or utilitarian value for confronting the immediate future. This epistemological alteration is most likely to signify the underlying cause of the extreme velocity with which critical and engaged discourse reacted to event of COVID-19.

Whether it was in spite or because of the fast pace of the debate, the nature of discursive reactions was often conservative, namely in that the new COVID reality was assessed on the basis of inherited theories and concepts which were applied without consideration for the possibly alien aspects of the contemporary situation that would have asked for modifications to a given corpus of knowledge. This attitude was best exemplified by Giorgio Agamben (2020a, 2020b), who famously identified lockdown events in Italy and elsewhere as proof to his long-established theory of sovereignty, which depicts rule via the state of exception and the reduction of citizenship to bare life. At the same time, Agamben proved a particularly bizarre exception to the overall pandemic discourse in theory and philosophy, as he went so far as to state that the restrictions to rights and freedoms during lockdowns in Italy were in excess of the disregard of human freedoms during

Nazi times and both world wars. Overall, a lot of authors felt their social and political stances confirmed by the crisis, such that COVID-19 became the catalyst for many different, but also interconnected agendas, from a Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation and destruction to feminist theories of reproductive labour and care to black and de-colonial perspectives on racism to ecological concerns. It is hard to say, then, whether the prominent view that the corona crisis came to expose and exacerbate preexisting political and economic inequalities is indeed an adequate assessment of what has been going on, or rather a symptom of the recycling of preexisting theories and philosophies—or indeed both.

The current debate in theatre and performance, both in academic and artistic milieus, is overall indicative of the same tendencies. Within a few months and particularly in Europe, discussions solidified around the issue of the economic survival of institutions and practitioners on the one hand, and the aesthetic and technological challenges of producing and delivering performance under social distancing regulations on the other hand. The former aspect was mostly addressed with respect to the ever growing need for more substantial and continuous public funding in the independent and freelance milieus—a demand that had been made for years—whereas the latter unfolded as a call for the ramping up of digital and interactive theatre forms, which unfortunately tended to lack knowledge of both the existing traditions of algorithmic and cybernetic theatre works from the 1950s and 60s onwards, and the implications that information based technologies of communication have in terms of technologies of power and the control of perception (cf. amongst others Otto 2019). Another output concerned volumes such as *Why theatre?* (2020), *and then the doors opened again* (2020) or *Lernen aus dem Lockdown? (Learning from Lockdown? 2020)*, in which curators, dramaturges, and practitioners asked their fellow colleagues to think of the temporary closures of theatre spaces caused by lockdowns as an opportunity to reconsider the fundamental values of theatre and performance. As practitioners were unable to go about their daily business, they were invited to engage in a renewed search for the meaning of what it was that they were normally doing, and what they wanted to do in the future. This collective exercise however did not result in radically new conceptions of the making and presenting of performative work, but rather it reflected a range of updates to approaches that had been introduced in the past. The urgency of useful theatre that has an immediate impact on and emerges from the involvement in social matters, the defence of aesthetic difference and its irreducible force of imagination, or the theatre as a space for vulnerable and subaltern bodies that is still in need of becoming more open or inclusive—these were among the most common, at times contradictory tropes which were reiterated by theatre, dance, and performance makers.

If this rough and fragmentary sketch of corona conversations from scholarly and artistic circles paints the picture of intellectual and creative consolidation rather than groundbreaking invention, then this is not necessarily to suggest a lack of ingenuity, but it goes to show that the COVID-19 pandemic did not completely overthrow the political and artistic state of affairs after all, even if some commentators bet precisely on that. Franco “Bifo” Berardi embodied this spirit in a message from the beginning of the virus outbreak, in which he held that “[w]e face two political alternatives: either a techno-totalitarian system that will relaunch the capitalist economy by means of violence, or the liberation of human activity from capitalist abstraction and the creation of a molecular

society based on usefulness" (2020, n.p.). While Berardi's estimation might not be too far off from reality, the rhetorical strategy of presenting the corona event as an all-determining watershed moment that will once and for all decide the future path of social life and human existence has certainly lost its appeal over the past months. In the end, the conjuring of COVID-19 as a messenger of apocalypse or utopia is the most conservative gesture of all, as it falls back on the age-old etymology of crisis as a question of life and death, which, although certainly descriptive of the terrible situation of millions who actually caught the virus, does not necessarily serve as a model for the explanation of the overall political developments during the time of the pandemic.

Neither the assertion that everything will be different, nor the view that the problems of performance and politics largely remain the same is entirely appropriate for the analysis of the corona pandemic. Authors like Paul B. Preciado show that there is a third option, which consists in the minute exploration of emerging differences that, although not necessarily turning everything on its head, have a significant impact on the parameters of social existence. Preciado's statements on the pandemic are certainly not shy of hyperbolic claims (cf. especially 2020a), but this does not get in the way of precise observations on the state of subjects and bodies under COVID-19, who, as he notes, "do not have skin; they are untouchable; they do not have hands. They do not exchange physical goods [...]. They do not gather together and they do not collectivize. They are radically un-dividual. They do not have faces; they have masks" (2020b, n.p.). In performance and dance studies, Gerko Egert, for instance, expanded on the changes to the image of the body in remarking that social distancing rules and the new awareness of virus droplets in the air have led to the choreography of a "*Luftbewegungskörper*" or "*Aero-Körper*" (an "air movement body" or "aero body," cf. 2020).

In the following, I will attempt to add to analyses of the socio-political differences resulting from the pandemic by taking a look at how both performance and politics have seen considerable alterations to their temporalities—alterations that, although manifesting in very different ways, allow for a constellation of performance and politics that can be described as a matter of *cancelled time*. I will start with an account of the temporal changes to performance, before turning to the radical politics of time in these days' proto-fascism.

III.

For the performing arts, the most immediate effect of the spread of the novel corona virus and subsequent political regulations was the closure of venues and the cancellation of performance shows for weeks and months to come. The visible reminders of these cancellations were to be found on the websites of theatre institutions, which, like *Tanzquartier Wien* and *Hebbel am Ufer* Berlin, chose not to delete the contents of their cancelled shows, but add a note that informed the audience about the cancellation or cross out the titles and dates of the events—which rendered them perfectly in-visible in their status of cancellation. Many artist websites followed suit, and on some occasions, practitioners were interviewed about the experience of such unwanted interruption of their professional practice. US performer Jibz Cameron aka Dynasty Handbag was asked: "What's the experience of the thing you do being canceled for the time being?" They replied:

I'm glad you brought this up because I am not having an easy time with it. And I'm not putting myself in any kind of special category; but when this broke out and became very serious last month, immediately everything I was doing was canceled. And nothing moved online. It just completely stopped. (Cameron 2020, n.p.)

While cancellations are not generally alien to performing arts, they do not usually happen on such a massive scale and in connection to global events. What interests me about this particular case of mass cancellations during the corona pandemic is not so much a discussion about whether they were indeed necessary from a political and epidemiological point of view; I will not concern myself with the fact that the cancellations were rather imposed on theatres from the outside, that is, by their respective national governments. Rather, I want to consider the moment of passivity that is inscribed in the temporal nature of a cancellation itself, and that may have politically charged implications relating to the issue of power and sovereignty. To that end, I will investigate the cancellation of Ruhrtriennale 2020, a renowned performing arts festival in the German Ruhr Area whose entire programme got scratched in the early period of the pandemic. As I am not aware of any substantial theory of cancellation in performance, I will not presume a given notion of cancellation, but rather develop it from the case study of Ruhrtriennale. A German anthology on cancellation as a cultural practice was published very recently (cf. Assmann/Kempke/Menze 2020), but its theoretical perspective on cancellation as a performative act is not helpful for my analysis, as I consider the cancellations of performances precisely as an event that undoes the capacity of the subject to engage in wilful performative action, at least in part.

Ruhrtriennale was one of many European festivals that suffered from COVID restrictions, most of them having had to cancel their original programmes as they were scheduled for the spring and summer when lockdowns and regulatory health safety measures made large-scale cultural events practically impossible. Other than theatre venues that operate throughout the entire season, festival institutions with their limited duration had even less wiggle room to adapt to the new corona situation. Some festivals like Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels were able to substitute smaller events in the autumn for their previous timelines, while many had to reschedule performances for 2021 or accept that certain projects would not be realised at all. Ruhrtriennale, however, had to face a particularly bitter predicament, as 2020 was Stefanie Carp's final season in her position as artistic director, which implied that she and her team could not postpone productions until even a few months later, when they would no longer be working for the festival. It was an undeniable fact that the original constellation of performative works under the curatorial guidance of Carp and her team was not going to materialise, even if several commissions may eventually be presented under new artistic management at some point in the future.

The cancellation of Ruhrtriennale 2020 sparked intense public debate, which in part had to do with the fact that the decision to cancel had been taken by the supervisory board as early as April, at a time when the late summer opening of the festival was still months away and when alternatives to the full cancellation still may have been available. Furthermore, it was speculated that the board's decision process may have been influenced by the political controversy around the invitation of Achille Mbembe as the lecturer for the opening ceremony of the festival, as Mbembe was accused

of having propagated antisemitic views in statements on Israel and Palestine. However, none of these factors concern me here, as I do not intend to discuss the reasons for the cancellation. Instead, I want to focus on the situation that Carp and her festival team were put in due to the cancellation, and on the curatorial response that they drew up to confront the situation.

The festival was not going to take place, but Carp and staff still had their jobs until the end of their contracts, and thus they effectively encountered a period of empty time that spanned from the moment of the cancellation until the moment when the festival would have ended. The cancellation had created an interval time-space for the festival, a present that was still imbued with the many prearrangements from up until the final cancellation, and a present that, at the same time, was devoid of any future. In other words, the prospective 2020 edition of Ruhrtriennale had turned into a future that would never become present, but that had immediately returned to the past, and that still lingered in the present. It was a future that had become past without ever having been present, a future in the past, or a past future which was only present in its absence. I would like to propose that this past future outlines the contours of the *time of cancellation* as one of the two sides of *cancelled time*. It is a time that suggests a view which was very aptly condensed by Candice Breitz, a South African practitioner, who was to exhibit a video installation at Ruhrtriennale, and who, in the aftermath of the festival cancellation, had asked: "How do we remember an event that never took place?" (2002, n.p.).

Breitz's question was published as part of a text that joined preparatory materials from performances, concerts, movies, and workshops of other Ruhrtriennale artists in the newly created "Archiv der verlorenen Ereignisse" ("Archive of Lost Events," cf. Ruhrtriennale 2020). Carp and team set up this archive in the form of a website which gave access to traces and fragments from the many creative endeavours that had begun to flourish before the cancellation made them come to a halt. All projects were listed with full credits and the additional header: "Geplant war," "intended was" or "planned was" this specific event at this specific time and place with these specific people. Supplementary descriptions and Carp's introductory statement to the archive made explicit use of the conditional perfect, summoning "was gewesen wäre" or "was stattgefunden hätte," "what would have been" or "would have taken place." In a gesture of ironic self-reflection, Carp also admitted that the cancellation of the festival could be seen as an apposite culmination of the overall leitmotif for her three-year artistic directorship—the leitmotif having read "Zwischenzeit," respectively "In-Between Time."

Among the individual entries of the archive was a video from January 2020 that showed early rehearsals for Brigitta Muntendorf, Stephanie Thiersch, and Sou Fujimoto's dance production *Archipel*. In light of the curatorial remarks on "lost events," on what "would have" and "could have been," the snippets from these early rehearsals took on a peculiar quality for the viewer: watching Brigitta Muntendorf (musical composition) and Stephanie Thiersch (choreography) discuss ideas, seeing dancers and musicians improvise materials in the studio or practice movement phrases and musical themes, one tended not to see the planning and testing of something to come, but the engagement in a futurity that now, from the viewpoint of watching the video after the cancellation, belonged to the past: the practitioners were visible as rehearsing for shows at Ruhrtriennale that

would never take place, and therefore the video of their actions generated a sense of a past future. To be precise, it did not offer an experience of a future that was gone, but it offered a glimpse into a future that continued to exist precisely as being gone. The video of *Archipel* rehearsals contained an unrealised performance that subsisted as something that will always be what it did not become.

A video from a different production further corroborates the idea of a specific *time of cancellation*. As if to suggest that Carp was aware of the festival cancellation before it even happened or before anyone even knew of COVID-19—which of course she was not—she had originally commissioned Swiss theatre director Christoph Marthaler with the creation of a new musical theatre production that happened to carry the title *Die Verschollenen* (*Those who Disappeared* or *Those who are Missing*). In the “Archive of Lost Events,” Marthaler’s project was featured with a short film by Hans Peter Boeffgen, who had edited a montage of photographs and videos that stemmed partly from the time when the production process was still up and running, and partly from after it had been cancelled. In less than five minutes, the film captures the past future in a most poetic and precise way: sitting in front of a computer, a member of Marthaler’s artistic team reads aloud an email that speaks of the so-called “Bauprobe,” the staging of the performance’s set design from the initial stages of production; in revisiting these lines after the cancellation, the reader’s voice assumes a reflective and retrospective quality that conveys a faint impression of the past futurity that the email record now holds. At home alone with their instruments, musicians are replaying some isolated notes on the violin or string bass, but they do not seem to be rehearsing the score, neither are they playing what and how they would have played it if the performance had taken place, rather they seem to engage in a fragmented recollection of how they performed the notes in the past when the chances of a premiere were still intact. Marthaler, for his part, stares into camera, lets some moments pass, and simply says one word: “verschollen”—“disappeared,” “missing,” before he eventually lowers his gaze and looks to the ground, as if to underline, with this delicate mimic expression, his appreciation of *Die Verschollenen* having fulfilled the meaning of its title by having gone missing itself.

In its subtle play with intonations, gestures, and meanings, Hans Peter Boeffgen’s short film comments on the *time of cancellation* as that of a past future which is accessible only insofar as one respects its irretrievability. The set design and musical performance only come into view via cautious words and actions, non-actions almost, which speak of an acceptance of the future of the performance having turned to a past from which it will never return—but in which it has gained a life which it would not have otherwise had: a future existence that will never be exhausted because it is enclosed in the past. In all its fragility, the film insists that the cancelled future cannot actually be turned into an image and hence cannot actually be seen, just as much as it cannot truly be remembered, as any memory involves a process of actualisation which would necessarily transform the past, and the past future in particular, into something else than what it was. Being aware of these restrictions, Boeffgen’s film walks the line of evoking, but never attempting to grasp and consequentially lose the reservoir of a futurity that only exists in and through the impossibility of it becoming present.

In the light of considerations like these, it is almost impossible not to think of a particular reference from philosophy: after all, did not Giorgio Agamben use very similar expressions to describe his early concept of potentiality? “What is essential is that potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-Being*, the presence of an absence,” he stated in his reading of Aristotle from “On Potentiality” (1999, 179, original emphasis). It might seem, then, that Boeffgen’s short film or the video of early rehearsals for *Archipel* can be conceived as the paradigmatic display, or rather the paradoxical non-display of the past future as a time of potentiality. Yet, in a crucial sense that requires some explanation, Agamben’s notion of potentiality rather tends to obstruct a deeper understanding of the past future. The crux of the matter concerns the ontological underpinnings of his theory: as the above quotation from “On Potentiality” shows, Agamben defines potentiality as the existence of non-Being. With non-Being, however, since it is defined exclusively in negative terms, there can be no recognition of differences except for its own difference to Being or the realm of realisation and presence. The insufficiency of this ontological account with respect to the idea of a past future concerns the delicate passage of and in time that the past future represents: the future transitions from its status as something that may indeed come about, to something that is retained in its status of never coming about. If one were to translate this transition into Agamben’s terms of potentiality, the result would be a tautology: one would have to say that the future migrates from non-Being (it may come about) to non-Being (it is retained as never coming about). In other words, what is lacking in Agamben’s theory of potentiality is a vocabulary for the differences of that which is not simply present.

The solution to this problem may lie in replacing the theory of the difference between Being and non-Being with a theory of the multiplicity of differences of being otherwise. Instead of the duality of the real and the potential, a Deleuzian notion of the actual and the virtual might prove helpful here, a notion which does not define the virtual as un-real and non-existent, but as the reality of multifold abstract differences that are not actualised and that are differential in themselves. On that basis, the passage from the future to its own past comes to signify a passage from one state of virtual difference to another state of virtual difference, both differing from the sphere of the actual and from each other. Recalling Gilles Deleuze’s famous reading of Bergson, one might also think of the metaphor of the cone and the surface, where the cone with its many layers represents the virtual past, whereas the surface, which balances on the tip of the cone, represents the present. In this metaphor, the past future performs the detachment of the future from its actualisation on the present surface, initiating instead a relocation on a layer in the depths of the cone of the past (cf. Deleuze 1991, 59f). With this in mind, Boeffgen’s film and the video of *Archipel* rehearsals can be understood as attending to a movement between different and differentiating states of virtuality that have nothing in common with an undifferentiated void of non-Being.

The alternative between Agamben and Deleuze has consequences beyond the ontology of the past future. Insofar as the past future implies an ability or inability to act, the theories of potentiality and virtuality equally involve two different conceptions of power. Agamben’s potentiality foresees a subject that essentially possesses the power of powerlessness or the “potential not to act” (1999, 181). *Vis-à-vis* the past future of cancellation, the non-action of the subject can be imagined as a process of remembrance, in which the necessary failure of remembering the past future—after all,

remembering it would be to lose its particular past future condition—serves as the exact and only possible way of matching it. In not actively remembering the past future, in accepting that it can only exist if it is not remembered, the non-action of the subject remains in a state of potentiality that ends up mirroring the potentiality of the past future which it did not engage in. Hence, in a paradoxical and dialectical sense, the powerlessness of potentiality signifies the highest power, which is the power of conjuring even that which escapes power. While this implies that potentiality tends to confirm power especially when it tries to escape it, a Deleuzian approach of virtuality offers a different view: it effectively considers the interplay of power and powerlessness as only one layer of the struggle of forces underneath or inside of which there subsists another regime of forces that is known as desire (cf., amongst others, Deleuze 2007). Desire as a third category next to power and powerlessness signifies virtual degrees of intensity and energy that are not related to the subject and its actions, but that can still be felt on a level of sensation. It does not take much, then, to imagine that the past future is indeed a temporal container of desire in which the intensity of future imaginations and aspirations for performances has been conserved in exactly their future state.

Overall then, the notions of virtuality and desire provide a meaningful conceptual reference for the deeper comprehension of the short film on *Die Verschollenen*, the *Archipel* video, and the “Archive of Lost Events” as a whole. As a reaction to the COVID-related cancellation of the entire Ruhrtriennale festival, the archive hints at the un-actualised desires from and for future presentations, exhibitions, screenings or workshops which, although they will never take place as they were supposed to, still have a life in the past of the archive space. In fact, if the festival cancellation had not taken place, and if the archive had not become necessary, the past future of so many performative and other works would have never existed, which is why the event of this past future and *time of cancellation* can be regarded as specific to the circumstances of the COVID pandemic. Its political value, however, will only become evident in juxtaposition with the COVID-19 event that marks the other side of *cancelled time*, namely the *cancellation of time* in proto-fascist politics.

IV.

On the political world stage, local governments have confronted the corona crisis in ways that correspond to diverse and sometimes contradictory modes of power: heavy lockdowns in many European countries were reminiscent of disciplinary power, whereas the concurrent test and trace programmes and the dynamic management of infection curves were rather symptomatic of liberal governmentality. In states like South Korea, the digital implementation of control allowed for the continuation of movement in the public, but the relative freedom to move came with the price of the surveillance of every single step of each citizen. Not least, some countries enforced their strict lockdown policies with a mindset of authoritarianism, chancellor Sebastian Kurz of Austria, for instance, having chosen a tactic of fearmongering to make people conform to the rules.

Probably the most radical, because most deadly political position was however to be found in countries such as Brazil and the United States. The essentially proto-fascist conduct of Jair

Bolsonaro or Donald Trump not only led to a terribly high number of avoidable deaths, but it made death an instrument of power and sovereignty that did not even shy away from the idea of suicide and total self-destruction. I consider this wilful self-annihilation to be about the ultimate sovereignty over life and death which, from a temporal angle, expresses itself as the *cancellation of time*. I will try to develop this view by dwelling on an essay from Vladimir Safatle about the pandemic in Brazil, but first, I will outline my basic understanding of fascism.

When I speak of fascism, I refer to a political or rather anti-political movement, a movement that wants to transgress and undo politics, whose most generic characteristic was first observed by José Ortega y Gasset in 1927. Writing as a contemporary of the early phase of Mussolini's rule in Italy, he noted that

[f]ascism is illegitimate, one might almost say illegitimatist, in a most peculiar and almost paradoxical sense. Every revolutionary movement seizes power illegitimately, but the curious thing about it is that not only did fascism seize power illegitimately, but that, once established, it also exercised it illegitimately. (1974, 195)

Fascism's novelty consisted in the fact that its terror did not seek the cover of the law even after it had seized the state. It comprised a form of dominion in which power came to replace the principles of right and order with nothing but itself, such that the only law was power in action—the violence that performed its legitimacy through its own occurrence. The same tendency was recognised by Hannah Arendt (2017) in her definition of totalitarianism: although her terminology distinguished fascism precisely as the taking control over the state in which crucial aspects of totalitarianism were missing, her account of totalitarianism as maintaining the centre of power in the movement, in the party and not in the state, identifies the same phenomenon that fascism denotes in Ortega y Gasset. Beyond signifying the vital strength of the organisation of active party members, the movement, in Arendt, gave a name to the process of constant change which was totalitarianism's only mode of being. It had to be in never ending motion, because every stagnation, every crystallisation of stability and order implied the danger of individual decision making which would harm the total identification with the movement. Referring to Arendt amongst others, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) eventually rendered the duality of fascism and state in terms of the duality of war machine and state apparatus. The war machine describes fascism as a pure and abstract force in which the logic and being of power is untied from virtually any conservative moment of representation, stratification, or reterritorialisation, as Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary would suggest. In fact, the power of fascism, in being of such a particular kind, becomes almost indistinguishable from the realm of becoming and desire, such that it can be defined as desire's dark and destructive forces.

When talking about the contemporary Brazil of Bolsonaro or the United States of Donald Trump, I address them as proto-fascist countries, because the main characteristic of pure violence is clearly present although the erosion of state institutions is not fully developed. Historically speaking, the designation of contemporary tendencies as proto-fascist allows for their comparison with the fascism of first half of the 20th century, while still enabling a view that indicates their differences. In this sense, I tend to follow journalist Masha Gessen, who, in her monograph *Surviving Autocracy*,

termed Donald Trump “an attempting autocrat” (2020, 166), a man in the first stages of erecting an autocracy.

Staying with Gessen’s analysis, it can be said she delivers an insightful portrait of Trump’s administration as a “government of destruction” (59) that tears down democratic bodies and procedures, that ruins public discourse and political debate, that wrecks the distinction between true and false or right and wrong, and that wants to abolish politics as such. Despite Gessen’s special instinct for all this destruction, what escapes her gaze is the self-referential violence of proto-fascist rule: the fascist desire is not merely one for the annihilation of the other and everything around it, but it is ultimately a lust or *jouissance* for the annihilation of the self. This is Vladimir Safatle’s argument on the political, or again anti-political course of action in Brazil during the early months of the COVID pandemic, where, according to him, a “flirting with self-destruction” (2020, n.p.) was characteristic of the measures of the local government. In stark contrast to authoritarian rule, which seized the moment to tighten their grip on the population via strict limitations to their everyday lives, the early response from Bolsonaro, similar to that of Trump, was to neglect the call for regulations to public life and instead surrender his people to the virus. Safatle is quick to add that this reaction does not simply fall into the category of necropolitics or a “necro-state,” but, rather, that the systematic submission of the entire population to the threat of death has the inherent quality of a suicide mission. The state turns into a “suicidal state.”

Safatle lent the notion of “suicidal state” from Paul Virilio (1998), who saw this state be perfected during the “total war” of the Nazis, while the “total peace” of the post-war period was according to him just the continuation of the war by other means, and hence the suicidal state’s further consolidation. (Interestingly, in 1976, the same year that Virilio published these thoughts, Michel Foucault in his lectures at the Collège de France performed his famous inversion of Clausewitz’ formula that resulted in the aphorism “politics is the continuation of war by other means,” cf. Foucault 2003, 15.) Virilio unravels the principal logic of the suicidal state in a passage that starts out from the indication of Nazism’s horrible fascination for the unusual, and that finds its essential clue in a quotation from Hitler:

It is in this horror, divided between everyday life and its milieu that Hitler will finally find his most certain means of government, the legitimization of his politics and of his military strategies, and this up to the end, since, far from weakening the repulsive nature of his power, the ruins, the horrors, the crimes, the chaos of total war will generally only augment its scope. Telegram 71: “If the war is lost, let the nation perish,” in which Hitler decides to associate his efforts with those of his enemies in order to achieve the destruction of his own people by annihilating the last resources of his habitat, civil reserves of every sort (portable water, fuel, provisions, etc.)—is the normal outcome of the politics of dialectical retreat of the man who had written: “The idea of protection haunts and fulfills life.” (1998, 40, original emphasis)

The suicidal state is the utterly irrational, anti-utilitarian, but entirely logical conclusion of the pure force of chaos and destruction which does not follow any rules except its own drive toward actualisation; or as Deleuze and Guattari put it in commenting on Virilio, fascism denotes a “war

machine that no longer had anything but war as its object and would rather annihilate its own servants than stop the destruction" (1987, 231, original emphasis). At the core of fascism's self-destruction is what Safatle called "an experiment in libidinal economy" (2020, n.p.): the suicidal tendency is not the negation of pleasure, neither is it the mere arousal of life forces vis-à-vis the possibility of death, but rather it is the final coalescence and consummation of desire and power in the moment of ultimate sovereignty which is defined as the sovereignty over the death of one's own and everybody else's lives. In the moment of deciding over the death of a people, a nation, and the self, desire realises itself as the indulgence over the illusion of omnipotence. This is why Hitler's telegram is not to be read as a concession of defeat, but as the final demonstration of ecstasy and control, as no one other, certainly not the enemy, was authorised to the sovereignty over death, only the leader himself. Deleuze and Guattari correspondingly speak of the "[p]assion for abolition" (1987, 227).

And yet, as if that was not enough, the fascist desire for total sovereignty is not completely accounted for until the destruction is comprehended in its most abstract and wide-ranging sense, namely as the destruction of the transcendental categories of time and space:

Time and space become a pure problematic. Represented and projected magnitudes are there no longer but imperfect programs; they appear in turn eminently subject to expression, expressive and being a part of the subject as much as of the milieu. It is in the progressive annihilation of the independence between:

TIME SPACE
SUBJECT

this integration of dimensions, in that which remains to the man of expression (the morality of the end), that, for the Third Reich, the last act, telegram 71, quintessentially plays itself out. (Virilio 1998, 41, original emphasis)

The highest virtue of fascist suicide is that the end of the self, of the people, and ideally mankind is the final realisation of the identity of subject and time in death. It is in and through self-inflicted death that one becomes the master over time, and such is the true meaning of the *cancellation of time* in fascism.

In the time of COVID-19 pandemic, proto-fascist governments showed their commitment to the suicidal state in relatively open form, but the most blatant demonstration of the will to total sovereignty was probably displayed by Donald Trump. Not only did his administration refuse to coordinate a nation-wide COVID health strategy, not only did he continue to hold rallies—which he had to, because this was his way of staying connected with the movement that fuelled his power—, but in early October 2020, when he had caught the virus himself and was released from medical care, he spoke to the public and said: "Don't let it [the virus] dominate you, don't be afraid of it" (cf. Kennedy 2020). These words are the perfect summary of Trump's mode of power: whereas authoritarian governments pushed their people into fear of the virus, Trump denied that anyone should be worried, which is only logical given that to accept a feeling of fear is a demonstration of impotence and weakness. For the same reason Trump was reluctant to wear a mask, after all,

masks suggested that one had to protect oneself against the threat of a virus which the body cannot fight on its own. The fascist logic at work in Trump's attitude is that the virus is the ultimate test to sovereignty: either the body of the individual and the body of the nation is strong enough to confront the virus and survive, which shows unlimited power against any harm, or the confrontation ends in death, which goes to show that one would rather die than live a life that is tainted by the humility of having to accept one's own limitations. What is essential is that, as Trump said, the virus does not dominate your life, but your life, or your death, acts as a sign of you dominating the virus. Therefore, the virus needs to be collectively embraced and desired as the event which can fulfil the drive toward ultimate power over life and death and time.

V.

The *time of cancellation* from performance and the *cancellation of time* from politics do not share any obvious connection except for the fact that they both emerged in the initial phases of the corona pandemic. They have in common a certain geographical overlap, as cancellations of performances also took place in cities in proto-fascist Brazil or the United States, but there is no causal, no immediately visible political or social relation between them. And yet, I would like to argue that a distinctly political relation can and should be constructed precisely in the face of the lack thereof, such that the *time of cancellation* and the *cancellation of time* form the bigger political question of *cancelled time*. For this purpose, I am taking inspiration from Walter Benjamin's notes on art and politics from *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (2003), in which he famously claimed that the fascist aestheticisation of politics is answered by the communist politicisation of art. In the same spirit, I would like to suggest that the proto-fascist *cancellation of time* can perhaps be answered by the performative, or rather non-performative *time of cancellation*, even if this answer may only come in subtle alterations. Namely, if the *cancellation of time* acts as the unbound actualisation of desire in the form of a final interruption to life and time after which there is no future except the eternity of death, the *time of cancellation* indicates an interruption which generates the transition of future desire into a space of the past, where it stays alive. Whereas the *cancellation of time* is the complete exhaustion of desire and power, or desire as power in total violence, the *time of cancellation* retains a momentum of desire or intensity that will never exhaust itself in violence or any other possible act, except if the active memory of it betrays it. In other words, against the backdrop of the fascist phantasm of the end of time and future life, performance's cancelled status performs a subtle counter-measure in which the future is preserved—a future that cannot become present anymore, but a future that stands in the way of time's annihilation.

The question remains, then, how performance might account for this past future in the future, when theatre venues open again and when the production of creations resumes. For this final thought, I would like to return to Marthaler's *Die Verschollenen*, a project whose title references Franz Kafka and his novel *Der Verschollene*, *The Man Who Disappeared* or *The Missing Person*, which is also known as *Lost in America*. As is widely known, *Der Verschollene* is one of Kafka's unfinished novels, which does not have an ending, but is framed by two fragments that were created after

several interruptions. Interestingly, one of these fragments provides an indirect reference to these interruptions, and as such, it provides testimony to the kind of preliminary or *temporary cancellation* that preceded it. In the fragment on the so-called “Theatre of Oklahoma,” or “Teater von Oklahama,” as Kafka spelled it (cf. 1983, 387–419), the protagonist Karl Roßmann wanted to join the theatre which promoted itself by stating that “[j]eder ist willkommen!” (387), “everyone is welcome.” Having entered the reception point for the application process, Karl suddenly noticed his friend Fanny, who worked for the theatre and happened to be dressed as an angel, playing the trumpet on a giant pedestal. Fanny encouraged Karl to apply for a job—“es ist ja das größte Teater der Welt” (394), “it’s the greatest theatre in the world”—and in the end, he was indeed admitted. The only curiosity, however, is that Fanny was nowhere mentioned in any earlier part of the novel. Her character is treated as already known and always having been a part of the storyline, but in fact it was not introduced before. It is this little inconsistency that, whether willingly included or not, acts as a visible trace of the temporary interruption or cancellation in Kafka’s writing process, and as such, it reveals a possibility that would not have existed in a linear progression of writing. In a noticeably theatrical manner, that is, in presenting Fanny *as if* she had always already been in the plot, the script highlights the temporary anomaly of the writing and identifies the fact that other futures of the plot did not get realised, that other characters could have featured instead, which therefore happen to exist as past futures of the novel. Fanny, the friend, the as-if is a stand-in, a medium for this past future of the novel; the theatrical gesture of the as-if is the friend of the past future, as much as the past future is a friend to the novel. In a way, the entire fragment on the Theatre of Oklahoma is a celebration of the as-if, after all, Karl got accepted to the theatre despite or because he did not give his true name—he called himself “Negro” instead—which suggests that the theatre is indeed a place where everyone is welcome, no matter who they are and especially if they pretend to be someone else.

What this final deviation is supposed to suggest is that performance can perhaps use the as-if and other theatrical measures to install impossible reminders not only of its own past futures, but the past futures of many social and political events: political events and experiments that had to be interrupted or terminated due to the COVID pandemic, due to proto-fascist violence, or due to other reasons. In their status as past futures, they will not be recovered, but their intensity might still serve as an impulse for necessarily other future actions that stand out against the desire for self-destruction. This, perhaps, is the promise of *cancelled time*.

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Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

IMPERCEPTIBLE BODIES: HAPTIC COUNTER-PLEASURES IN THE WORK OF MARCELO EVELIN

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Nosso tempo é especialista em criar ausências: do sentido de viver em sociedade, do próprio sentido da experiência da vida. Isso gera uma intolerância muito grande com relação a quem ainda é capaz de experimentar o prazer de estar vivo, de dançar, de cantar. E está cheio de pequenas constelações de gente espalhada pelo mundo que dança, canta, faz chover. O tipo de humanidade zumbi que estamos sendo convocados a integrar não tolera tanto prazer, tanta fruição de vida. Então, pregam o fim do mundo como uma possibilidade de fazer a gente desistir dos nossos próprios sonhos.¹ - Ailton Krenak.

Introduction

In a 1990 conversation with Antonio Negri and toward the end of his life, Gilles Deleuze replied to Negri's rather romantic question, 'what politics can carry into history the splendor of events and subjectivity?' by alluding to certain kinds of events that, for a brief duration, elude established forms of power without yet being assimilated into new ones. For Deleuze, such events 'can't be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead.' Within their apparently unprecedented emergence, they 'engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume' (Deleuze 1995, 176).

This 'evental romanticism,' if I may call it so, was counterbalanced by his by now seminal *Postscript on Control Societies* published the same year, in which Deleuze ominously describes the ever more

fluid modes of control-power. According to Deleuze, control society more and more replaces the disciplinary model of power described by Foucault (1995 [1975]). Whereas disciplinary power depended on closed systems—i.e., institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and schools—in which concrete practices and behavioural training shape and normalize subjects, control societies render these enclosures obsolete. In contrast to the institutional ‘moulds,’ control mechanisms are open systems in constant *modulation* that do not need to target a *desiring subject* as such but can latch onto anyone at any time, like a ‘transmuting moulding continuously changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another’ (Deleuze 1995, 179). This is why Deleuze speaks of the shift from the individual to the *dividual*. As Frida Beckman explains, what ‘emerges in the place of the long-term training of the individual body in disciplinary society is, Deleuze suggests, the “dividual” of control society, that is parts of selves, affects, desires, which are identified, addressed and controlled by means of samples and data’ (2018, 14).

Deleuze’s writings on control seem to tell us two things about our contemporary era of algorithmic and logistical capitalism. First of all, in control societies it becomes impossible—or at least very difficult—to separate control and freedom. As André Lepecki writes, a key feature of control is the way it ‘preconditions freedom from within by subtly providing pathways for circulation that are introjected as the only ones imaginable, the only ones deemed appropriate’ (Lepecki 2013, 15). For example, when GPS technology ‘simultaneously serve[s] the interests of the individual who voluntarily consents to using them and the interests of the providers or other agencies who are thereby able to monitor the individual in the course of his or her daily activities’ (Patton 2018, 195), power-relations become *less concealed and less discernible* at the same time.

Second, when capitalist mechanisms begin to target ‘infra-individual’ (dividualized) affects and pleasures directly, long term processes of subjectification are replaced by short term algorithmic and logistical modulations of actions and movements. As Antoinette Rouvroy argues, in contrast to neoliberal governmental forms that produce ‘hyper-subjects’ endlessly realizing themselves, *algorithmic governmentality* ‘affects, without addressing them, people in [...] situations where they are not requested to “produce” anything, and certainly not subjectivation. Rather, algorithmic governmentality bypasses consciousness and reflexivity, and operates on the mode of alerts and reflexes’ (Rouvroy 2013, 153).

A pertinent example could be food-delivery companies such as Wolt. Wolt does not need to educate and monitor their ‘subjects’ to any significant extent; they only need to incite and activate certain opportunistic and conscientious affects in the bodies of their couriers in order to capture their movements for the company’s logistical operations and production of capital. (For a much more in-depth analysis of the relation between choreography and logistical capitalism, see Egert 2022 in this issue.) In such modulations, the dynamics of power are permeating ever more fully *the informality of social life*, interpellating not subjects as such, but the dividualized movements, interests, and performances comprising a social field. As Lepecki states, control society ‘does not hail. Instead, it choreographs’ (Lepecki 2013, 19).

Within this refinement of the microphysics of power, I would like to draw attention to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming-imperceptible*. In my view, this notion performs the dual operation of both naming the conditions as well as locating new lines of resistance. Are the patterns of power outlined above not precisely rendering bodies *imperceptible*, as they go beyond turning them into obedient subjects or subjected objects, even beyond commodification, turning them instead into fleeting and fluid *carrier-bodies*—in other words, interpellated into and as logistical movements? And as such, is the Deleuzian 'snake'—the symbolic animal of control societies as opposed to the 'mole' of disciplinary formations (1995, 180)—not too crude an image? Are not the imperceptible aerial swarms of viral particles, the 'viro-spheres' that our bodies move with and within (see Döcker 2020), not the horrifyingly concrete symbolism disclosed by the Covid-19 pandemic? Did not Deleuze himself speak of society as a fluid or a gas? (Deleuze 2006, 280).

In opposition, and precisely on the same terms as the choreographic regime of the imperceptible, I am interested in modes of resistance that problematize the crippling effects of being reduced to an operative force within a complex modulatory exchange. What are the *other ways of disappearing into relationality* that refuse the algorithmic and logistical reduction of living-thinking bodies and by doing so, enact and enable the political persistence of the different and disparate, the interruptive and non-computational, the indisposed multitudes that neither negate nor submit to perfectly flowing worlds, but insist on existing *oppositionally* (Moten and Harney 2013) within them? What are the relational spaces and eventual configurations that, however transient, within their ephemeral shimmer of existence are capable of emitting a radiance that cannot be sustained but nevertheless lingers, endures as an afterglow and so infuses struggles to come?

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, becoming-imperceptible designates a process of desubjectification, in which any given entity becomes so much part of its organic or social fabric that it 'becomes everybody/everything' (*tout le monde*) (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 325). In the words of Rosi Braidotti, 'becoming-imperceptible is the point of fusion between the self and his or her habitat, the cosmos as a whole. It marks the point of evanescence of the self and its replacement by a living nexus of multiple interconnections' (2006, 261). In this most affirmative sense, becoming-imperceptible may be another word for the Deleuzian *event*. Within such events, the locus of subjectivity shifts away from subject- and object-positions to the imperceptible texture that enfolds them, the always-already inseparable assemblages in which they are entangled and become otherwise. Such eventual configurations are not *perceived*; they are *perceiving*. They are lived from within themselves.² In this essay I want to contemplate one such transient, eventual unfolding: the practice and work of Brazilian choreographer Marcelo Evelin. It is my contention that Evelin's work problematizes the intensified interpellation of bodies in their interactive movements outlined above. As we shall see, this has to do with a convergence between informality, imperceptibility and hapticality.

Alongside the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, my analyses and contemplations draw on the black theory of Denise Ferreira da Silva, Fred Moten and Stephano Harney as well as the quantum physics-philosophy of Karen Barad. In dialogue with this divergent but refractive field of thinkers,

I address the ethico-political and onto-aesthetic aspects of Evelin's work in its modes of becoming-imperceptible.

My starting point is Evelin's haptic practice of *massa* (mass), in which a group of dancers move together in a sort of blob or bundle, striving for as much surface of touch as possible. Here, the participants are asked to move *from* and *through* their tactile sensations, as a sort of curious and constant feeling-into other bodies, and of feeling themselves through feeling others. In order to account for *massa* as a particular choreographic 'texture,' I will draw on my own experience of doing the practice as well as briefly touching upon Evelin's earlier work *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* (*Suddenly everywhere is black with people*, 2011). On that basis, I analyse *massa* as an embodied mode of co-existence, in which the activity of the implicated bodies become *supple and refractive*, to the extent that this activity can be called *prismatic*. However, I will argue that this becoming-prismatic is a function of the haptic density of the practice, its intensification of physical touch, which renders it an involuted phenomenon, an introversion of relationality. In other words, one has to take part in the practice in order to experience its altering mode of co-existence.

It therefore becomes interesting to analyse Evelin's most recent work, *A Invenção da Maldade* (*The Invention of Evilness*, 2019), which, in my view, enacts a haptic mode of becoming-imperceptible that directly implicates the audience in what I, following Deleuze and Guattari, call *haptic space*: a mode of collective spatialization that intensifies the social field in such a way that the very sensation of being distributed together in space embodies a 'touch-ness,' a haptical sensitivity evoked within the indeterminate transience of the social field. It is here that the ever more smooth and subtle modes of power outlined above are fully problematized.

As a final gesture, I cannot ignore that this article was written during the 2020–21 pandemic, in which societies have been forced to outlaw proximity and touch. Beyond the scientific and sociological studies on the detrimental effects of touch deprivation, I propose that the notion of haptic space poignantly names the loss, which occurs when not just the actuality but the *virtuality* of touch, its potentiality, is postponed indefinitely.

Part I: Prisms

The Dense Crowd

My first experience with the practice of *massa* took place in one of Marcelo Evelin's masterclasses during an afternoon in April 2017, in a loft studio in Utrecht. Besides being my introduction to the practice, it was also my initial encounter with Evelin, and the beginning of a friendship. Two years later, during the rehearsals for *A Invenção da Maldade*, I witnessed *massa* from the outside numerous times. Here are two accounts from my notebooks, one from the inside and one from the outside, respectively:

The inside of exteriority:

My upper body slides between two slabs of flesh wrapped in cotton or some other fabric. Smell of armpits, open pores. Someone's breath takes hold of my nostrils. Still sliding through the slabs, a face buried in the back of my head, legs wrapping around other legs, in circular movements, how we brace around each other; hands, chests, butts, heads. Moving senselessly, sensefully enfolded by each other in a mixture of attraction and repulsion. Gradually, inevitably, I lose myself in the fuzziness of never-ending touch, never-ending circulation, in a flat field of intensity that roams, grazes, glides, grabs, breathes, feels, saturates.

Nothing but surfaces. Nothing but living pulsing things.

The outside of interiority:

In an old storage facility seven naked bodies move in a strange deformed bundle. To the sound of a maraca they constantly seek the centre of the bundle, but the centre does not persist, it continually dislocates, and so does the whole group. It looks like a human swarm the way they blend into each other, but the fleshiness of their bodies and the occasional bumps and collisions give off another feel; like a playful fight, a wrestle, a sort of sensual, innocent cruelty. An odd amalgamation of fluidity and coagulation. A cluttered mass of flowing flesh.

Back in 2017, not long after experiencing *massa* myself, I attended Evelin's group piece *De repente fica tudo preto de gente* in Köln. It was during the research for this work six years earlier, inspired by Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power (Masse und Macht, 1960)*, that Evelin had started exploring the choreographic implications of mass-movements (Evelin, unpublished interview 2020). In an eloquent account of *De repente fica tudo preto de gente*, Lepecki describes its mass of five dancers in the following way:

Not a group, not a mound, not a pack, *it* slithers and glides and moshes and huddles as each one of its bodies moves on top of the other, or as one dives underneath the other, or as all try to climb on top of the other, or as all squeeze through one another, and as all pass through us, and in these anexact yet rigorous, indefinite yet determined motions they all make *it* keep going, while *it* makes them all keep going, as *it* does and undoes itself as form [...]. (Lepecki 2016, 74)

In the following, I will analyse the practice of *massa* by asking the following questions: How does the sense of subjectivity change within the mass? How does it change the perception of being embodied and in relation to other bodies?

In doing the practice of *massa* I find myself immersed for a long duration of time in the density of circling, sliding, grabbing, sensing bodies. Here, a space is opened where the sense of 'I' begins to disappear into the haptic totality of touching-moving-sensing-smelling-hearing. The persistence of full-body touch dilutes the sense of (my)self, the fixed and enclosed sensation of subjectivity. Canetti writes: 'Suddenly it is as though everything were [sic] happening in one and the same body' (1978, 16). However, there is a difference between dilution and dissolution. In contrast to Canetti's

descriptions of the crowd (Masse), in my experience of *massa* the sense of 'self' withdraws, but it also *continuously resurfaces*. It is as if there is an oscillation between (self-)differentiating awareness and group-subjectivity, between I/the others and 'it.'

In her writings on the haptics of cinema, Laura Marks notes that there is always a play between haptic and optic visibility. She links this to the erotic, arguing that what makes something erotic is the interplay between near and far, between maintaining control (giving, affecting), and relinquishing it (receiving, being affected). She further writes:

In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth—we become amoeba like, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting. (Marks 2002, xvi)

This haptic immersion is central to the practice of *massa*. However, in my kinaesthetic experience, a minimal portion of 'distal' perception is still active, which ensures an attentiveness to perceptual differences: the difference between my torso and *this* arm, *this* scrotum and my leg, *this* lump of hair and *that* shoulder blade. It is an acute sense for details, changes, and encounters in physical space.

The oscillation between disappearance into totality and (re)appearance of minute detail is a consequence of *the intensification of touch in a turbulent proximal space*. Instead of producing a disintegrating desubjectification, the effect of this oscillation is a *diffused sense of agency*, or *fuzzy subjectivity*. It is not that 'I' have disappeared altogether into a cloud of moving body parts, nor am 'I' conserved as an intentional and willful doer. What one experiences in *massa* is a paradoxically fuzzy *and* acute sense of self and other. We could say that it is a desubjectified space, which retains just enough subjectivity in order to unfold its diffused but centred relational force.

What I would like to propose is that such agency can be understood as *prismatic*. Prismatic in the sense that the interplay of bodies, body parts, and movements, in all their details, are not so much *reactions* to each other, but *refractions* of one another. As a cluster of body-prisms, *massa* works as a differential generator, a conglomerate of active forces that, despite their active character, are not individually intended acts, but rise out of a multiplicity of microscopic encounters (as noted above, between *this* leg and *this* stomach, *this* turn and *this* slide, etc.). All movements and touches become refractions of each other, and it is within these 'prismatics' that the diffused agency is generated. This diffusion is not a consequence of inaccuracy but of *imperceptibility*. As *massa* enfolds its bodies, the forces that determine its direction, speed, temperament, and rhythm cannot be traced back to any of the (now diffused) subject-positions. The withdrawal of (frontal, self-transparent) subjectivity is not the dissolution of agencies, but the agencies become dispersed in a *field*.

In Karen Barad's take on quantum field theory, particles are always entangled within an indeterminate field, in which all 'physical' particles interact with and within a cloud of virtual particles. By doing so, every particle virtually touches and is touched by every other within the vibrancy of the quantum field (see Barad 2012). Taken not as scientific authority but rather as

'quantum physics-poetics,' this imagery helps to grasp how *massa* can be said to generate a *field effect* amongst its participants, a liminal mode of embodiment, where actions operate prismatically instead of intentionally, neither willful nor resistant, but supple and refractive.³ What I have attempted to describe here is how *massa* generates or discloses another kind of conjunction between subjectivity and relationality. Within the microcosm of *massa*, these are not separate affects nor do they dissolve completely into each other. Instead, the prismatic mode of co-existence that I propose here can be said to constitute a 'refractive milieu' where forces pass between and through bodies and is bent and shaped by their singularities, so that the collective movement becomes a multiplicity shaped by the accentuation of differences rather than their erasure.⁴

Haptic Bodies

Having analysed *massa* as a haptic practice that operates prismatically, the next step will be to examine the ethico-political implications of such a haptic mode of existence. I will do so in dialogue with Moten and Harney and da Silva, because Black Studies offer some crucial insights regarding the haptic and affective dimensions of power.

Moten and Harney have proposed the concept of *hapticality* in their poetic theorization of *the hold* (of the slave ship). In the terrible non-place of the hold, hapticality names a condition of physical togetherness that is simultaneously a consequence of colonial violence and a mode of resistance against it. They write:

Hapticality, the capacity to feel though others [sic], for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you [...] Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other. (Moten and Harney 2013, 98)

Moten and Harney bring attention to an *affective space*, a state of entanglement in that non-place where 'the laws of (meta)physics break down in hapticality's terrible, beautiful intensities' (Moten 2018, 209). I do not wish to ignore the violence the hold presupposes nor the brokenness it entails. But what Moten and Harney show us in relation to touch is that in and against colonialism's deep, racial theft of livability, a haptic mode of sociality (entanglement) surges, which Moten characterizes as 'the refusal of what has been refused.' According to Moten, blackness entails having been drafted into the project of white, colonial, patriarchal subjectivity *as apparatus*, as a 'commodity that speaks,' such that the only appropriate response is that of nonperformance, of 'disavowing, of not wanting, of withholding consent to be a subject' (243). Hapticality, then, is the name for a radically informal (black) social space that does not run parallel to (white) majoritarian modes of subjectification, but instead obliquely and opaquely disrupts them as it insists on a refractive and affective milieu.

This space of haptic, fluid, fleshy informality is perhaps what *massa*, as a performative microcosm, proposes. In *massa*, the relations of power that make the mass operational is precisely what, in other constellations, could be perceived as in-operational, or powerless: the power to be affected. Whilst the bodies in *massa* no doubt affect as much as they are affected, it makes sense to highlight the latter, because of the way the practice operates below the threshold of intentionality and volition. In this regard, the term *affectability* deployed by black feminist scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva can help make tangible the political implications of a haptical mode of co-existence.

For da Silva, affectability denotes 'the conditions of being subjected to both natural (in the scientific and lay sense) conditions and to others' power' (2007, xv). Da Silva argues that since the 16th century, European political philosophy has defined the legal subject as a *self-determined and self-possessive mind* that alone is able to judge and act. Whoever or whatever is not included within this domain is relegated as *necessitas*, as that other which is not the actor, but the acted upon: an *outer-determined, affectable I*. Such bodies perceived as incapable of judging, acting, setting into motion or possessing oneself are treated as 'no-bodies' who can be killed in order to protect (real) citizens (da Silva 2014).

As da Silva, Moten and Harney seem to argue in their different but entangled ways, there is an ethico-political valence to claiming the affect-able space of 'no-bodies.' By insisting on non-determination (da Silva) and appositionality (Moten and Harney), these theorists may jointly articulate a strategy of affect-ability. As Spinoza said, any being is determined by its capacity to affect and to be affected. A strategy of affect-ability then perhaps encompasses all the practices of life, thought, and art, in which we increase our capacity for existing in entangled states, of being able to bear the affective intensities of others as we pass through each other. Such strategies operationalize modes of existence, which, despite remaining powerless to the crippling mechanisms of control-power, operate *on other frequencies* to make affective and responsive circulations between living bodies suppler and stronger. Within the constant modulations of our movements and the automatisations of frontal subjectivity (the 'zoomification' of life), there are other lines of connection: anarchic intra-actions, unexpected encounters, friendships and alliances.

In this light, Evelin's practice of *massa* can be understood as a space of intensified affect-ability. As such, its dilution of agency *could be* seen as an abdication of power. In fact, from the perspective of self-determined subjectivity, *it is*. However, this is precisely its forcefulness. *Massa* softens the border control between bodies without eradicating sensitivity towards differences. It does not destroy subjectivity; rather, it makes it prismatic: The locus of perceptibility is shifted from enclosed subject-positions to the imperceptible and indeterminate field, in which these bodies materialize and become-other. The practice of *massa* is a collective mode of becoming-imperceptible, which is evoked by the multiple singular modes of affecting and being affected that populate its bodies and their 'intra-activities' (Barad 2007). As such, it is a momentary micropolitical field, in which relationality is redefined.

Part II: Haptic Space

The transient retexturing of relationality that *massa* enables is a consequence of its intensification of actual touch. That means that the radical hapticality, which conditions the practice, is its strength as much as its limitation. Because *massa* depends exclusively on physical touch, its mode of co-existence is only (fully) activated for those participating in the practice. Therefore, it becomes crucial to ask how the prismatic qualities of the practice spill into the artistic work and become available to an audience. How can the force of hapticality be activated beyond the dimension of physical touch?

In order to approach these questions I will now turn to Evelin's most recent group piece, *A Invenção da Maldade*, to examine how this work can be said to install what I, in resonance with Deleuze and Guattari, call *haptic space*; a mode of co-inhabitation where the intensities of touch are distributed to the space itself, implicating everyone in a shared haptical field.

The Invention of Evilness

The field, in this case, is CAMPO⁵ in Teresina, Brazil. We are in an old storage facility, a large room of grey concrete walls and floors. Four columns mark a square in the centre. Five unlit bonfires are distributed in the space. Six dancers are standing along the walls. A seventh dancer, Rosângela Sulidade, walks at a consistent, slow pace around the room, pointing ahead of her with a wooden stick. The dancers are all naked. It is April 2019 and we are attending the premiere of *A Invenção da Maldade*.⁶ As the audience enters the space, we hear the subtle sounds of seventy white ceramic bells hanging between the columns, activated by small fans. It gives off an ethereal, ominous feel. There are no chairs to sit on, no guidance as where to stand, sit, or look. Only Sulidade draws attention, but if one looks closely at the other dancers, something else is already happening. They are, each in their different way, moving slightly, minutely. A hand rattles, a leg jolts, a neck vibrates. These bodies are already in a process of *charging*, of being charged by something, of ceasing to be in-charge, nonetheless taking charge, but in relation to something intangible.

Meanwhile, Sulidade keeps walking, unrushed. She seems guided by the stick, as if it was a dowsing rod leading her, not to water, but something else of which we have no idea. Occasionally she slashes the stick through the air, always three times. Her gaze is firm but distant, her lips move in an inaudible murmur. She is here, but elsewhere. Finally, she stops at one of the bonfires. Incredibly slowly she raises the stick towards the ceiling. As she stands there, fully erect, the space is drenched in drum music. The other dancers, the 'chargers,' make their way to the chosen bonfire.

Now, a sort of rite, a terrible 'party,' starts to unfold. The seven dancers⁷ move around the bonfire, charging it with abnormal movements, with wild jerks, jumps, and twists. The rite, as a whole, unleashes an explosive outpouring of movements, an inexhaustive and asignifying uproar of corporeal signs. The movements are disturbing, forceful, unapologetic. But they also display a sort of innocence, a 'naive' mode of doing: actions upon actions, performed only for the sheer sake of their potentiality. Innocent cruelty reaches its maximum, as dancer Matteo Bifulco suddenly

trashes the bonfire, scattering its limbs across the floor. The 'maenads' come together, tentatively, in the ruins of the fire. Connected through the force field of their ritual charge they begin touching, grabbing, pursuing, and inciting each other. A sweaty, disorderly *massa* unfolds. It swirls and rotates through the space. Sometimes it disperses and the dancers run like energetic fairies through the cluster of spectators. The *massa* reassembles, flesh collides again, while the audience-body draws in and surrounds it.

Out of colliding, playful flesh, voices rise above the pulsating drums. A plethora of speech in five different languages bursts unexpectedly from the mouths of the *massa*. The words are not important, it is pure nonsense: language at the level of Artaudian incantation.⁸ Now the audience is not only pierced through by running fairies and exposed to a moving mass of sweat and touch, but also bathed in a profuse, incomprehensible clamour. As the clamour eventually dies down, we become aware that the drums have abated as well, leaving only the simple but incessant beat of a maraca lingering.

From here, various 'scenes' of a more recognizable character emerge. Scenes of domination and submission: Nonato performs a sacrificial killing of Moreno. Sulidade disciplines Dehaspe, guiding him around with her witch's stick. Bifulco crawls on top of the resurrected Moreno, riding and controlling him, but also carrying him gently on his shoulders, once again uttering a stream of words, this time more sensible and less intense. Everything is slowing down and dissipating, as the group enters its last metamorphosis.

In a way, they return to their initial state around the fire. Then again, not at all. What unfolds now is only possible as a residue of everything prior. Staying close but without touching, these residual bodies move as a unified but heterogeneous field. It is a strange procession, which follows a peripheral line along the audience clusters. Only the sound of the bells fills the space. The dancers drift among each other, poised within the field, following a common but unidentifiable rhythm. It is as if nothing is happening, but this *nothing* can only move, can only exist so potently, because *everything happened*. Touch happened. Violence happened. Ecstasy, misery, endurance, death, and joy happened—affectively and imaginatively. Now the field is alive with all (these) things, with fleshy eventfulness, whilst enfolding upon itself an opaque quality, a no-thing-ness. As the procession continues, the ones who stay attentive to its subtlety become aware of its near-imperceptible, haptical field, which radiates as an afterglow of evilness and a promise of its recurrence.

At last, the field arrives at the wrecked bonfire. Gathered around the ruins of celebration-destruction, *it* lingers for a moment, before its bare bodies turn around and leave. They don't return for applause. The final residues are us, the witnesses, thrown back upon ourselves and the proximities between us.

Being in/for Space

Laura Marks describes haptic criticism as the attempt to 'make the dry words retain a trace of the wetness of the encounter' (2002, x). With the description above I hope to have invited the reader

to feel, at least as minuscule droplets, the feel on the skin of *A Invenção da Maldade*. Before enfolding this feel into analysis, I will briefly sketch out Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *haptic space*.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the haptic is discussed in relation to the distinction between striated and smooth space. Striated is that (relation to) space, which is measured, gridded, mapped, and thereby regulated and controlled. Smooth space, on the other hand, depends on *haptic perception*, which attends to the particularity of the immediate environment—as when a Bedouin crosses the desert, or a Sherpa navigates a snowy mountain range.

It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space. (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 572)

However, the difference between smooth/haptic and striated/optical is not a matter of quantifiable spaces (the latter pertaining to longer and wider spaces, the former only to close-range ones). Neither is it a purely qualitative matter, as two distinct mentalities: 'what distinguishes the two kinds of voyages is neither a measurable quantity of movement, nor something that would be only in the mind, but *the mode of spatialization, the manner of being in space, of being for space*' (560. Emphasis added).

The claim that haptic space concerns a mode of spatialization, which is not only a manner of being *in* space, but also being *for* space, is crucial in understanding how hapticality can operate without physical touch. In the following analysis, I aim to show how *A Invenção da Maldade* creates a manner of being spatialized, in which we feel that we are touching and being touched—simply from the facticity of inhabiting *this* space together in *this* particular way. In a Foucauldian manner, I want to show how such a haptic space is able to invoke a *susceptibility to pleasure* beyond what we usually understand by that word (1996, 310), so that our relational spatialization is by itself an emanation of vital and pleasurable intensities.

In order to articulate *A Invenção da Maldade's* singular mode of haptic space, I want to draw attention to two aspects of the work. The first is what I will call *figurality of movement*, which concerns its kinaesthetic qualities. The second concerns its spatial dramaturgy or what I will call *choreographic spatialization*. These two aspects are intimately intertwined, but by treating them separately I hope to highlight more clearly the artistic dimensions of haptic space.

Figurality of Movement

The term *figural*, as opposed to *figurative*, is deployed by Deleuze to describe how the Figure can exist in Francis Bacon's paintings without its presence being illustrative or narrative (2004, 1–7). This is 'achieved' through *deformation*. For instance, in Bacon's series of 'heads' (self-portraits), Deleuze describes how the way in which the heads are deformed from each painting to the next looks like the head of a space traveller, 'immobile in his capsule,' coming physically into contact

with the forces of the cosmos. The forces themselves remain imperceptible to the viewer. For Deleuze, this means that Bacon paints forces, or what is *non-given* (56–9). As dance scholar Gerko Egert suggests, in the same way as painting make invisible forces visible, so too can choreography be said to make perceptible the forces of dance (2020, 2).

In light of this, what is it that the bodies in *A Invenção da Maldade* do? They charge and are charged. As they enter an altered perceptual and affective state, not a trance but something akin to it, their movements are neither signifying nor purely abstract. They are *figural* in the sense that we observe the dancers being almost attacked and possessed by hidden forces, but the bodies themselves are also, each of them, a minor swarm of forces acting on each other through their charge. This produces a seemingly inexhaustible invention of figures that through processes of deformation are constantly modulated from one to the next. The specific 'style' or vectorization of this figurality is that of *maldade*: evilness. Without attempting to exhaust what evilness alludes to in *Invenção*, or to offer any totalizing interpretation of it, we can perhaps locate it on the level of figurality.

The quality of movement in *Invenção* reveals a constant instability and displacement. The dancers never rest, as if in a constant process of moulding by outside forces. There is an almost defiant insistence on repetitious deformation, of constantly falling into a crack, which unleashes a ferocity of action, a vital outpouring. It is this insistence, I would argue, which presents evilness. However, it is a peculiar insistence, because it does not arise out of the dancers' expressive intentions, but must be located in the state of affect-ability, which surrounds and interpellates these bodies; a state which they themselves have summoned into existence. The figurality of movement of *Invenção* can then be understood as the paradox of a *desiring acting-out of evilness as a consequence of existing in intense affect-ability*. In other words, there are no desiring subjects behind the acts, just the affective space generated by the charged and charging bodies, which in turn distributes agencies of affect-power: evilness. In unapologetic affectivity, we stay inside the diffuse struggles within and between bodies, in the constant negotiations for co-existence, of giving and taking space. In the figurality of movement specific to *Invenção*, evilness designates whatever falls outside the sphere of the acceptable and agreeable; the uncontainable 'extra' that drips off and pours out of bodies, that bumps into them, that rises like nonsensical speech and is left over like residues of a figure that was only there as a sudden, violent tear in the fabric of reality.

In doing so, the quality of movement can be said to operate *diagrammatically*. In the Deleuzian view on painting, the diagram is 'the operative set of asignifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones,' which embodies the procedures by which clichés or already signified figurations are avoided (2004, 101). In a more general sense, the diagram is the way *the outside*, the 'abstract storm' of composing forces, arrives strategically at composed forms (2013, 73).

In *Invenção*, the figurality of movement can be understood as a set of diagrammatic operations by which the uncontainable affective forces of the outside are made perceptible *in their imperceptibility*. Ontologically, it is important not to mistake 'the outside' for an immaterial, otherworldly reality that acts upon the material plane. Instead, the notion alludes to the chaotic mass of an absolutely immanent plane, which needs strategies, procedures, and practices in order

to invent-disclose the matter-flows, which *are yet to* and *will have* sustained and created the bodies we pass through.

Choreographic Spatialization

The other aspect of haptic space in a performative context has to do more directly with its sense of space, or its mode of *choreographic spatialization*. What I mean by this is first and foremost the spatial dramaturgy of *Invenção*. In the beginning, the rite around the fire is an almost touch-less but intensely charging sequence. There is a force in this centralization that binds the dancers in a heterogeneously oscillating field. The audience is, likewise, drawn towards its restless centre. As the centre deterritorializes and breaks with itself, it starts to swirl through the space in the form of *massa*. But the *massa* of *Invenção* already contains its own deterritorialization, as it disperses into the fairies and out through the incantatory voices. Throughout this sequence, the spectators are forced to move around, following the contractions and dilations of the mass. They are traversed, invaded, surrounded, whilst they themselves gradually become their own irregular form of mass, contracting around the whirling blob. Eventually, as the performers morph into the force field, as they hover along the periphery, the audience has also been turned into a field: a plurality of haptic gazes that cannot penetrate the subtlety of the dancers' field, but remain intensely exposed to its residual radiance. Blind, but 'touched.'

How, then, does this install a haptic space? First of all, through the unapologetic swallowing of the audience into spatial togetherness (insistence on mutual embeddedness). Within this, the piece enacts the quality of trespassing and of being trespassed, not on the level of intentional, subjective choice, but on the level of forces that oscillate between bodies. Here, a certain *pleasure of acting upon and being acted upon* is played out. In light of this, I will dare to put forth the claim that in *Invenção*, in each of the movements of the dancers in their singularities, in each of the sequences of the piece, and in each mutation of the topology of its unfolding, *evilness erupts as the desire to touch and be touched*. To enfold and be enfolded. To saturate and be saturated.

For this reason, the piece as an affective strategy does not need to touch, because its whole operability is the invocation of a feel of touching, of being touched, which fills the spaces within and between the bodies present. Although moments of actual touch do occur, these are embedded in a consistent virtual enactment of touch. The affectivity that the piece patiently constructs can thus be compared to Moten and Harney's poetic rendering of the bodies hurdled together in the hold: An 'adjacent' space to that of separated subjects. Here, the relational swirl takes precedence, and the implicated bodies are 'held' within the feel of/for each other, thrown into the touch-ability, which always-already oscillates in/as/between them. Within this, the almost defiant ethico-aesthetic impulse of *Invenção da Maldade* is to furiously enact *the desire to be here, the pleasure of being here*, with no apologies or reservations. Not uncritically, but in full affirmation. To keep moving through chaos, affirming suffering as well as joy, despair as well as splendour.

As we saw earlier, haptic space, as a mode of spatialization, is not just a manner of being *in* space, but a manner of being *for* space. The affect-ability, which is enacted in *Invenção*, embodies the

desire to generate another kind of space, or to inhabit space differently. The invention of haptic space is the evocation of a spatialization where we touch and are touched by the sheer facticity of our co-existence. As such, the particular haptic space generated by *A Invenção* embodies a trait of resistance that attends to the times we are currently living. Maybe what we need right now are modes of charging and hapticalizing spaces together, so that in them, critical and affirmative problematization can take place. Maybe what we need are simple, vibrant spaces that can hold differences and allow for a prismatic, haptic contemplation of the ways in which we are, always and in every situation, vulnerably exposed to the social and material forces that compose our modes of existence.

These spaces are perhaps what Deleuze and Guattari call *smooth*. But if we, as I have surely done here, venerate such spaces, we should also not forget that '[...] smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us' (2016, 581).

Micropolitics of Touch

A Invenção da Maldade displays a singular mode of becoming-imperceptible in and as performance. In its diffused and ferocious outpouring of corporeal signs, it can be read as an affirmation of co-existence in and against the brokenness of surrounding political systems. Its evocation of haptic space is an act of defiance. As such, its haptic spatialization is an insistence on the informality of social spaces in their imperceptible movements.

As the quote above stresses, it is crucial not to mistake such informality for an idea of always-already emancipated togetherness or unfiltered sensuous reality. As Deleuze argues, the interplay of forces that constitutes power-relations is precisely located in the informal, non-stratified dimensions of sociality (Deleuze 2013, 74). As an insistence on informality, haptic space is not a solution, but instead a fleeting, problematizing field in which the living forces that surge within and between bodies can be reactivated and redistributed, thus engendering new, asymmetrical alliances between disparate beings: Social configurations, where bodies oscillate together in their singularities of difference, as a counter-power to the controlled compositions of self-isolated subjects.

As a mode of resistant becoming-imperceptible, what haptic space makes apparent is that the forces of life, which are annulled or subdued within the controlling circuits of power, are never resuscitated as they were: how to feel and be touched by each other must always be reinvented and reaffirmed; how to take flight together and become entangled at that evanescent point, where nothing is no longer hidden but nothing is no longer comprehensible either.

Postscript on the Pandemic

As I have been writing this article during 2020–21, cooped up in my apartment (and sometimes, very fortunately, in a friend's cottage by the Danish seaside), I cannot help to notice the irony of writing about haptic spaces in a time where they—at least on a societal level—are deactivated or non-existent. Marcelo Evelin creates very intense and incomparable haptic spaces in his art, but haptic spaces exists all over the place, in many different formats and levels of intensity. Anyone who has been on a throbbing dance floor, in a lively bar, at a concert, on a basketball court, in sexual intimacy, in a gathering of friends, on a mountain hike, at a performance event, in a dance class etc., has experienced haptic space to some degree, even if just for an instant.

At the onset of the pandemic, Giorgio Agamben argued that the state-imposed measures of social distancing revealed a society that no longer believes in anything but survival (Agamben 2020). In a poignant critique of Agamben, Sergio Benvenuto wrote that he perceived it as a gesture of kindness when a younger friend kept three meters of distance between them. Benvenuto's observation was that, during the pandemic, 'I display my love for the other by keeping her or him at a distance [...] This is why Agamben has failed to understand anything about what's happening in the *molecularity* of human relations' (Benvenuto 2020).

The question is, however, if we can locate a deeper or more intensive 'molecularity' inherent in our relational conditions. During the first lockdown of spring 2020, Paul B. Preciado wrote that the administration of life and death in the face of Covid-19 produces a subject that 'has no skin, is untouchable, who has no hands' (Preciado 2020, translation slightly modified). In a concurrent essay, Georg Döcker argued that if the self-isolated subject is barely a body, then the body that traverse public spaces is barely a subject (Döcker 2020). As an always potentially infected and infecting disease-carrier, nothing but vulnerable corporeal life walks to the store and back again, back into its ultra-connected home, its prison 'as soft as an artichoke heart' (Preciado 2020). Between incorporeally dividualized subjects and pathologically desingularized flesh, haptic space disintegrates.

What this means is that even the most trivial and self-evident haptic spaces—the ones that we inhabit by being in the bakery, at the office space, on the sidewalk, are gone as well—even if we still *co-inhabit these spaces*. This, I believe, and as I've argued throughout, is because haptic space is a *mode of spatialization, a manner of being in/for space*. Haptic space is eradicated, not just because we cannot go to the club or the swimming hall. It disappears, because in pandemic life we materialize differently.

In pandemic life, the decline of physical touch is a huge problem, particularly for those in risk groups forced to avoid it altogether. But the loss of haptic space is real too, as such spaces are sustained through the potentiality or the virtuality of touch, through 'a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you.' (Moten and Harney 2013, 98). Such subtle and vibrant virtuality is what has been paused and deferred. Deprived of it, despite inhabiting the same physical spaces, our bodies become like screens to one another. Self-isolation is not simply a

'homeized' phenomenon. Above a face mask, a pair of glassy eyes; beneath it, a body that, like my own, must be turned inwards and away from the chaotic and dangerous openness, which *the other* now entails. The pandemic produces, perhaps for the first time *in the flesh*, a Cartesian subject—so firmly lodged within his or her 'cell of biovigilance' that he or she forgets that such existence was an illusion to begin with. In a striking comment on Spinoza's *conatus* (the tendency in all beings to conserve their own being), philosopher Shaj Mohan writes: 'if there is a tendency in everything (in so far as things are) it is to prolong itself sufficiently in a "milieu" in order to enjoy being-other-than-oneself, and to be elsewhere' (Mohan 2020).

Notes

¹ The times we're living in are expert at creating absences: sapping the meaning of life from society and the meaning of experience from life. This absence of meaning generates stringent intolerance toward anyone still capable of taking pleasure from simply being alive, from dancing, from singing. There's still a whole constellation of little groups of people who dance, sing, make it rain. The kind of zombie humanity we're being asked to join can't bear so much pleasure, so much fruition in life. So they holler on about the end of the world in the hope of making us give up on our dreams' (Krenak 2020, 32–33).

² For a thorough study of the performative and ethico-aesthetic aspects of becoming-imperceptible, see Schnor (forthcoming thesis).

³ In referencing Barad in relation to my idea of the prismatic body, it is important to note that Barad, in her critique of reflexivity as a trope for knowledge, groups reflection and refraction together as metaphors of sameness. Here, she follows Donna Haraway's lead and proposes diffraction as an alternative metaphor and methodology through which thinkers can attend to phenomena in their finer detail and difference. See Barad 2007 and Haraway 2004. Without devaluing Barad's diffractive methodology or the critique of reflexivity in general, I disagree that refraction is a metaphor for sameness. Whilst diffraction denotes the way waves bend and spread around an object, refraction designates the way a wave bends as it passes from one medium to another. As such, I find refraction a more apt metaphor than diffraction for the way movements within a haptic dance practice change as they pass through and between its moving parts. In a performing arts context, I prefer to imagine bodies as prismatic figures that re-refract whatever passes through them back into their environment, which then transform with every refractory act.

⁴ Regarding the notion of refractive milieu, cp. Manning 2016, 51: 'In time, in the art of time, what is activated is not a subject or an object, but a field of expression through which a different quality of experience is crafted. What art can do is to bypass the object as such and make felt instead the dissonance, the dephasing, the complementarity of the between, of what Deleuze calls the "revelatory" or refracting milieu.'

⁵ As this article is being written, the beautiful space described here, which has hosted CAMPO Arte Contemporânea for the past five years, has disappeared. The owners decided to end Demolition Incorporada's lease, tear down the building and turn it into a supermarket. Luckily, Evelin and producer Regina Veloso have now found a new space for CAMPO to continue in Teresina.

⁶ In Portuguese there is a distinction between mal (evil) and maldade (evilness). Whereas mal is the word for evil in the metaphysical sense of good vs. evil, maldade, on the other hand, is a much more ambiguous word. It alludes to a certain 'innocent cruelty,' to fairy tales and the imagination. Whenever Evelin would stage theatre acts as a child, his grandmother would simultaneously caution and encourage him by saying: 'here begins the invention of evilness' (Evelin, unpublished interview 2020).

⁷ Bruno Moreno (BR), Elliot Dehaspe (BE), Maja Grzeczcka (PL), Márcio Nonato (BR), Matteo Bifulco (IT), Rosângela Sulidade (BR) and Sho Takiguchi (JP).

⁸ See Artaud (1981), particularly the essay titled 'Production and Metaphysics'.

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Biography

Jonas Schnor, M.A., born in 1985 in Copenhagen, Denmark, is a dramaturge, writer and performance researcher. He has collaborated with choreographers and performance collectives across Europe and Brazil, most recently with Marcelo Evelin/Demolition Incorporada (BR) and Catarina Vieira at Das Arts Graduate School Amsterdam (PT/NL). He is currently a PhD student at the Center for Performance Philosophy, University of Surrey, Guildford, and a recipient of PhD stipends from both University of Surrey and the TECHNE consortium.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

TO BE POWERFUL WITHOUT THE MEANS OF POWER: *ACORDO* BY ALICE RIPOLL AND *AZDORA* BY MARKUS ÖHRN

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As you sit there

As you sit there, lost and intrigued, outraged and entertained, everything changes.

The chain of actions of *aCORdo* by choreographer Alice Ripoll leads to a flip that comes unexpected in the final scene. The whole performance is a finely tuned game of power balances and imbalances between spectators and performers until a last reversal, in which the whole situation is turned upside down. The participatory project *Azdora* by Markus Öhrn produces a more gradual and yet equally inevitable turn. Rather than a chain of actions, the spectators perceive a growing flow of force pushing so decisively on power relations that they see them turning into empowerment before their eyes. The relations of power at the core of this work are not those developing between performers and spectators; here the latter are invited as necessary witnesses of an emancipation process turning power 'downside up.'

Invited to write about power and powerlessness, we find ourselves going back to these two works, which stayed with us long after seeing them. Both works inhabit the tension between power as

restriction and power as empowerment; and rather than inviting you in, they settle within you. *aCORdo* by Alice Ripoll (seen at KunstenFestivaldesArts in 2018) choreographs the poles of this tension using authority, as a way to be ‘powerful without the means of power,’ in the words of Luisa Muraro. *Azdora* by Markus Öhrn (seen at Santarcangelo Festival in 2015) operates on ‘the radical transformation of self-representation’ cracking the *patria potestas* and making space for the feminine *potentia*, thinking along the lines proposed by Rosi Braidotti. In this article, we follow their lines of inquiry into these tensions, the glimpse they offer of an overturn from ‘power over’ to ‘power to,’ by putting them into dialogue with feminist thinkers, in order to investigate the ways these performances give substance to and articulate the affirmative side of power.

‘Subjection technologies reveal the negative side of power’—writes Braidotti quoting Foucault—‘but that’s not the whole picture. Power can be also affirmative as “*potentia*,” it doesn’t only produce resistance but also alternative subjectivation models’ (Braidotti 2019, 99, our translation). Both Muraro’s authority and Braidotti’s *potentia* are concepts situated in the positive area of the semantic field of power, the one oriented to the construction of possibilities and relationships: not the oppressive ‘power over’ but the generative ‘power to.’ In *Autorità*, Luisa Muraro explores the emancipatory potential of authority as the experience of

a change in a relationship [that can be felt as] an incitement to act and an increase of our possibilities. [Authority] asks to be acknowledged and practiced for what it promises [...], a symbolic force alternative to what oppresses us [...]. Without being *per se* good or bad, [authority] is oriented in a relational sense, it allows free consent and competes against power for the terrain of political gamble. (Muraro 2013, 49–50, our translation)

The main deed of authority is thus to ‘contribute to turning a disparity into a relationship of exchange and transformation’ (59). The alternative subjectivities emerging in the shift from *potere* to *potentia*, as described by Rosi Braidotti in *Materialismo Radicale*, are also oriented to relationality. They cannot be otherwise as the encounter with others is fundamental for their process of becoming. Here Braidotti is drawing on Deleuze and on Spinoza first, as she describes the *conatus*—the tension to and power of self-preservation that constitutes the essence of the individual in Spinoza—as ‘the subjectivity’s desire to cooperate, to connect, in order to increase the *potentiae* of the singularities and the *potentia* of the collectivity’ (Braidotti 2019, 39). The relational aspect is inherent to such *potentia* described as ‘the capability of enduring and resisting, known as the feminine noun of *potenza*. It is always the feminine *potenza* and never the masculine word *potere* (power). It’s always the subjectivation and never the subjection’ (ibid.).

In this article, we delve into *aCORdo* and into *Azdora*, with the aim of following their lead as they blur power relations and perform affirmative power. The two performances give a very specific body to the concepts of authority and *potentia* as they put forward specific identity markers: the poor man of colour and the industrious housewife. Yet, rather than setting at the centre the bodies themselves, the works complexify the relationship around these identities making use of performativity and theatrical conventions, hence unlocking multiple entry points into these concepts for their audiences and their performers.

A blurring movement

aCORdo, made by Brazilian choreographer Alice Ripoll and her company REC in 2017, suggests in its title a few possible meanings: the Portuguese word 'acordo' means among others 'wake up,' 'agreement' and 'accordance,' while the title can also be read in the way it is written: 'a cor do,' 'the colour of.' Commissioned by the exhibition *Que Legado (Which Legacy)*, the performance is a response to what would remain as a legacy for Rio de Janeiro, after the World Cup and the Olympics, great events that were supposed to bring improvements to a city heavily marked by social and economic inequalities and composed of different neighborhoods, including many *favelas* (slums). In response to this invitation—a response that, as any artistic gesture, does not answer a question but opens it up—*aCORdo* brings on stage the performers with whom Alice Ripoll had already been working for over eight years: young men of colour who live in a *favela* and who experience often the border separating the rich population from the poor, often invisibilized people that do participate in the life of higher classes as workers, but are criminalized and therefore regularly intimidated and often brutalized by police. In this sense, Rio does not look any different than the global society at large. Its life and balances are grounded in heavy demarcations and separations marked by a clear perspective upon the relationships between different kinds of people. The legacy of the events, Alice Ripoll and her performers suggest, risks to just be an enhancement of these distinctions, an intensification of the set of violences that keep separation going and protect the part of society that does not want to be confronted with other subjectivities. This is the historical legacy of a country suffering from capitalist extractivism and a colonization process that has marginalized a part of the population and keeps it marginalized in many ways. This same power structure is mirrored by the theatrical apparatus that *aCORdo* approaches and transforms: historically, the theatre has proposed a gaze based on differentiation and distance, and a sharp separation between an 'us' and a 'them.' It is upon this form and its ideology that Ripoll constructs her performance, and over the performance itself blurs it and finally flips it over, turning the theatre into a device that can make us aware of the positions we are in and the power relations connecting them.

The performance starts with the small group of audience being seated in a room, on simple chairs positioned on two, or sometimes depending on the venue three, sides of the squared space, staring at four bodies—four young men, black or brown skinned—laying on the ground and slowly moving around and over each other. Their movement resembles some contact-improvisation practice but is slowed down into a choreographic score where stillness and just weighting (over the floor, over each other) is as important as touching, supporting, and composing an organic, collective body. The audience is addressed as a collective viewer, and the actions being danced, the movements being moved, take different shades ranging from fatigue to abandon: the movements are slow but restless, the bodies weigh over the floor but never release completely. At some point, one of the performers stands up and starts dancing, followed by the others: one by one, the bodies are mobilized and each of them finds its language in what looks like a dance or a contest, growing in intensity and speed. The costumes become more visible here, as a signifier of

a class or social belonging: workers' clothes that also resemble a uniform—could be a worker's, but also a prisoner's one. The dancers are barefoot, and their movements gradually grow into a very physical choreography, with references to dancing and to fighting, until a moment of surrender comes, and the bodies with their heavy breathing crawl and roll over each other. These movements get the dancers very close to the spectators, who remain a comfortable majority of passive viewers and yet become addressed more directly and more personally by the performance. The spectators sitting on opposite sides also become more aware of each other, since they are now being seen through the moving bodies of the dancers, like a double is seen in a mirror. At some point, the four performers lay on the floor again, this time in line, one next to the other, and one by one each dancer rolls over his companions. Their breathing is the only sound in the silent room, and the small noises made by the spectators become audible too. When the dancers stand again, three of them are carrying the fourth one. He lays abandoned and relaxed over their arms and is carried around as a dead body being taken away from the place of an accident or a murder. The same body is then taken by one of his peers and carefully posed over the body of a spectator or two, given to them as one could give the body of a sleepy child to a parent. The body, still heavy, becomes something to be handled with care, not just by 'his' community but by 'us,' the strangers, the spectators.

In a dramaturgy made of gradual, organic shifts in terms of relation between and among the bodies involved, this is a turning point. The first, and yet not the most radical, switch of positions. With just one gesture, the bodies of the dancers transform from being agents into being acted upon, and the bodies of spectators are suddenly mobilized: their arms are now carrying someone's shoulders or legs, their sitting position is renegotiating its balance to accommodate the weight of another body and prevent it from falling. The scene keeps unfolding, with each of the performers holding the body of a companion and giving it to some audience members, and these same bodies—the ones that carry and bring, the ones that are carried and release—slowly start pulling out some personal belongings of the spectators (a pair of glasses, a scarf, a watch, a necklace, a wallet, a set of keys...), to either put them in their pocket, or bring them to another spectator. These two actions—the carrying and moving of bodies, and the pulling out and redistributing of objects—continue, intertwined with each other, in a calm pace where the dancers oscillate between activity and passivity, being now the moving bodies and now the released bodies, and taking and giving in a circularity that is potentially never ending.

The theatrical conventions play a pivotal role here: nobody in the audience seems to be bothered or worried by something that pertains to the realm of fiction and representation. The theatre is a symbolic space for spectators to soften their behaviors and let some cracks open into conventions and social patterns that would not normally open in the reality of a social gathering. What happens exactly in the moment that we hold an unknown body, that a young strong man is just laying upon us, in complete surrender? What, when the same guy is softly pulling out our necklace or glasses, or opening our bag and taking our wallet or mobile phone? How are we negotiating between resistance and abandon, how do we make the decision to let this happen? What series of assumptions and anticipations does this set in motion? And what does this say about the borders that normally protect us as individuals—our skin, our clothes, our belongings, our beliefs and behaviors?

Here the focus is on how vulnerability and precariousness are constitutive of human, and therefore social and political life. By 'precariousness,' thinkers such as Judith Butler and Isabell Lorey denote the socio-ontological dimension of individual lives as always precarious and co-dependent (see Butler 2004, Puar 2012 and Lorey 2015). Vulnerability, as well as the impossibility of being autonomous that Butler and Athanasiou (2013) also connect to dispossession, are conditions of human life and affect human bodies and relations. As humans, we can only be born when someone else is there with us, and birth is a perfect example of the 'being two' (Irigaray 2001) as constitutive of existence. Individually and collectively, our survival depends on each other: there is no such thing as the autonomous, independent individual.

Indeed, while precaritization is an ongoing process that 'allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space,' precariousness defines 'a function of our social vulnerability and exposure that is always given some political form.' And while precaritization 'is surely a form of power without a subject, which is to say that there is no one center that propels its direction and destruction,' precarity is 'differentially distributed, and so one important dimension of the unequal distribution of conditions required for continued life' (Butler in Puar 2012). *aCORdo* seems to choreograph these terms and to use the theatre as the device that, by assigning positions and defining identities, provides a space to mold subjectivities and to situate and embody discourses. It offers the opportunity to do and undo identities, to exchange positions, to redefine one subjectivity in relation to the others, in multiple and ever-changing ways. Ripoll and the performers are very cautious in not proposing this as a smooth and harmless process though: there is a lot at stake in this possibility that the theatre offers, and those subjects that are more often marginalized are softly but firmly taking the agency that the theatre offers them, while spectators are confronted in their privilege and the responsibilities that come with it. While the positions of performers and spectators never become or pretend to become symmetrical in their power relations, power is in fact molded and transformed and passed on to others, blurring any clear distinction between doing and surrendering, taking and giving.

Vulnerability becomes mutual in this scene: when the bodies of the performers lean on the spectators, they surrender and give their power away, while at the same time taking power over when they start pulling valuable objects from the bodies that are supporting them and keep them or gently pass them over to other hands, other bodies. For a moment, it is not very clear who is leaning on whom, who depends on whom here. As well as it is very unclear what is *actually* going on there, what other shift is going to follow, which action will come next in this chain.

Movement is key here: bodies keep moving, pauses are just marking the separation or the connection between two different postures, relations do not settle in but keep being transformed. Spectators are pushed to experience on their skin how a relationship can only act if acknowledged, and how personal borders can reinforce or vanish according to specific circumstances. *aCORdo* challenges the forms of mutual acknowledgments that are made available to us in the theatre, and how they mirror, but can also switch, the positions that are made available in social and political life. This is where *aCORdo* leads its spectators until just before the final scene, which once again shifts agency and suggests how 'power over' and 'power to' are connected. Different subjectivities,

the performance keeps suggesting, may in any moment switch their positions and role, and move into another configuration, other balances and imbalances.

Before leaving this room

The final flip of *aCORdo* builds upon the state of softened energy earlier produced by the performance, to hit the spectators hard. Keeping the same calm pace that characterized the previous scenes, the four dancers—some spectators' bags on their shoulders, wallets, phones and other objects in their pockets and jewelry around their necks and arms—slowly stand up and move to stand in line next to the door facing the wall, their hands against it, the heads slightly reclined and the gazes towards the floor. They are taking the typical position imposed by the police when checking whether someone is carrying something illegal. A position often meant to intimidate, and sometimes also beat up, individuals that at the eyes of the authorities are seen as either 'dangerous' or not worthy of trust and respect.

Making their bodies available for a police check is the ultimate gesture of the performers, who will not move from this position. Far from ending the performance though, this action calls for a counter-action of the spectators, that can sometimes be immediate and sometimes more mindful. Sooner or later, one by one the audience members stand up and get their belongings back, before passing through the open door and leaving the room. There is no interaction in this final scene, no reaction of the four bodies to the inquiries of stranger hands that search their belongings, often hesitant between the sense of legitimacy given by owning a property, and the sensitivity of an audience that has just experienced how power relations operate, and what place each of us occupies in the world. What does it produce within the spectators to have to search the performers, therefore objectifying them into a representation of the undesirable, possibly criminal inhabitants of the *favelas*? What internal negotiation must be going on within them, between the pragmatic need to get their belongings back before leaving the theatre, and the emotional response to the humanly complex choreography that they have just been part of?

The whole choreography of *aCORdo* speaks of fatigue, search for support, trust, vulnerability, shift in position and mutual responsibilities. The relation that the performance establishes between performers and spectators seems to be based on *authority* and in this last scene becomes a statement about the possibility that the theatre provides to make it circulate among those whom it gathers together.

When writing the short, dense text *Autorità* some years ago, the aim of Italian philosopher Luisa Muraro was to explore and reposition a concept that has long been misunderstood and connotated with negative meanings, probably because of its proximity, which is only literal though, with its abuse, authoritarianism. According to Muraro, who also refers to a wide spectrum of ancient and modern philosophers, authority is first of all 'a relationship among people' (Muraro 2013, 16). Authority is indeed not a prerogative of someone, nor is it assigned by official roles or positions. It only springs from a mutual, often silent agreement: we can acknowledge authority to someone, and can act upon our own authority when this is acknowledged to us by others. In this understanding, authority is a foundation for all human political behavior based upon or heading towards a sense of agency towards one's own life, and responsibility towards one's own position

within a collective entity. Authority, states Muraro, allows us all—those who are granted with authority as well as those granting it—to be ‘powerful without the means of power’ (49). By insisting on relationality, authority opens up possibilities of mutual emancipation and acknowledges the agency of everyone who is involved in a relation, since while ‘power can skip the consent or get it by means of deceit, authority cannot act if the other does not acknowledge it’ (71).

An interesting point about authority, as Muraro writes in the very last pages of her text, is how we can ‘let authority act in situations that indeed seem to require the intervention of power’ (103). In the final scene of *aCORdo*, performers and spectators embody how authority can act even in situations that are normally governed by power, if only the people involved in the relationship acknowledge it and allow it to be. Should we be able to obey authority rather than power, and empower ourselves and the others to act upon our own authority, political relations could be complexified, blurred and blended. In the moment of the final, radical flip of power, the spectators of *aCORdo* are forced to realize that the performers had until that moment acted upon authority indeed, an authority that was granted to them by the theatrical coordinates framing the event. The only affirmative power that we as spectators are offered by the performers, is in the end the power of not exercising our power over them. No matter how long the moment of suspension lasts, before the first spectator approaches the body of the performer who got some of their personal belongings and gets them back by touching and grabbing, that moment is a moment of potential and awareness, a real suspension where we can contemplate the possibility that relations and power dynamics can change.

aCORdo complexifies these patterns of power relations by showing how reality and fiction are entangled, and how a performance can play with the conventions of theatre, also implying that an artistic experience is approached as a form of exception from the coordinates of reality. First the conventions of representation are established, and then they are taken away with a subtle, silent gesture. How did we behave when these conventions were being applied, and how do we behave when the conventions shift and we return to reality? The performance produces a powerful rupture in the pattern of power relations, and then gives the audience the power of maintaining and expanding it, or letting it shut down again and surrender to the known forms of how power operates within and among us. The final scene leaves us the audience in the moment that we get back to our socially-located identity (mostly white, middle class, well educated, liberal...) and have to experience some discomfort in inhabiting it, in being contained by our skin. Skin is indeed explored as a border in *aCORdo*, not just because of the awareness that the work creates about how a darker skin-tone is normally perceived, especially when accompanied by other personal traits such as male gender, young age and working-class outfit. The skin becomes the border because we get touched and we touch: the surface of our bodies, that is also how we are in contact with clothes and accessories that define and express us, becomes the terrain of an intimate and yet tense exchange.

With its final flip, *aCORdo* makes a simple and consequent gesture that becomes somewhat world-changing. The whole performance slowly builds up towards its ending, nevertheless we do not see it coming, and when the power relations shift, they open up to an altogether new constellation of relations. One where authority can fully operate, in its being ‘powerful, without the means of power,’ if only we let it.

Azdora

Killing the angel in the house ca. 100 years later

Invited to deliver a speech at the National Society for Women's Service in 1931, Virginia Woolf speaks about the Angel in the House, a phantom much harder to kill than a reality, getting in her way during the writing process, hampering her career as a woman writer.

It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her [...] I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. (Woolf 1931, 151)

Azdora and the Angel in the House share much of their identities. Azdora is the traditional housewife of the Romagna region, and although her image and qualities belong to a past epoch, the word is still used in the everyday language of the region. A quick search on Google will result in thousands of images featuring home-made tortellini, piles of dirty dishes to wash and the *azdore* themselves: smiling middle-aged women with an apron and a rolling pin. The website 'The Myths of Romagna' offers the following description of the *azdora*: 'Ruddy-faced and a little dirty with flour, with her hair collected in a headscarf or a hat, she is the positive symbol of a tireless industriousness and the cornerstone of the traditional family' (Miti di Romagna, n.d.).

The *azdora* tends to fulfill the etymology of her name, becoming the bearing column of the household—a powerful and yet subordinate subject—the Angel in the House devoted to the care of others and of others' feelings at the price of her own.

In his site-specific project *Azdora*, realised for Santarcangelo Festival in 2015, Markus Öhrn works on the consequences of this care labour and on the chances of transformation of the contemporary Angels in the House from the Romagna region. Interested in this figure, Öhrn involved 28 women from Santarcangelo who, gathered through an open call, committed to the artist's long-term project investigating the destructive and undomesticated side of the *azdora* and the possibility of emancipation.

Part of the starting point is biographical: Markus Öhrn recalls how his grandmother's biggest remorse was that of having always put others in front of herself. In an interview, he says: 'I was born in northern Sweden, in a patriarchal society, where the values of the nuclear family are the only "existing" and accepted ones. I never felt at home in such an environment and I witnessed the consequences that this system has on people with a different lifestyle.' The consequences for women exceed the biographical and enter the structural: if men and children are allowed to be angry, destructive or childish, insofar as these behaviours are accepted as part of their 'nature' or

personalities, women are often encouraged during their education to avoid anger and refrain from making trouble as it is considered unfitting.

In 'The Promise of Happiness,' Sara Ahmed proposes to look at 'gendered scripts as "happiness scripts"' (Ahmed 2010, 59): happiness, or more specifically its promise, orients women's desires and behaviors, binding their happiness to that of others and towards 'happy objects' that are presumed to be good and promising of happiness such as marriage and motherhood. Sara Ahmed reports Arlie Russell Hochschild's example of the bride who, even in the case of a gap between the expected feeling of happiness and a different actual feeling, has to 'save the day by feeling right' and 'prompts herself to be happy' with the given situation (41). Within the workings of this narrative, there is no room for expressions of anger or behaviors that would disturb the making of a happy home. Not by chance, it's the figure of the happy housewife—and not that of the happy woman—whose genealogy is reconstructed by Sara Ahmed in order to investigate the emergence of the unhappy housewife and the 'feminist killjoy,' two figures whose negativity challenges, in Ahmed's opinion, 'the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal' (53).

Azdora gives shape to an artistic attempt performed by housewives from Santarcangelo of emancipating themselves from the promise of happiness. The project was born out of their encounter with Markus Öhrn, Jakob Öhrman and the musician ? Alos (Stefania Pedretti). It occupies a space for the whole duration of the festival and opens its doors to the audience once a day for 10 days, in the evening, for a transformative black-metal ritual. Spazio Saigi—*Club Azdora*—is a former warehouse, which was used mainly for the storage of wheat. It's a sultry shed with no windows, whose obscurity is interrupted only by a glimmer of light coming from the heavy black curtain hanging at the entrance door. Coming from outside, the presence of *Azdora* is marked by the audience gathering before the start of the daily ritual. Once inside, as the eyes get used to the dark, it is possible to see a merchandising corner, where fans and t-shirts featuring the writing 'azdora' printed on them in gothic characters are on sale. The rest of the space is only dimly visible and in the absence of a stage or any sitting option, the audience is left wandering around. The space might resemble a squat, there are some writings on the walls—the list of rituals that compose the project—as well as some video documentation featuring the azdore.

On the first evening, 'RITUAL #1 A New Beginning,' they wear the make-up we would get used to seeing them in everyday, with their faces painted in white, big black circles around their eyes and black lipstick. They wear their own clothes. Some wear slippers, some have plastic hairpins in their hair. They all seem to be rather indifferent to the audience's presence, immersed as they are in their own club. Then, in the second room, equally dark, hot and damp, a washing machine appears, stage-lit and ready for action. Brooms and mop sticks are leaning on it. One *azdora* plays a bell with a stick, announcing the start of the ritual. Another one, sitting on a throne, starts urging the others to action through a microphone with a hoarse voice. She says: '*Dai, dai, dai...*' (the equivalent in English is the colloquial 'come on'). The soundscape absorbs these sounds in an atmosphere of anticipation. In the smoke, one of them hits the washing machine, her posture and body express power and determination. Others join in, one at the time, hitting the appliance with a broom or a mop stick. As the hitting stops and the chorus of '*Dai, dai, dai*' becomes more and more decisive,

the washing machine starts spinning its drum and making small jumps, some parts are shot out of its door and its top falls apart piece by piece. In an increasing rhythm, the machine self-destructs and the lights go off.

Azdora was shaped during a long residency period, documented through some videos made available inside Spazio Saigi. They feature the *azdore* involved in exercises like destroying cars with baseball bats in a junkyard or as they walk through the city or on the beach pulling off small childish stunts. Also during the festival days, it was possible to come across an *azdora* armed with a water pistol, who might or might not spray you. *Azdora* is in fact multiple things at the same time: a concentration of performative images, a process of transformation, a participatory art project, a black metal fantasy, an ongoing emancipation workshop, a social and artistic ritual. Following its lead means thus thinking through its multilayeredness and its processuality.¹

In the second and the third ritual, the *azdore* open up their club to a closer encounter with the audience. In 'RITUAL #2 The Confession,' people are offered a one-on-one meeting with one *azdora*, with whom they could exchange memories, stories and secrets connected to an important *azdora* of their life. In 'RITUAL #3 Eternal Commitment,' a commission of *azdore* listens to 10 people from the audience as they, one at the time, describe why they want the name of one *azdora* tattooed on them. They then decide on the one person, who will actually be tattooed in the course of the ritual. The audience, gathered around the commission, witnesses the interviews and then the tattooing, which is also video-projected on the wall. This ritual punctuates the entire trajectory of *Azdora*, as it is repeated also on the seventh and tenth day.

'Every revolution'—writes Braidotti—'includes the culture of and the radical transformation of self-representation' (Braidotti 2019, 105). This was very clear to Virginia Woolf, quoted also by Braidotti, whose battle with the Angel in the House is made harder by the fact that she is a representation: 'Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her' (Woolf 1931, 151). Virginia Woolf describes the violent struggle entailed in such radical transformation that is no different than killing a part one's self. Even if the killing is successful, no one will give back a woman the time and the labour she invested in this form of emancipatory self-destruction: 'Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been spent upon learning Greek grammar; or in roaming the world in search of adventures' (ibid).

The *azdore* seem to be killing a fictional figure by means of fiction. Their presence and practices are dark and shining at the same time. In their clothes and attitudes, they combine the artistic imaginary of Markus Öhrn, with their own imaginaries, desires, and everyday objects. Folkloristic head-scarfs fall into place within a black-metal aesthetic and body-building and tattoo culture meet and mingle with matriarchal figures. They are *azdore* unbuilding the fictional figure of the *azdora* by embodiment and transformation. As they embody it as real *azdore*, they also engage with her destructive side through their real bodies and stories. They operate radically on their (self-

)representation and construct new fictions for themselves and for others. At their Club, the audience is completely immersed in the space. The *azdore* embody their *potentia*, they make their 'power to' palpable and as this power reverberates through the music, the humidity and the obscurity, the public's bodies can only be set as witnesses. The atmosphere is charged with energy and yet rich in funny and entertaining ingredients. It tunes in to eerie and ironic elements, it blends the ceremonial and the farcical. As a witness, one smiles and at the same time is made very aware of the seriousness of the process they see: a 180° turn of self-representation injected with irony, fear and excitement.

In 'Nomadic Ethics,' Braidotti describes the radical transformation of a subjectivity as occurring also on the level of representation and identity models: 'a radical process of de-familiarisation or dis-identification from dominant representational and even self-representational practices' (Braidotti 2013, 348).

Azdora is an outburst of joyful passions. In it, the transformation of subjectivity is made suddenly palpable as the curious idea that it might as well just begin with a joyful destruction of the self. In the *patria potestas* (the father's power and property), the feminine *potentia* took the stage. Continuing with a paraphrase of Braidotti's words, in *Azdora*, killing the Angel in the House did not claim to cancel the consequences of the unbalanced distribution of reproductive and emotional labour; it tried to transcend the resignation and powerlessness that follows the struggle of killing a subjectifying self-representation, and the time invested in it. In the celebratory destruction of the self performed by the *azdore*, the struggle was still present but, in this case, the time for roaming in search of adventures was not lost forever, rather it appeared as it had just begun.

The making of

The transformation of self-representation brought about in *Azdora* intensifies gradually in the second half of the festival, when the rituals become more disturbing and compelling.

'RITUAL #6 The Path of Pain and Understanding' presents some elements that will come back in other rituals and are particularly charged with meaning. Like all the other rituals, this one appears in a density of noise music, obscurity and smoke. Also the throne, another recurring element of the rituals, is there. An *azdora* sits on it dominating the floor, where a circuit has been prepared. The audience standing around witnesses two naked men covering the circuit on all fours. Three *azdore* mark three points on the path, a fourth one completes it sitting on the throne. Every time a man reaches a point he gets hit by the *azdora*. She spans him with no hesitation or mercy, armed with different instruments, some more or less ascribable to the sadomasochistic imaginary, some coming with a hard impact, some with a softer one. It doesn't take long to realize that the two men are Markus Öhrn and his artistic collaborator Jakob Öhrman. As they pass the *azdora* on the throne, she asks: 'do you understand?'—her voice emerges in the thick noise music. The two men masturbate and set off for another round on the path of pain and understanding. The exchange of roles is clear as the male artist submits to the women participating in his artistic project, and through the sadomasochistic metaphor, gives up his power and control becoming the slave of his mistresses.

'RITUAL #8 The Gathering' was closed to the public. It was a party only for *azdore*. Only those who partook in the project as well as others—friends of theirs who also are *azdore*—were invited. A black metal noise concert was performed for them, they put on costumes and the usual make up on each other and had their friends over in the club. Markus Öhrn and Jakob Öhrman, this time in latex bodysuits, walked on their hands and knees to serve the *azdore*, who took once again the mistresses' role. In a video interview given on the day after, Markus Öhrn, Stefania Pedretti and Jakob Öhrman describe the trajectory undertaken by the *azdore*: 'Yesterday we could see what we have created, that is the real thing. Yes, there are performances that you can go and see every night. That's something but the real thing is what happens between them now. It's its own organism, we don't control it anymore.' They tell about the *azdore* becoming familiar with black metal noise music and starting to build a relationship to it—'Stereotypically you wouldn't think that an old woman would start liking metal or noise but they do.' Also the face painting is recalled as an important element, which was questioned at the beginning but towards the end of the festival became a tool to transform: 'they put it on and they become something else. It's like opening Pandora's box, then they can do what they want...' (Santarcangelo Festival 2015).

The single rituals are set in a trajectory that pushes the energy higher and higher, as the *azdore* move from more familiar and innocent actions—such as destroying a washing machine—to more ruthless actions and practices that one would assume to be distant from them—such as whipping a sexual slave before a live audience. The three tattooing rituals frame this *crescendo*, which is traceable at the aesthetic level in the make-up and clothing of the *azdore* that gradually develop to find their final shape in a figure whose appearance recalls an evil folkloristic creature and whose presence is unsettling and mesmerizing.

Already by the day of 'RITUAL #6,' the radical transformation seems not only to have begun but also to be in full becoming. Witnessing any of the rituals, one would find oneself before a subject in becoming—quoting Rosi Braidotti—made concrete by performance. Following the entire trajectory would bring to the surface the gradual development of such becoming: a subject being made, and being made by herself in a radical interconnection with others. In this case, other *azdore* and the public. By the evening of 'RITUAL #10 Eternal Commitment. Rebirth and Final Liberation,' marking the end of this part of *Azdora*, each of them became a woman who had killed the *azdora* in herself, and got rid of that naturalised identity snooping around her own businesses, and was now a creative subject on a stage. This process was definitely singular and, at the same time, it didn't resemble a solitary emancipatory effort as the one described by Virginia Woolf. Rather, it was made available on stage as a radically collective affair. The celebratory destruction of the self gave way to celebrating rebirth as a subject in becoming with others. Drawing on Spinoza, Braidotti describes how negative affects 'harm the capabilities of a subject to establish relationships with others and thus to grow together.' The emancipation of the *azdore* appears as a process of liberation from those negative affects, an unlocking of joyful passions able to nurture 'high levels of interdependence—the dependence on otherness—which is also the key to understanding the subject as "non-unitary"' (Braidotti 2019, 136).

The rituals produce a conflicting set of affects, made of wonder, distance, curiosity, respect, discomfort and fun: the making of a group of women making individual women, and individual women making a group of women. In this sense, what the audience witnesses is not the making of another subjectivity but the subjects in the making, through a collective practice. It is because this process is made so concrete and so accessible through performance, that the question 'what now?' becomes pivotal—the making of new subjects in the making is now concretely beyond theatrical representation.

What happens after a participatory art project has been a point of discussion and critique in many instances—a fundamental reference in this sense is Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells* (2012)—because of the paradoxes of participation that such projects carry with them. The above-mentioned interview ends with the following:

After Sunday they will be again at home cooking for their husbands, so we have a responsibility to continue this somehow, to let them use this energy further [...] The goal would be that it would be their own organisation. I mean, there is a quite big problematic thing of course...it's about the mother but once more again, maybe one can say that it was initiated by me, I am a man and once again the man is telling the woman how you can be free...I would like for it to become their own group. I just want to look upon myself as a starter, together with these two, and then that it would, you know, live its own life, so it doesn't become Markus Öhrn's project in the end.

The project remained Markus Öhrn's but *Azdora* did undertake its own path. The artists accompanied the *azdore* as the whole group returned to Santarcangelo festival in 2016 for black metal noise concert and the release of the LP 'Dai,' and also toured in Italy (Xing, Bologna) and in Germany (Wiesbaden Biennale, in 2016 and Kampnagel in Hamburg in 2018). In 2017, without the artists who initiated the project but without abandoning the aesthetic developed with them, the *azdore* opened a bed and breakfast for artists during the festival; and in 2019 they performed a ritual—*Azdora's Temple: greetings to Eva Britt Niemi*—to remember and honor Markus Öhrn's grandmother. In August 2019, soon after the final iteration in Santarcangelo, the whole project came to an end with a ritual in Niskanpää, the village where Eva Britt Niemi was born and spent all her life. The *azdore* were in residency there and performed a series of actions, including a final ritual on her grave.

Rosi Braidotti describes the subject in becoming as a subject 'freed from being One, [who] starts functioning as a junction for many diverse intersections and encounters with a multiple otherness' (Braidotti 2019). In her perspective, the ethics corresponding to these subjectivities unfold in the radical relationality that belongs to power as *potenza*. In her Spinozian view, we look for the encounters with others, and multiple others, which increase our agency, the capability of our bodies to act, our productive power. The multiple otherness as Braidotti conceives it, didn't belong to *Azdora*, whose group was homogeneous in terms of identity. Yet, on that stage and off it, it was possible to see 'an embodied subjectivity,' who could truly be—and probably was—in a process of transformation embedded in a radical interdependency with others: a group of bodies desiring the

encounters with others, and becoming together with others as they represent, embody and perform a flip: from power over to power to.

The traces of *Azdora* are very alive in its participants and in its witnesses as the desire to continue working together shows. What certainly remained to the women, next to all this, is the women themselves as witnesses of each other's making and of the process of making themselves as a group.

Aftermath

aCORdo and *Azdora* set in motion forms of spectatorship, identities and relationalities, shuffling the constellations of power at the theatre. In these two shows, a relational space is set up by someone specific, a body carrying an identity marker, for somebody—a more or less varied group of people gathered there as spectators of something about to happen—who will exit affected by the relationships that appeared and unfolded in these encounters.

In *aCORdo*, the performers create and use this relational space by gently but radically operating a series of shifts of position and finally, inviting the audience to walk through the very same door they had entered at the beginning, and get back into the world—the 'real' world—shaken, questioned, or even transformed, awakened, supported, sparked. In *Azdora*, the spectators are invited to an already existing space of relations whose processes they can attend to almost only as an echochamber, and are left with the awareness of being witnesses of a transformation that, while not being about them, affects them deeply.

Here, spectatorship is put to work by two very marked kinds of bodies, that of people of colour coming from a poor and violent background, and that of the women as housewives. To their audiences, they come with a proposal of radical relationality, moving apart from the theatrical audience situation. At the beginning, both *aCORdo* and *Azdora* operate a clear distinction between the performers and the audience. A dichotomy is stated either by marking a separation between their roles and the place they are assigned to, or by emphasizing the differences between bodies that at a first sight are read on the basis of the identity politics marking them, and bodies that, mingled within the temporary collectivity of an audience, do not appear in all their individual complexities.

Yet, as the actions unfold, both pieces hinge on the identities they put forward, making complex the relationships around them rather than the bodies attached to them, and do so by also involving the other bodies convened by the theatrical setup: those of the audience. In *aCORdo*, the relationships shaping the theatrical convention, in which the public is more directly called into question, are maneuvered in order to let performers and audience soften their fixed identities and roles by experiencing each other's vulnerability, and acknowledging their interdependency as much as the asymmetries entailed in it. In *Azdora*, the relationships that helped shape the fixed identity of the housewife gradually make room for the relationships that unbuild it: the spectators reverberate and recognise themselves in both, bitterly acknowledging the first in their own

identities, families, constellations, and cheering and cherishing the second as they witness the rituals of transformation.

Ultimately, both performances flip around a set of relationships between fixed identities and open them up to often unnoticed ways of performing power and authority, thus setting conditions for the experience of an affirmative *potentia*. The strategies put in place are different, somewhat opposite. In the case of *aCORdo*, the capability to act—the *potentia*—is triggered by the performers and then left to the audience. Still, for the spectators, not acting or at least suspending the moment of acting feels like the most responsible option, when the position they are given is, not differently than in everyday society, a position of oppressing and acting upon structural violence, that the theatrical device reveals its most subtle nuance of innocence. In *Azdora*, the *potentia* fills the atmosphere as the power to roam in search of new adventures and to get rid of one identity in order to embrace the subject's tendency to be in becoming. The emancipation that comes with it is for the *azdore* though. The audience can be deeply touched and inspired, but they are also reminded of their position as necessary witnesses to a ritual meant for those who perform it.

The encounters taking place in the frame of these performances make visible the deep lines binding and separating bodies, identities and subjectivities as they let emerge transformative processes of becoming. Here, is where they intertwine, embedding these transformation processes in a radical relationality. *aCORdo* builds on authority in order to complexify power relations and sections a field of tensions drawn taut by opposed identities—black and white, poor and rich, actors and spectators—with the notion of a subject that is always dependent on and constituted by others. *Azdora* puts on stage a nomadic subject in the making, to be witnessed in her constitution through a process of creative destruction that is operated by herself and by others. A woman 'desiring metamorphic processes of the self, of the society, and of her representation models' (Braidotti 2019, 130).

Intertwining spectatorship, identity and relationality into a composite, *aCORdo* and *Azdora* unbuild fixed identities to show their relational constitution, every performance anew. They entertain the idea that power might be replaced with authority as suggested by Muraro, and that identity could be overcome making room for subjectivity as proposed by Braidotti, also by means of performance.

Notes

¹ Here the complete list of rituals: 'RITUAL #1 New Beginning' followed 'RITUAL #2 The Confession,' 'RITUAL #3 Eternal Commitment,' 'RITUAL #4 Enlightenment through Darkness, noise and chaos,' 'RITUAL #5 Transcendental Demolition,' 'RITUAL #6 The Path of Pain and Understanding,' 'RITUAL #7 The Eternal Commitment,' 'RITUAL #8 The Gathering,' 'RITUAL #9 Aftermath,' 'RITUAL #10 Eternal Commitment. Rebirth and Final Liberation.'

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Biographies

Silvia Bottiroli, PhD, lives in Bologna and works as an independent curator, researcher, organizer and educator in the field of performing arts. Her current research is focused on the politics of performativity and spectatorship and on the intersections between artistic and curatorial practices and education. She was the artistic director of DAS Theatre in Amsterdam (2018–2021) and of Santarcangelo Festival (2012–2016). She curated various artistic, discursive, and educational platforms, collaborating among others with Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels), Vooruit (Ghent), Homo Novus Festival (Riga) and School of Visual Theatre (Jerusalem). Since 2011 she has taught Methodology, Critique, and Research in the Arts at Bocconi University in Milan and since 2019 she has cocurated together with Kee Hong Low the programme *For the Time Being* for Freespace in Hong Kong.

Livia Andrea Piazza (Brussels/Giessen) works as researcher and practitioner in the field of performing arts. Since 2019, she has been a research and teaching fellow for Artistic Practice at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies (Justus Liebig University) in Giessen; and since 2018 she has taught at Bocconi University (Milan). She holds a PhD in Cultural Studies (Leuphana University Lüneburg, 2015) and her current academic research focusses on the political economy of performance. She has engaged with different collective research platforms (a.o. Aleppo/Brussels, Critical Practice Made in YU) and, as a practitioner, she has worked as an independent dramaturg and as a curator for discursive programs within festivals and art institutions, such as Santarcangelo Festival (IT), Homo Novus Festival (LV), DAS Theatre (NL), a.pass (BE), PACT Zollverein (DE).

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

POWERLESSNESS AS POTENTIALITY

Gigi Argyropoulou on artistic self-organisation in times of crisis, the micro-physics of power in theatre occupations, and how performance can learn from children. An interview by Eve Katsouraki and Georg Döcker.

GIGI ARGYROPOULOU INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER, DRAMATURG, AND CURATOR
GEORG DÖCKER UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON
EVE KATSOURAKI UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND

In the interview that follows, myself (Eve Katsouraki) and Georg Döcker had in mind one central question from which a number of co-related issues emerged. This question concerned the forms of performance-making available to us today that can claim to possibly oppose ongoing crises in our society in ways that might make viable the realisation of radically democratic goals. On that basis, we talked to curator, theorist and performance-maker Gigi Argyropoulou about her insights from her involvement with the Embros theatre occupation in Athens in 2011, and, more recently, the initiative Eight (Το Οχτώ)—two processes of material, political, and institutional expression that investigate the creative potential inherent in social relations of a communal performance-making, notably as resistance to neoliberal imposition. In deepening and extending democratic relations as part of performance-making itself, what begins to emerge are not only new methods and practices, but a more pressing objective: what theatre as an institution should look like, what conceptual resources would be required, and how we could negotiate the complexities that inevitably emerge from resorting to more participatory democratic practices. In searching for a more democratic theatre, within the purview of a model of creative expression and institutional critique, we also often stumble at who and how one makes artistic and political decisions in such cultural, artistic settings?

For thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), as well as Jacques Derrida and John Caputo (1997, 106–8), there is always a degree of danger to the idea of the “community,” in that it tends to express collectivity as a form that, although shared, can often be static, homogenous, and reluctant to internal criticism of its power relations. In this interview, we explore this problematic more closely through the processes of creating theatre *communally* while also searching for an alternative to the language of the “community” with which to create a radically democratic space for theatre making. A useful suggestion in this respect can be found, for instance, in the work of radical economist Massimo de Angelis who prefers to talk about the ideas of “commons” as opposed to community, commons comprising social spheres of life rather than cultural homogeneity or shared identity; their unifying objective is to “provide various degrees of protection from the market” (2007, 145). The commons therefore denote a shared interest in defending and producing a set of common resources which in theatre making becomes the basis, potentially, of setting democratic processes of creative and social relationships. This offers the prospect of political theatre enacting a community as “commons,” to borrow from Nancy, of “consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing” (1991, 40) which seems to be what Argyropoulou discusses when untangling the dynamics of creating collectively in a cohabited public space.

The philosophical nature of *decision*, as explained by Derrida (1988, 166) is at the core of the theatre projects that Argyropoulou partakes in: decision, not in terms of a stylistic or aesthetic choice, but in terms of who decides what, and how, which as a process of determination is also always the result of undecidability too. Undecidability is what causes these decisions to be made in the first place. For this reason, Derrida locates a paradox at the heart of every decision. A decision releases a potentially interminable deliberation while putting an end to this deliberation at the very same time. This is why Søren Kierkegaard pondered that decisions naturally evoke a degree of “madness” (1987), as the arbitrary nature of decision making presupposes a sense of potentiality that is being conjured as much as it is exhausted in the decision. The collective capacities for decision making in radically democratic theatre practices that we discuss in this interview open up the way to a prospect not immediately felt: that the radical democratization of theatre in Embros and Eight introduces, first of all, a proposition whose key purpose may be one of opposition to the cultural and political system, that is, the local political structures in Greece and their participation in the neoliberal project overall. Yet, it is more than that. Its activation expands into the cultural and political domain the power of a collective which tries to establish—however precariously—self-determined decision-making processes, rather than having their decisions depend on governmental funding, institutions, the market, etc. What is really being expanded, therefore, is the *possibility itself*, the possibility to create, to express, to share, to voice discontent. As Ernesto Laclau reminds us, in this expansion of possibility we find the expansion of democracy (1990, xv).

The interview took place in March 2021, almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this interview does not explicitly attempt to unpack the various implications this pandemic held for the democratic nature of theatrical expression, the unfolding discussion may still offer some answers to the complexities of democracy and radically democratic theatre in the face of a pandemic crisis. (Eve Katsouraki)

EIGHT AND THE COVID CRISIS

Georg Döcker: Gigi, it is the beginning of 2021, a year has gone by since the global outbreak of the novel corona pandemic, and most parts of the world, your home country Greece included, are still struggling to contain the virus as well as the negative effects it has had on public and daily life. As I understand, the pandemic also threatened the existence of EIGHT, a self-organised arts and research space in Athens that you co-founded with peers in 2018. EIGHT received financial support from a crowdfunding initiative entitled "Solidarity 2020" led by Wolfgang Tilman's Between Bridges project; donations to art spaces, of which EIGHT was one, were rewarded with reproductions of posters designed by renowned artists such as Anne Imhof, Jeff Koons, Pierre Huyghe, Mark Leckey, Isa Genzken, and Tilmans himself. How does EIGHT continue to exist in times of the pandemic? Can EIGHT continue to operate despite or with the circumstances of the pandemic (do you have residents?, public events?...) I am formulating this question in terms of a temporal problem of continuity as I am aware that EIGHT was envisioned as a response to the challenge of collectively maintaining long-term artistic and social activities in the face of the politics of austerity, precarity, and permanent crisis, an issue that has occupied the minds of many in activist, feminist, anarchist and other circles in the past decade.

Gigi Argyropoulou: EIGHT or Το Οχτώ (as it is in Greek) is a collective space in the centre of Athens that was created in an attempt to find a continuity of previous experiments, whether large scale and visible—like the occupations of Embros and Green Park—or more ephemeral and less visible direct activist actions and public gestures. In a sense it seeks to experiment with what might be an intervention here and now responding to the changing cultural and political landscape of Athens. It focuses on creating situations of collective study and research and making space for doing things with others. EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ is situated in the heart of the city on Polytechniou street, opposite the Polytechnic University and the archaeological museum on the border of Exarcheia, a neighbourhood that is currently undergoing radical change. Exarcheia has historically been an anarchist-student area with many squats and an active community. In recent years, it has undergone gentrification and has become part of large-scale regeneration plans for the transformation of the city centre. The recent government has attempted to "clean" the area (from anarchist circles) and in the last year or so closed most squats and solidarity spaces of the neighbourhood while installing a large number of police force. EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ is not an occupied space, but rather a space that is managed collectively and that hosts and initiates discussions, performances, exhibitions, research groups, screenings, social actions, and an artistic residency. Eight is the number of the building on Polytechniou street, and the space was initiated eight years after the economic and social crisis in Greece, at a moment when we had to rethink our tactics and strategies of performing power/powerlessness, as you would say.

Indeed, many of the things we initiated during the last decade started from a place of powerlessness or brokenness. And yet, some of them created public moments of visibility that had a significant effect in the landscape. This brokenness created some powerful moments of resistance that functioned as moments of togetherness that produced cultural alternatives. Nonetheless, they also produced further brokenness. Especially after the end of the occupation of an abandoned café in Green Park in 2017, one of the central parks in Athens, it was difficult to find

a way forward for many of us - personally and collectively. Politically, it was a challenging moment for most initiatives of the so-called solidarity movement that emerged in Athens during the years of the economic crisis. Many initiatives had reached a moment of crisis and stasis that was caused partly by political closures after the debt referendum and an exhaustion after many years of struggle. The Green Park occupation itself required a lot of physical labour and we were under continuous pressure to evacuate. At the same time, most of us were already exhausted after many years of precarity and multiple collective challenges. We didn't know what might be a way forward that could make sense after Green Park, but from this place of powerlessness we decided to start a new space and explore a different model.

Soon after, the pandemic comes, and this forces us to rethink again, even more fundamentally, our practices and the spaces we can use now and in the next years. EIGHT is an independent space dependent upon events and audiences and free donations and it does not receive funding by private or public sources. We had to rethink if it made sense to continue and in what way we might do that and whether this current form—a space in the centre of Athens—made sense in this new landscape. We still have the space, although all recent activities happen online since Greece has had some of the longest (and least effective) lockdowns in Europe.

Döcker: Staying with the financial side of things for another moment, I would like to inquire more generally about the aspects of in-/dependency and re-/distribution in alternative economies of self-declared autonomous spaces. If I understand correctly, EIGHT does not receive or desire funding from governmental funding bodies, and as such, it is in the company of residencies such as Performing Arts Forum in France who claim a correlation between socio-political, artistic, and economic influences. How does EIGHT generally acquire financial resources? What are, so to say, the transactional protocols at EIGHT, and how does the approach of resisting governmental benevolence shape social interaction between everyone involved in the residency? Also, when residents pay for their stay, do they typically apply for funding at state or regional funding bodies in their respective countries so that the space is still indirectly dependent on governmental support?

Argyropoulou: EIGHT is not only a residency space. The residency program ("The city@Eight") is part of the public program, but EIGHT mainly initiates and hosts public events, performances, exhibitions, talks, festivals and other actions. It is interesting to open up these questions of finance and organisation that somehow always come up even if it is decided that there is no monetary exchange in a space. There are always forms of exchange and the question of who supports whom and how is never unrelated to what the space seeks to do.

Now to your questions, we don't have a strong clear protocol. As with previous experiments we form our way as we go—it is a process. Of course there are some clear limits and things we wouldn't do or support, e.g. get involved with institutions we disagree with in terms of their politics and policies, but there is also a grey area that cannot be defined by a protocol and is dependent upon each project and event. We discuss things and we try to make the appropriate decisions together. Deciding to rent a space collectively already puts us in constant dialogues about financial issues

and also our protocols, ethics, boundaries and approach. We know there are grey areas and yet not everything is grey.

There are different forms of funding, institutions, policies, and histories; although to refuse all funding is one position that we have instituted in previous experiments, at EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ, we discuss and decide accordingly. We are not against any form of funding, but definitely we don't follow the principle "take the money and run." For example, although EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ doesn't receive any funding, we have hosted performances that have received funding from the Ministry of Culture.

We are collaborating and co-curating with HKW in Berlin in one edition of the New Alphabet School on Instituting in Athens in June 2021 with invited speakers Fred Moten and Stefano Harney and the collective ruangrupa. We have a series of research laboratories in preparation and we work with researchers, activists, artists, scientists, lawyers, theorists and groups. For these preparatory events we have received partial support from Goethe Institute. The first research workshop was on "Urban Ecologies" (November-December 2020) focusing on the city of Athens and exploring emergent forms and fragmented histories of instituting that took place before and during the years of crisis in Greece. Thinking through notions of mutating, immunity, and parasitising in relation to the urban environment, the workshop sought to examine the evolving urban ecologies of the city and how they are mapped in the streets of the city.

I would also like to mention that, in the early 2000s, many of us were part of the DIY independent performance scene of Athens where there was no funding, no institutions we could access, no space for the experimental work that we were interested in doing. We had to find our path as we improvised between constraints (e.g., financial, legal, cultural etc., or in other words, between a lack of space, money, and access to media at the time) and, in a sense, we still continue this practice. The cultural landscape changed during these 20 years, although many structural and infrastructural problems remained the same. This process of improvising between constraints becomes a necessity in precarious conditions and in precarious landscapes. With EIGHT/ Το Οχτώ we continue in this way and hope to remain at this space of experimentation that can initiate moments that intervene in how reality is constructed. And yet we know it is an improvised and precarious route.

Eve Katsouraki: I would like to look at the current pandemic more closely. We're living in unprecedented times; social distancing being the new motto, tele-meetings, online teaching, working from our homes, while, on the other hand, having cinemas and theatres forced to close, including cafés, pubs, restaurants, gyms, etc. It seems the entire neoliberal infrastructure is somehow being directly undermined by an invisible threat that is aggressively contaminating an already anemic neoliberal economy. Where do you think the familiar interface between arts, experimentation, and social change stands in this new landscape of governing life? How can theatre act as a powerful agent of social justice if theatre itself is being suspended? And what can performance do in a world that is asked to breath behind a surgical mask, in isolation, and with alarmingly growing inequalities between adaptable and unadaptable workforces, the deprived and the privileged, the young and the old, and the list goes on.

Argyropoulou: The pandemic intensified what was already there: social inequality, police brutality, systematic racism, oppression, generalised precarity, no separation between work and life. Yet, during this pandemic, together with unprecedented measures of social distancing and isolation, we have also witnessed the mobilisations in the US after the murder of George Floyd, demonstrations in France against the censorship law, and recently massive mobilisations in Greece, the UK, and other places against police brutality; and I'm only naming a few. So while we experience unprecedented conditions that make life unbearable for many, we also witness new social struggles and structures of solidarity emerging. We definitely need to rethink our ways and methods especially as it seems that in the years to come, the political, social, and economic challenges will intensify.

In her essay "Neofeudalism: The End of Capitalism?" (2020), Jodi Dean identifies a number of characteristics of feudalism in the current condition and argues that perhaps what we experience is a form of neofeudalism that includes parcellated sovereignty, new lords and peasants, hinterlandization and catastrophism. What can theatre do in these conditions and during social distancing? Well, one can only hope that it won't simply continue online, but would rather become self-reflexive and offer new forms that contest the pandemic imaginary, inequalities, entitlement of legality and experiment with new ways of being together. Forms that ephemerally undo or reveal political and social constructs whether this is done through existing artistic practices or new modes of intervention.

Crises, occupations, and collectivity

Döcker: Let's go back in time to the year 2011, when your work crystallised around the activist practice of occupations in times of crisis. In reaction to contexts and events such as the financial crash of 2007/08 and the Arab Spring, within a few months, occupations expanded across the globe. Occupy Wall Street in New York certainly was the most visible and influential camp, but theatre occupations like that of the Teatro Valle in Rome in June 2011 or Embros theatre in Athens in November 2011 were part of the wider movement. Let's consider the particular case of Embros: in your writing, you explain that the theatre was closed in 2007 due to unsustainable debt, then went into the ownership of banks for a short time, before the state took ownership, only to do nothing with the space—the theatre remained closed. Could it be said that Embros was an emblem of the corrosion of artistic infrastructures due to unsustainable neoliberal policy and the capitalist logic of credit, and therefore constituted a prime target for occupation? There is the question of where to occupy: as Mavili Collective, you did not occupy a public square or the ministry of culture, not an operating theatre, but a deserted run-down theatre.

Argyropoulou: The occupation of Embros was both pragmatic and also symbolic—to test what arts can do. The space had been deserted for seven years yet it was also a space we all remembered being active as a theatre and a drama school in the 1990s. Many times during these seven years there were rumours about plans from the state to use it, yet the space remained closed. The occupation attempted to take an abandoned and disused space in order to rethink what theatre could be in the here and now. The occupation took place at a moment when we as cultural workers

were forced to rethink what we can do with what we have, how we exercise our right to the city, and what other paradigms might be available.

This occupation was also a paradigm, an invitation to other groups and collectives to take over the city, its buildings, and places, and reimagine their function in the here and now. Crucially, Embros occupation was not simply an action of cultural critique but a tangible paradigm of organising. The occupation took the form of a twelve-day cultural programme running daily from morning to evening and hosting numerous activities that were devised to respond to the precarious cultural landscape of Greece. Making a collective, unexpected, undefinable space of cultural praxis that was responding to the cultural and political landscape and testing how a theatre might function collectively, practically and imaginatively.

Katsouraki: You decided to occupy Embros in a moment of governmental transition or interregnum, in November 2011 when early elections were agreed upon for May 2012. What was the importance of acting on a temporary instability in state power, and how did you navigate state institutions once a new government was installed? Were you met with repression or ignorance?

Argyropoulou: It was something we were thinking for some time, but we didn't know how to do. The actual timing was partly accidental, but happened at a moment when the whole society was activated. We didn't know what would happen and whether the police would close us down after a couple of days. We had legal advice beforehand, and we sought to create a different form of occupation—open to all, visible, resisting categorisation, also as a space of experimentation, of hybridity, of unexpected encounters and actions that intervened in the cultural landscape. Embros drew large and diverse audiences and became a positive “example” of responding to the crisis in local and European press and media. So the state tolerated it for some time. But after the governmental change the following year, things intensified. The centre-right government tried to close all self-organised spaces in Greece, branding them as centres of illegality—Embros was one of them. Therefore, in the autumn of 2012 the state attempted to evacuate it in order to privatise it and then another struggle started.

Döcker: The occupation of Embros was, as you once put it, “a public consideration of what theatre can do in times of crisis” (PhD, 2015, 187). I would like to talk a bit more about the meanings of “crisis” in this context. In the years of the 2007/08 financial crash and Occupy, a relation unfolded between crisis government—governing in a crisis as much as governing with a crisis as an instrument of power—and occupation as a mode of living under and despite the conditions of crisis. How would you analyse this particular coming together of mechanisms of power and resistance through a crisis? It seems to me that this constellation is not least a fight about different claims of necessity: Dario Gentili (2013) and others have analysed neoliberal crisis management as the production of necessity or the fiction of a lack of alternatives, whereas occupations insisted on the necessity of spaces for nurturing social and artistic life, the necessity of reproduction, care, etc. Two claims of necessity, which are at the same time two claims of existence and survival.

Argyropoulou: For me, the tension that you refer to was very clear in the summer of 2015, after the debt referendum. During these years of crisis, Greece functioned as a laboratory of new social

practices as over 43% of citizens took part in some form of self-organised or solidarity initiative—the basis of society was mobilised. These widespread mobilisations led to the election of Syriza in January 2015. Yet, after the debt referendum, and after further compromises with new sets of severe austerity measures, the powerlessness of such alternatives for effecting wider structures became obvious. However, even if such initiatives failed to provide sustainable counter powers, they still offered methods, practices, and ways of organising in the social that are common tools these days.

Katsouraki: We mentioned that Embros was part of the occupation movement. Some of the techniques for creating work in space mirrored the sharing of the occupied space by the inhabitants as a commune. I'm aware that in your academic writings you identified a failure in this dynamic. You have identified the failure you experienced in living and working together in the mode of a General Assembly. Is this a pessimistic outcome and what needs to change to find new, more democratic ways of creating artistic works that are engaged, relevant and, perhaps, above all, capable of shifting power relations?

Argyropoulou: Firstly, let me clarify a few things. Mavili was a collective that initiated the occupation and the public programme. And it was in collaboration with other collectives, local inhabitants and groups that the space and its public programme continued to run for a year. In the autumn of 2012, after repeated threats by the police and the state, Mavili refused to hand over the keys and made a call to groups of the city to oppose the police together. This led to a change in its mode of organisation as the space started to operate with an open-to-all-assembly. It was an assembly with very diverse attendees, and that was fruitful at first, but very soon became a highly contested space.

With the Embros occupation, Mavili tried to create a different model of occupation that didn't necessarily follow the rules of the anarchist squat that was dominant in Greece since the 1980s and sought to operate between cultural and political practice. It tried to combine experimental practices with activism (and that was not only the case for Embros, but for a series of direct actions in the following years). We tried to think content and form together, as we were trying to think of an intervention and how it might be effective. At least in Greece, but I think elsewhere too, political activism, art, and performance tends to assume expected forms, linked for instance with dramatic/narrative gestures, politicised text-based theatre pieces following representational aesthetics, and so on. As we were coming from experimental performance and active in the DIY art scene of Greece in the early 2000s, we were more interested in what Embros can offer as a space of experimentation, both culturally and politically. The initial activation program focused on experimental forms of art and performance and resisted curating a programme around a theme, but rather created critical structures that others could inhabit in response to the cultural landscape of Greece. For this initial period of the first year, Embros remained uncategorised between the cultural and the political and, in a sense, fled from established sedimented practices and power relations.

After clashes with the police, the space started to operate with open assemblies and gradually transformed as it experienced new challenges—seeking to find ways to operate through open

participation amidst different agendas, needs, and desires. Initially this difficult exercise of social pedagogy was fruitful, but soon after, Embros became a very contested space as there were many inconsolable ideas and desires for the operation and organisation of the space. Power relations and hierarchies are always present even in so-called democratic processes such as an open assembly setting. In the same way, the assembly of Embros became a space of collusion and antagonism. For me, this is not a pessimistic outcome; when you try to engage in an intervention into how things are formed and performed culturally, socially, and politically, you cannot expect happy endings (for example, the lack of sustainability or the disappearance of a space or a project is not simply a negative outcome but rather signifies a different process: an attempt to consider continuity as a constellation that exceeds the constraints of a space or a project). Seeking to undo sedimented practices and ways of doing makes a space vulnerable as it seeks to intervene between oppositional established agendas and processes. Disappearance, disorder, breaks, dissensus are all necessary processes and all come with individual, distinctive agendas. The experience of Embros definitely challenged romanticised ideas about the power of performance/art practice when intervening in the social. “Making with” others—that are unlike us and seeking to create a context—is never a route we can understand with existing neoliberal narratives of producing.

Katsouraki: Could you elaborate on the dynamics of powerlessness that you seem to indicate as being clearly in operation at the Embros project? How, for example, did Embros as a shared space manage to act as a form of “performing resistance” despite its members facing the various power relations within the collective you described? What were these power relations like in actual day-to-day creative exchange and co-creation?

Argyropoulou: Embros emerged from powerlessness (or “impotentiality,” as I have written elsewhere), but then this powerlessness seemed to produce too much of a potential as it opened new ways of doing (e.g. organising, being together, making). During the initial activation programme in Embros, every evening cultural workers, architects, anarchists, professors, established artists, immigrants, inhabitants, gallery owners, and marginalised groups co-existed in the space as the space resisted categorisation. The space indeed ephemerally became a meeting place for all these diverse groups that would often occupy diverse city areas and spaces.

Mavili promised from the beginning that, after the twelve-day programme, on the last day of the occupation we will decide collectively about the future of this space through an open assembly. A series of assemblies followed in a full theatre and demonstrated the importance of the space, yet also revealed inconsolable imaginings for its future. What remained common was the desire to continue, and so we did for a year, seeking to keep the space uncategorised. We achieved this by constantly shifting structures and avoiding the establishment of patterns, offering instead space to diverse groups and collectives until the next autumn, when the state demanded to evacuate the building in order to privatise it. This threat created different positions within the collective on what might be the best way forward. Oppose the police and continue the struggle or abandon this space and continue what we did with Embros elsewhere. I wouldn’t call this power relations though—it was more of a complex experiment that had an impact on the local scene and took place at a very challenging moment politically.

Katsouraki: In your writings, but also with your practice, you engage a lot with collective working practices. Could you describe these practices and give us a sense of how a more collective approach has influenced your projects, the themes you have chosen to explore, as well as your critical thinking?

Argyropoulou: Personally, my engagement with different forms of “being with” others undoubtedly formed my thinking in work and life. In the early 2000s I was part of a performance collective that attempted to make devised/post-dramatic experimental work against a conservative and exclusive cultural landscape. Unable to access established institutions, some of us, back then, started forming collectives and experimenting with ways of working collaboratively in unexpected DIY sites. In 2010, as many of us in Greece, I was part of a series of collectives and initiatives, amongst others, the Institute of Live Arts Research, an initiative that sought to create new dialogues between theory and practice. In addition, I was part of the Mavili Collective and Embros that also led to other collective formations such as Kolektiva Omonia, later Green Park and EIGHT. All these were diverse forms of collective response to the here and now; seeking to think of existing and potential practices together and respond to cultural, institutional, and political strictures.

I guess this journey reflects how such practices effected the range of my own practice as a performance maker interested in spatial interventions to then moving into political and social practices and, most recently, to forms of curating and making. So the way we work at EIGHT influenced by such collective journeys is really to experiment with structures of co-existence and modes of being together—curating as assembling—that create conditions open to elaboration, and initiate processes that remain incomplete and thus shared.

Döcker: In activist and scholarly reflections on what was soon termed the post-Occupy condition, it was highlighted that artists started to function as organisers or that the new definition of the artist was that of the organiser (MTL 2013; McKee 2017). In turn, Bojana Kunst, in a recent essay on the corona pandemic (“Beyond the time of the right care”), noted that artists had sort of become care workers in recent years. How do you perceive these shifts in the understanding of the artist and their artistic and social role?

Argyropoulou: I guess the underlining question is how do we respond to the challenges around us and how are they relevant to what we do? For example, in 2010, many of us couldn’t imagine continuing to make work in the same way, but we had to rethink our practice. Embros was one thing that emerged at the time as a response to this—in which we were rather organisers, as Yates McKee suggests. However, such questions are both entangled with local histories and changes in what is perceived as art in institutional agendas—and that can go both ways. For example, socially engaged/relational practices that emerged as a form of responding to conditions of late capitalism since the 1990s, many times have been recuperated by governmental agendas to increase the social impact of the arts. They were thus utilised in urban regeneration projects and participatory projects that perform citizens’ involvement.

Katsouraki: Could we explore the notion of brokenness in your work and, more broadly, in the projects you have been involved with? I’m thinking of Embros, but also Green Park and the recent organisation EIGHT. For the Hegelian philosopher Gillian Rose, brokenness necessitates a speculative space in which

negotiation is replaced with the failure of two opposites to transform one another, resulting in a mediating 'third' term—what Rose calls, 'the broken middle' (1992, xi). Your recurrent confrontation with brokenness and failure seems to produce precisely this speculative space in which something or someone can "come to a changed relation." It is a dynamic that brings about a form of recognition so that something is understood through one's continuous engagement with and negotiation of the points of contradiction in pursuit of what Rose describes as 'a good enough justice' (1995, 116). Could you relate your creative work to this possibility? Perhaps we could say that you're not looking to resolve what still remains a problem in our culture, society, economy, and so on. Perhaps what you seek to find are ways to relate differently to the condition of loss and register not individual opposing strategies to socio-economic and cultural regimes, but to the nature of opposition itself so that a deeper understanding can be attained as a way of life, one that is characterised by human struggle and failing.

Argyropoulou: This is a very interesting elaboration! My understanding is that in the refusal to fix something there is also the refusal of functionality or of a correct way of doing, and an acknowledgement that not everything is always fixable or that one has the capacities to fix it. As Jack Halberstam writes in the introduction of the *Undercommons* by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, what if we "do not seek to fix what has been broken, then what? How do we re-solve to live with brokenness, with being broke, which is also what Moten and Harney call 'debt'" (2015). Embros, Green Park, and EIGHT operated from brokenness and in brokenness as most of us were living in multiple states of brokenness. In a sense, these projects indeed became a speculative space in the sense that you outlined. They produced changed relations which led to other broken forms, or perhaps elaborations of brokenness.

In 2016, a group of us from Green Park initiated a DIY Performance Biennial with the title "No Future," attempting to occupy the idea of the biennial and think the potential of such self-organised and broken forms of recent years. "No Future" as a provocative statement from a place of impotentiality, yet also as method; a refusal to a futurity and the hope of betterment. The event sought to analyse forms of self-organisation and structures of solidarity that emerged in Greece when our relationship with the future (e.g., a canonical, imagined future) was disturbed and when we had to engage with the "here and now." What do you do with a broken "here and now"? What forms of practice might emerge if you do not hope things will improve?

The event started from the occupied space of Green Park and the nearby park of Pedion tou Areos and travelled via boat to the island of Cythera, proposing the method of "self-curating" as assembling. Prior to the public programme, every day participants met and organised the day, sharing the labour of making things possible. During this unusual journey from an occupied space to a public park to a boat and various locations on an island together with diverse attendees, we explored once again this brokenness in the here and now. As Lauren Berlant beautifully put it, "how to be in the space of broken form and nonetheless understand that as you proceed transformation proceeds" (2017).

Outlooks

Döcker: Focusing on the immediate present and future, what do you think are the new challenges of artistic-activist resistance? Police in many countries seems determined to affirm what Foucault, the Invisible Committee, and others claimed about their prime function, which is not to execute the law, but to guarantee a contingent state of normality at all costs, a normality of crisis, of lawlessness. At the same time, there is a plethora of diagnoses that assert a new state of generalised civil war (Berardi 2022; Steyerl 2017, et al.). Where do you see theatre and performance position themselves in all this, or how do you see activist strands of theatre and performance intervene in such violent conflicts, violent in terms of bodies on the streets, but also in terms of discourse?

Argyropoulou: The question of resistance and what forms it might take is very crucial especially within the context of the pandemic. In many places, we have witnessed the failure of governments to properly act in response to the pandemic as well as the constant introduction of new sets of measures that feel absurd, random, and oppressive. These measures build a new imaginary of living that we need to reflect and act upon.

This leaves a lot of space for theatre and performance to both directly engage with new struggles and to offer structures to reflect on this new imaginary of life, the limits of resistance of what constituted a liveable life. Thinking of activist practice I feel there is a lot of potentiality to create moments that, as Agamben argued, “reveal the anomy of power” (2013). At the same time, at least for us in Greece, there is a need to reflect on the multiple methods and practices of the last decade and see how they might inform current processes. As I mentioned, currently at EIGHT we have a series of research workshops that seek to reflect on cultural/activist practices of the last ten years in Greece and identify areas of intervention in the here and now.

Katsouraki: Your interest in experimental performance seems to always return to how to form new political imaginaries. It seems to me that you have been trying to achieve this goal by engaging with participatory and collaborative performance practices and, most recently, by curatorial projects that encourage engagement with children. In your essay “Haunting dreams of a wild Future: or what children have to teach us about politics,” (2018) you talk about the type of methods children bring into contemporary performance making. You argue that performance “needs” children, and you develop a more hopeful analysis of what to come in our political and social landscapes. Could you tell us what led you towards this direction? How do children, performance, and radical imaginaries interconnect, and what are the ethics and politics of engaging children in experimental performance as a pole for change? I’m aware that you also draw on the modern Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis to sketch out a more radical vision of performance. Could you discuss this combination and tell us why looking at children for rethinking experimental political practice? And with this we’ll conclude this interview which has been a real pleasure.

Argyropoulou: I am glad you find some hopefulness in this article. Turning to children and performance was a different way to think through a politically bleak moment in the time after the debt referendum in Greece. Turning to children was a way to disengage with the immediate

present and reflect on how imaginaries are formed. What interests me in particular in children's doings and performance is the potential of a radical undoing of our familiar ways of being, instances that challenge what is considered as acceptable, expected, canonical. I was mainly looking at breaks, mis-performances, accidents when structure is failing and children make present other possibilities of and in the here and now. Children produce a wider questioning of how reality is constructed or, in Castoriadis terms, how social imaginaries are formed and operate. As we watch children in wild reconfigurations on stage in repeated moments of failure to perform, I argue that we reflect on our own constructs, methods of making sense, and embodied patterns of compliance to what is there. We also need to reflect on how we work with children, how this process is fruitful for them as it is for us.

But to your question: in performance making and children and the work of Castoriadis radical imaginaries meet in some inoperative everyday moments that ephemerally flee from social constructs, from what is considered canonical and performs an undoing. Inoperative moments that somehow become visible and take the centre temporarily and ask what we are doing and what we should be doing. What are the horizons of expectation that form the here and now? What is the social imaginary we actually form through repeated embodied patterns? In such fleeting moments, I see potential for performance to create "instances of undoing" that intervene into the now through the questioning of long-standing social imaginaries and internalised operations of power. And perhaps through repeated questionings of existing living structures, and through diverse instances of undoing of familiar structures, new paths might open up that offer other possible imaginaries and are practiced otherwise to the here and now.

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Biography

Gigi Argyropoulou is a researcher, dramaturg, theorist, and curator working in the fields of performance and cultural practice and based in Athens and London. Gigi has initiated and organized public programs, interventions, performances, conferences, festival, exhibitions and cultural projects both inside and outside institutions. She is a founding member of EIGHT - critical institute for arts and politics (2019), Green Park (2015), Mavili Collective (2010), Institute for Live Arts Research (2010) and F2/Mkultra (2002). As a member of Mavili and other collectives Gigi co-initiated/organised occupations, interventions, programmes and cultural critique actions during the crisis. Gigi received the Dwight Conquergood Award for her work in 2017 and the Routledge Prize (PSi18) in 2012. She holds a PhD from Roehampton University focused on space, politics and performance. She has taught at undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Gigi publishes regularly in journals, books and magazines and is editor (with H. Vourloumis) of the special issue of *Performance Research* "On Institutions." She is a member of the curatorial and editorial board of HKW's 'New Alphabet School' and co-curating the upcoming edition "On Instituting." Currently she is completing her first monograph.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

**BEING IN TOUCH:
A METAMORPHOSIS OF JAN FABRE'S
THE CASTLES IN THE HOUR BLUE
INTO BODIES OF LONGING**

SYLVIA SOLAKIDI CENTER FOR PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY, SURREY, UK

for A

Time is the substance I am made of.
Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river;
it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger;
it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.

Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time"

A green light has sprouted in a small circle at the lower right quadrant of her photograph. She is "active now."

The pattern of dark photographs and those with bright green circles changes continuously on the rectangular window of the messenger application that is open while I write on my laptop. Each light bears potential for a contact.

When did all these lights emerge?

As I am sitting at my writing table and I move my eyes from the rectangular laptop screen to my rectangular window, I see the rectangular sky segment cloudy and the lights on in several rectangular windows of the rooms at the opposite side of the inner yard; each light indicates human activity. The pattern of dark and bright rectangular elements changes continuously, following the weather and the hours of the day. The time that passes becomes a kaleidoscopic installation of flashing lights that I cannot affect; I cannot affect time, as I cannot contact people and participate in their activities. An *Empire of Light* in the inner yard.

In the old times, we touched each other and it was only Mr Monk who needed antiseptic wipes after human contact. In the old times, we were active with others outside our homes and it was only Mr Monk who believed that "it's a jungle out there." This is the title of Randy Newman's song for the titles of the TV series about the brilliant detective who suffered from phobias that worsened after the loss of his beloved wife. Since March 2020, it's a jungle out there for everyone; the COVID-19 pandemic jungle. In order to protect each other we must practise social distancing. Our homes are shields from the virus and isolation is the price we pay for safety; we trade human contact for safety. Touch is related etymologically to both contact and contagion (Partridge 1991, 692); touch, though, has become dangerous, as if it was related only to contagion and not to contact.

Despite a distance of no more than a few metres, people and their activity around the inner yard are beyond my reach. My need not to lose touch becomes more pressing with time; I am near but not close enough. I am like Tantalus, who saw trees and rivers withdraw, as he stretched his arms to grab fruits and drink water; he could see what he could not have. As I am sitting at my writing table and I am looking out of the window, the unbridgeable distance of safety brings despair; I acquire the desperate body of Tantalus. I can only be in touch with people online. Distance depriving me from human contact in the physical space and transforming contact in the digital space becomes a limitation in my life.

The old times of touch as contact rather than contagion were only over a year ago.¹ Experts talk about the post-pandemic era, a new era of human relationships. Old times bring nostalgia and post-pandemic brings uncertainty. The distance in space that isolates one from others is transformed into a distance from time, as I am isolated from both past and future; I close down into a parenthesis of time. The notion of post-pandemic implies a future as succession and completion, a future of evolution, which closes the door behind it and sets an unbridgeable distance from the past, the old times when touch as contact was possible. If I lose touch with contact and I offer touch to contagion, this parenthesis will never open again and contact will be confined to an unreachable past. Certainly, quarantine and physical distance are needed during the pandemic. But why should physical distance become social and temporal as well?

As I am sitting at my writing table, I try to make sense of my unprecedented isolation. I read Marc Augé's 2014 book *The Future* and I realize that the future of post-pandemic is not the only option. The future, he claims, is "a time of conjunction," which "always has a social dimension" and "depends on others," so that we may not lose touch (Chapter 1). The parenthesis of time will make the past of touch as contact "disappear and collapse" and will bring more "solitude in the blank

image of a terrifying future" (Chapter 2). Augé's notion of the future as "inauguration," a "beginning" and a "birth" (Chapter 3), suggests that the transformation of touch from contagion into contact can only happen during the pandemic, otherwise loss will be irrevocable.

As I am sitting at my writing table and I am looking at the succession of day and night in the changing pattern of lights in the rectangular elements on my screen and outside my window, I review an image of day and night, light and darkness, from the old times. On a gallery wall, two rectangular drawings are hung side by side; the day and the night, the sun and the moon, a cross for the sun and a sword for the moon, among blue lines that cover the surface of the drawings. Let's follow the blue lines; where did they stem from?



Figure 1a: Jan Fabre Cross with suns (1987). Bic ballpoint pen on paper 238 x 165 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Copyright: Angelos bv

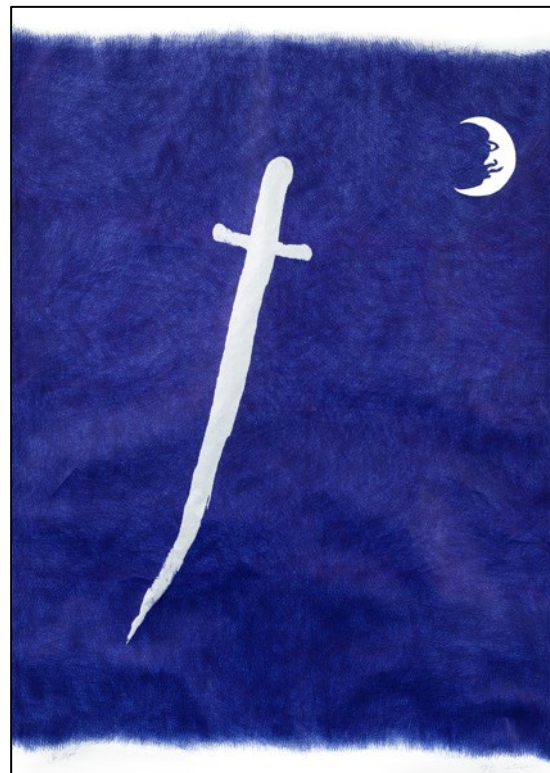


Figure 1b: Jan Fabre Sword in the night (1987). Bic ballpoint pen on paper 238 x 165 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Copyright: Angelos bv

In the beginning was an insect. In the late 1970s, in Antwerp, Belgium. On a white paper sheet on the top of the work table of a young artist. What time is it? It is the Hour Blue, the time of stillness and silence, when nocturnal animals have gone to bed and diurnal animals are not yet awake (Bernadac 2008, 104). The Hour Blue is a hybrid of night and day. It is not "night" since nocturnal animals are not active; it is not "day" either, since diurnal animals are not active. It is like an *Empire of Light*, René Magritte's series of paintings with a paradoxical combination of a day sky with a night earth. It is the time of sleep and transformation from night to day; it is "the hour of imagination" (van den Dries 2001, 61).

The artist is the great nephew of the entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre who defined the Hour Blue. And the insect was with the artist, with Jan Fabre, who is awake and works at his table. He was intrigued by the insect's movement on paper and he traced it with a blue BIC ballpoint pen (Fabre and Bekkers 2006, 23–24); he wrote movement down. More BIC blue lines followed; the white paper became blue with white gaps since the pen can never cover the surface smoothly. "There is a land where drawing is writing and vice versa [...] This land lives in me and I have discovered it through Vincent van Gogh," Fabre writes in his diary (Fabre 2011, 15). The BIC blue lines are vibrating like those in van Gogh's paintings. As the Hour Blue, the hybrid of night and day, is drawn in BIC blue pen, which is a writing instrument, each work becomes a hybrid of drawing and Fabre's handwriting. Out of the repetitive BIC blue lines emerge letters, words and forms, either in blue or in white—cuts on paper or spaces untouched by BIC, like the sun, the moon, the stars, the sword and the cross in the works *Cross with Suns* and *Sword in the Night* [Figures 1a and 1b]. Drawing and night are not closed down into themselves, but open up towards writing and day, their supposed opposites.

The process of transformation from egg to adult during the life cycle of an insect is called metamorphosis. And since an insect triggers the drawing of the first line of Fabre's Hour Blue, it transforms it into an hour of metamorphosis. For Fabre, who stages repetition in his visual and performing art, the biological process of metamorphosis has become "an attitude in life" (van den Dries 2001, 60). Repetition that allows the body of the artist "to master the action" (59) is his condition for endless experimentation (Fabre 2011, 134) and is derived from what he considers to be the main principle of theatre that repeats itself differently in each rehearsal and performance of a piece (Fabre 2011, 132). In Flemish, his language, the word "*repetitie*" stands for both repetition and rehearsal (van Dale 2008). Metamorphosis for Fabre becomes the opening up towards new experiences; it is a birth. Each repetition is different than the previous one, like the forms of the body of an insect during its life cycle. Each repetition is metamorphosis in-the-making, a process towards a future (Fabre 2011, 139), which can be inauguration and new beginning, according to Augé.

As I am sitting at my writing table, I try to make sense of my unprecedented isolation from people and time by approaching the future through Fabre's staging of the biological notion of metamorphosis. He is not alone in this process. In his 2021 book *Metamorphoses*, philosopher Emanuele Coccia also reflects on metamorphosis as a concept not confined to insects and their biology but as a principle of "shared life" (174). He approaches metamorphosis as an alternative to "evolution and progress" (9), since the different forms of an organism do not replace one another but are "simultaneously present and successive" (9), comprising "a continuity of life" (3). He claims that metamorphosis is rather a life of forms than a form of life" (54). "A single self expresses itself" across forms (57) and none of them corresponds to a final stage of an evolutionary process; metamorphosis is always in-the-making. "Every living being is a chimera" of more forms, states Coccia (55). Accordingly, Fabre privileges metamorphosis because he "refuses to accept the body as a closed identity" (van den Dries 2001, 66). Bodies on his stage are "hybrid," hence "liquid" and "rebellious," and cannot be easily kept under control, as they change form continuously. The Hour Blue that is initiated by insects as a hybrid of night and day, as well as writing and drawing, is for

Fabre the hour of metamorphosis, because the body can open up from its presumed “unique” identity (61).

How about the body of Tantalus and its closed identity of desperate isolation? Could it open up through a metamorphosis? As I am sitting at my writing table, I re-view my experience of Fabre’s Hour Blue drawings.

It is December 2018 in Milan and I visit Fabre’s exhibition *The Castles in the Hour Blue* (22.09–22.12.2018) curated by Melania Rossi in Building Gallery and Basilica of Sant’ Eustorgio. The choice of the church does not come as a surprise. Fabre has been influenced by the spirituality of the works of Great Masters in Antwerp, his home city. He has even created works that are permanently housed in Churches, such as his sculpture *The man who bears the Cross* in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp and his installations with hearts made of red coral in the Chapel of Pio Monte della Misericordia in Naples. As I look at the works and I am taking down notes in BIC ballpoint pen, I keep my hands busy, with a pen and a notepad, while my hands are eager to touch the works. These drawings with the blue lines that scratch the paper deep and create a relief surface are like “parchment or prepared skin,” as Fabre states (2014, 158). Their protective glass makes the distance from the skin of my hands to their “skin” feel bigger; I am near but not close enough. I am desperate to touch the works, I long for this touch. The inviting, tactile characteristics of these drawings, though, can be perceived with my eyes; my eyes touch them. It is not the torture of Tantalus. It is a game of the senses. The distance between our skins is part of this game, it makes the experience of drawings more intense, as I am on the verge of touching the works and my imagination is triggered by involving two senses, vision and tactility, instead of tactility alone. The viewing experience of the drawings of the hybrid Hour Blue becomes a hybrid of two senses, a sense in-the-making, a metamorphosis of my senses and my viewing experience that allows me to be in touch with the drawing without touching it.

In a series of 1989–1990 drawings, castles made of plant leaves are placed on the BIC blue lines (Figure 2). No, these are not leaves, they have antennae... and six legs. They are insects! The castles are made of bodies of *Phyllium giganteum*, an insect species that has a hybrid phenotype and resembles a plant leaf. These insects undergo metamorphosis to leaves and castles by crossing over the limits of species and living organisms; they are hybrid creatures of the Hour Blue. They tend towards the BIC blue lines, they long for them, but are never fused with them. They are added on the relief as distinct bodies that interact with the “prepared skin,” they organize and orient the vibrating BIC blue lines around them, and they shape *their* Hour Blue through their BIC blue shadow. The intensity of the interaction between castles and BIC blue lines adds to the intensity of my viewing experience of the drawing’s tactile features.

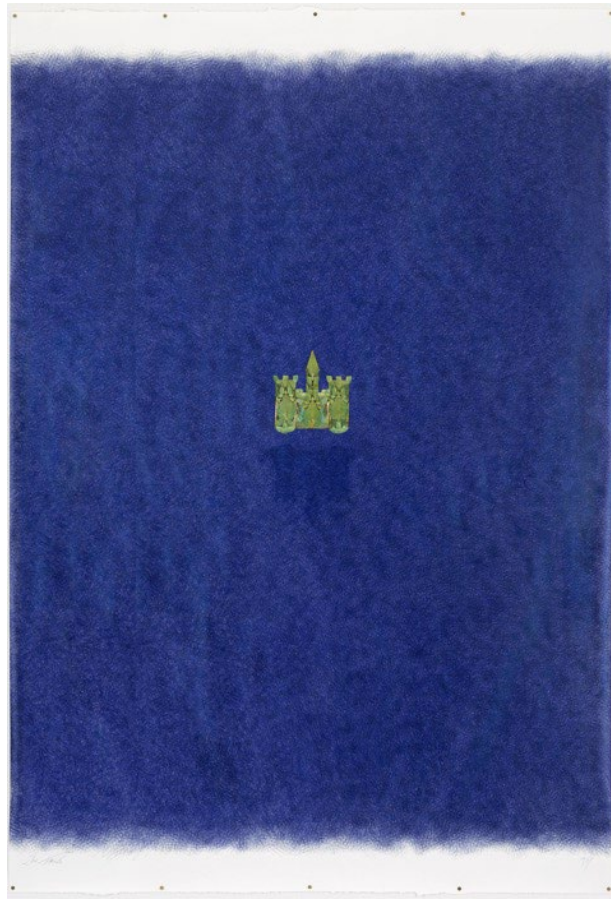


Figure 2: Jan Fabre Dream castle in the hour blue (1989). Bic ballpoint pen on paper with pieces of *Phyllium giganteum* 168,2 x 164,5 x 6 cm (incl. frame). Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Copyright: Angelos bv

These castles are not made of stone but of bodies of insects; life is their building stone. More precisely, “shared life” (Coccia 2021, 174), since insects offer them their process of metamorphosis. For Fabre, insects are “comparable to medieval knights,” since their exoskeletons are like armour. He believes that an armour protects the vulnerability of existence and he embraces metamorphosis as a way to expose and protect this vulnerability (Bernadac 2008, 105). “The medieval universe” is a place “where the opposites coexist,” he states. His example is the brave Lancelot, who has an imperfection since he commits adultery. Like a medieval knight, the insect is “hard and vulnerable” (32). The castles in the Hour Blue are such hybrids; they are vulnerable shields. The Hour Blue, the hybrid that is fluid and cannot be controlled, can protect as well.

In Basilica of Sant’ Eustorgio, Fabre’s 1987 piece on artificial silk *A Castle in the Sky for René* (Figure 3) was hung like a soft wall, along the left aisle of the main body of the church, where the Mass takes place. There are no insects in this piece. Out of the BIC blue lines emerge various forms. As I was about to light a candle at the chapel opposite this work, I saw a heart; it was the main form at the upper right part of the piece. No, it is not a heart; it is a rock, the building stone of the castle. The piece is dedicated to René Magritte, the Belgian painter who used to paint rocks, as well as skies, like the day sky over the night earth in his series *Empire of Lights*, and Fabre considers him to

be one of his Masters. The information next to the piece pointed to my mistake; still, I looked at the piece and its heart was beating. A metamorphosis of the rock into a heart took place in my viewing experience. The castle founded by this rock is a vulnerable shield, a castle in the Hour Blue, because its beating heart is an invitation for a contact with those who are outside. This castle offers security not because its rocks are as strong, but because it longs for contact. A castle can be seen from everywhere, but life inside is inaccessible; it is closing down and it is always ready for defence. This castle, though, shows its beating heart and opens up, it refuses isolation and suggests that protection is connected to interaction. In the Hour Blue of metamorphosis, safety undergoes a metamorphosis and the knight of the castle made of stone/heart is desperate for others; he longs for contact.



Figure 3: Jan Fabre A castle in the sky for René (1987). Bic ballpoint pen on artificial silk 689 x 1684 cm. Photo: Installation during the exhibition 'Jan Fabre. The Castles in the Hour Blue', Milan, 2018. Location: Basilica of Sant'Eustorgio, Portinari Chapel. Photo: Attilio Maranzano. Copyright: Angelos bv

And there was evening, and night is not the end of the day for Fabre, but the beginning. The Hour Blue is his time of creativity, when he makes his drawings and writes in his diary; he uses BIC pen for both, as “despite the computerized world, he writes everything by hand” (Lóran 2012, 140). “Whom can I count on?” he asks in his *Night Diary* (Fabre 2011, 129). His diary is intimate, a way to close down into his thoughts, but he longs for interaction with others, he is desperate to open up during the day; he has also published his intimate diaries.

He works in his home that is lit not only by electricity, but by his creativity as well; it becomes a *House of Flames*, of BIC blue vibrant flames, like the houses of his 1989–1991 installation—three rectangular boxes painted in BIC blue and a bigger one, a “Tower,” at the end. The first box has its door closed, the other two have their doors open at different degrees, while the Tower’s door is wide open (Figure 4). This installation is a hybrid of different stages of closing down and opening

up; it demonstrates metamorphosis in-the-making. I did not see this installation in Milan. *The Castles in the Hour Blue* is a touring exhibition but undergoes metamorphosis, as the curator adapts it to each exhibition site. I saw this piece in Arras, France, in Musée des beaux Arts, the old Benedictine Abbey of Saint Vaast, where it was scheduled to run from 02.03.2020 to 04.05.2020, but closed early because of the COVID-19 restrictions; I visited it on its second day, to re-view the works that I had already enjoyed in Milan.



Figure 4: Jan Fabre Houses of flames (shrines) (1988). Bic ballpoint blue on wood (three parts) 17 x 20 x 29 cm; 25 x 28,5 x 39 cm; 32 x 37 x 51,5 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Copyright: Angelos bv. Jan Fabre Houses of flames (tower) (1991). Bic ballpoint blue on wood 76 x 24 x 32 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Copyright: Angelos bv

And there was morning and Fabre met people he could count on. And with them he made the work *Tivoli* (1990), and covered the walls of this castle with Hour Blue BIC drawings that he prepared with friends and colleagues. The paper sheet of his Hour Blue drawings has opened up and has become immense; he is sharing the life of his Hour Blue with others. And others re-create the Hour Blue with him. And others look at the works; like me, who looked at photographs and film of the Tivoli castle in his exhibition in Milan and Arras. His creativity of the night undergoes metamorphosis and becomes a hybrid with the creativity of others during the day.

And there was morning and Fabre met people he could count on. And with them he makes theatre. During the night he prepares himself for the rehearsals of the day by writing and making drawings (Fabre 2011, 140); he prepares himself for the metamorphosis of his creative rituals of the night into the rituals in his rehearsal space, Troubleyn Laboratorium, in Antwerp. "Ritual is essentially a birth," as Augé insists, and theatrical rituals are only possible with others. The collaboration in Fabre's theatre Laboratorium is also based on metamorphosis, as Fabre believes that there is "one

long chain that keeps us all together" (van den Dries 2001, 61). The biological fact that "our life [...] was transmitted to us by others" and that it is "a continuation and a metamorphosis of a life that came before it" (Coccia 2021, 3–4), is transformed into theatre. The paper sheet of his Hour Blue drawings has opened up and has covered the stage of his first opera, *The Minds of Helena Troubleyn* and his theatre piece *Prometheus Landscape I*, after Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* in the 1980s. The knight has admitted his vulnerability by showing the beating heart of his castle, his own beating heart, and he longs for sharing his activities with others. He opens the door gradually, with caution, Safety is not achieved in total isolation, but in cautious interaction with others. Fabre closes down for preparation in order to open up for collaboration, towards a future as birth and "conjunction," as Augé states, which materializes in his theatre pieces. A castle in the Hour Blue can be a shield for the preservation of contact; the invitation to shield together and protect each other.

In the beginning was an insect and the insect is Fabre. He is the dung beetle, "the happy Sisyphus" of repetition. He identifies himself with the beetle that rolls a huge ball to the peak of a hill and lets it roll back in order to collect materials and do the itinerary again, differently (Fabre 2002). And as an insect he can undergo metamorphosis into a castle; he *becomes* a castle in the Hour Blue.

And there was evening. In his House of Flames, Fabre cannot sleep. He is an insomniac, "he lives the night in a continuous manner" (Fabre and Bekkers 2006, 21). As a result, he is awake when both nocturnal and diurnal animals sleep and he experiences the Hour Blue. He does not only observe the Hour Blue, but he shapes it, he makes it his own, as the BIC blue lines are directed towards the lower right corner of the paper and give rise to his signature; his name becomes another bunch of vibrant BIC blue lines. As he undergoes the metamorphosis of Hour Blue every night, he *becomes* the Hour Blue.

According to Coccia, "being alive does not just mean perceiving the world [...] but also constructing it, shaping it in a different way" (155). Fabre reflects on his insomnia and explains it creatively: "Why don't I sleep? Because only during the night I have the time to be who I am" (2011, 20). He approaches sleep deprivation as a creative limitation and as he is both a Castle *and* the Hour Blue, he copes creatively with time, in a way that differs from those who can sleep. The Hour Blue, his time of "imagination," becomes his time of creativity because he dares to cope creatively with its temporality.

Since his childhood, he has been building castles and listening to chivalry stories from his father (Fabre 2011, 99). Fabre has been dreaming to restore chivalry as a fight for a good cause (2014, 37). The knight of despair is the main character in his 2005 theatre piece *History of Tears*. The knight achieves a metamorphosis of his desperate situation, from loss of hope to longing for something, as despair makes him believe "in an absurd hope" (Fabre 2005, 31). This knight has a special relationship with temporality, as he says "I sense the future" (11). The good cause that he fights for is the search for a future through relating to people, those who are on the same stage, where he performs his monologues at a distance. As time goes by, he switches from "I" to "we," when he

speaks. He longs for people, as he longs for the future that he can already sense. His sword in this fight is “the force of vulnerability” (11). The knight is immortal, a hybrid of living and dead bodies, since when one dies, another takes its place (12). His body undergoes metamorphosis of life and death and constantly changes form. It does not have “a closed identity” (van den Dries 2001, 66), but it is “longing for completeness” (61). For Fabre, this completeness is “the sublime moment when scene and audience merge into a seamless whole” (61), the moment when the insomniac artist who works alone in his room when everyone sleeps, undergoes a metamorphosis through the interaction with collaborators and audience.

The future that the knight senses cannot be a time that closes down, a future of succession, but a future of a new birth. For Coccia, metamorphosis is “a future, an omnipresent possibility. [...]And everything leads back to it—especially death” (83), which is “a metamorphic threshold” (90). For Fabre, “death is the father of metamorphosis” (2007, 135). The knight of despair is a hybrid creature of life and death on Fabre’s stage, where death longs for life and vice versa; in his case, “two incompatible bodies belong to the same individual” (Coccia 2021, 174). Death, the vulnerability of existence, is not the end but the longing for a future of a new birth.

Fabre who experiences the night “in a continuous manner,” like the immortal knight experiences life and death “in a continuous manner,” explores his insomniac body as a body that undergoes metamorphosis, as a Castle in the Hour Blue. The vulnerability of his insomniac body becomes his strength, like the exposed vulnerability of the beating heart of the Castle of the Hour Blue. Alone in the night, he creates rituals to cope with his insomnia. These rituals undergo metamorphosis in his theatre space, Troubleyn Laboratorium, his other “castle,” with his performers in the morning. This Laboratorium is a shield for an artistic community, “a sheltered building” (Bousset et al. 2016, 79). The hybrid body of metamorphosis re-creates the Hour Blue by coping creatively with its temporality through despair that longs for a future of “an absurd hope;” a future through longing.

I went to Arras in March 2020 to watch Fabre’s solo theatre piece *Resurrexit Cassandra* (2019), and his exhibition *The Castles in the Hour Blue* was opening on that day. His Cassandra is a hybrid creature of life and death, the prophetess who comes back to life in order to warn humans about climate change; she is a hybrid creature of the Hour Blue, although no BIC blue lines cover the stage like in Fabre’s theatre works of the 1980s. On my last time in the theatre and in a museum before the pandemic, I heard a plea for metamorphosis as a future through longing. As I am sitting at my writing table, I re-view the exhibition that I visited twice, through this plea. Since metamorphosis is a process of repeating differently through hybrids, I take up Fabre’s gesture and I explore it through the dynamics of closing down and opening up. It is not a narrative of evolution, my writing does not progress, but unfolds in rounds of closing down and opening up that repeat this movement differently in the art of Fabre and my experience of isolation; it creates hybrids of these two states instead of opposing them to each other. The beating heart and the open door of Fabre’s castles are an invitation to share his creativity, an attempt to cope creatively with time that will lead to a future through longing. It is a narrative of a future as birth, a narrative of genesis of a temporality that takes up the genesis of Fabre’s universe of the Hour Blue. It is told with the help of the Book of Genesis and the beginning of the Gospel of St John, an attempt of a secular

metamorphosis of a sacred narrative, like the one performed by Fabre in his works that are in Churches.

I re-view Fabre's exhibition in order to hybridize my experience from the two visits with the experience of the pandemic. Art can become a paradigm for shaping a future, since, as Augé claims, "art offers to one and all the opportunity to live through a commencement." This experience does not end when I leave the exhibition space, I can adapt it in order to live. Whom can I count on? If touch is not closed down in a parenthesis of time during the pandemic but becomes a hybrid of contagion and contact by taking its vulnerability into account, this sense can undergo metamorphosis and lead to a future through the hybrid temporality of longing, since when I long for something, I experience in my present a future birth.

As I am sitting at my writing table, I watch a recording of Penny Arcade's performance *Longing lasts Longer* (Zehentner 2021), a performance that I experienced in London in 2016. "Longing is a persistent sense of loss that attaches to ourselves," states Arcade. Longing is not nostalgia, since "nostalgia is done from a safe distance," according to Arcade, but touch is not trapped in the old times that can only be missed, but is opening up towards the future of a new birth. As a hybrid temporality, "longing lasts longer, longer than anything else," as Arcade keeps repeating, since it does not close down into one point in time. It is immortal like the knight of despair, and takes different forms; longing is constantly born anew. Longing can make metamorphosis happen because it prepares for it. As I am sitting at my writing table, I read the novella *Mokusei!* by the Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom: "When does such a thing as a great love begin? [...] probably started with the longing for one [...] That had been the preparation for the moment" (50). For the moment that Fabre's theatre company meet their audience in theatre venues; for the moment that quarantine will end.

Longing is related to length, to distance in space and time of waiting. When Fabre closes down in his home during the night, when BIC blue lines cannot cover the paper smoothly and when I cannot touch the drawings, distance does not lead to disruption of experience but to its metamorphosis into creativity. Distance from others, which is essential to keep us safe from the pandemic, can be approached as a creative limitation, the way Fabre is coping with his insomnia. As I am sitting at my writing table, I re-view the exhibition in order to explore the possibility of a metamorphosis of my body of the desperate Tantalus into a body of longing. Fabre achieves metamorphosis, can I do the same?

Although the distance of a few metres among windows in the inner yard seems unbridgeable, we can be in touch online by seeing each other. We can change our point of view on time and refuse to experience the pandemic as a temporal parenthesis in our lives. Instead of leaving contact in the past, we may take advantage of the fact that we can be on the verge of touch thanks to technology and approach it as an opportunity which makes things more intense and urgent. Longing becomes a pressing need for action when there is a limitation. When touch was possible and I could not imagine that I could be deprived of it, the viewing of Fabre's exhibition where touch was not allowed prepared me for it as I coped creatively by experiencing the tactile features of

drawings through a hybrid sense of vision and touch. I was “long-prepared” for the loss. This long preparation is called longing, a longing for loss, by Leonard Cohen in his *Book of Longing* (60–61) where he made his own metamorphosis of the poem “God abandons Anthony” by Constantine Cavafy. The hybrid temporality of longing extends to a past that is not nostalgia. When longing for something, we are in touch with the whole temporality instead of suffering inside a parenthesis of time; being in touch with time prepares for being in touch with people.

The distance mediated by screens during a video call may activate the game of the senses, since my gaze has been prepared to long for tactile characteristics and the touch of skin, like the “prepared skin” of Fabre’s drawings. In the same exhibition space, my gaze was also prepared to touch the skin of the castle of Tivoli, through photographs and a film. The prepared gaze does not only perceive tactile characteristics but also creates and changes its environment, an act that also “changes the environment of others,” as Coccia suggests (156). Thus, the intensity of being on the verge of touching people, leads to a metamorphosis of the sense of touch, so that people who are in touch through screens may participate in each other’s activities through the mutual creation of an environment of shared life defined by longing to touch and be touched.

French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposes “the flesh of the world” as the ontological element that guarantees the intertwining between our bodies and the world thanks to reversibility (1968, 147), the intertwining between the body and the world as well as between senses. Since our bodies are nodes in the fabric of this flesh of the world, they are open to the world and our gazes “envelop” things and bodies (131). This reversibility makes possible the game of the senses that leads to the hybrid sense of vision and touch. Merleau-Ponty grounds intersubjectivity on reversibility. He describes the relationship that we have with our own bodies not as a relationship with an object but as a reversibility of touching and being touched: when my two hands touch each other, each of them is both touching and being touched from the other (1964, 166). Intersubjective relationships happen as intercorporeal relationships when the two hands do not belong to one body, but two: “The handshake too is reversible” (1968, 142). Through longing I can have something without possessing it, unlike Tantalus, who sees what he cannot have. Others are not near but are close enough. The challenge for which longing prepares us during the video calls is to move from gazes that touch to touching each other; to move from having without possessing to grasping each other’s hands.

When the digital distance is approached as a creative limitation that may change the environment of experience, it can transform the restrictive function of distance in the physical space as well. The lights from the rectangular windows in my inner yard can create the longing that has been practised online, so that I may not be shut outside the lives of others but participate in their activities through having without possessing them. Such participation is possible not by visiting them, which is not safe during the pandemic, but by realizing that by turning on and off the light in my room I change my environment as well as theirs, as Coccia claims (156). The light of my rectangular window is not outside but a part of the changing pattern of lights that I observe and corresponds to time that passes. Indeed, I can only see one of the four sides of the rectangular inner yard and the kaleidoscopic installation of flashing lights includes all four sides; someone on

the opposite side perceives my window as part of the kaleidoscopic installation. Therefore, time is not outside my room, it does not pass without me being able to have an effect on it.

Creative coping with distance, closing down in order to open up, leads to creative coping with time. My body is not the body of Tantalus anymore, since by opening up towards the activities of others it becomes a body in the course of metamorphosis, a hybrid of temporalities of contact; the present of longing for the future of a new contact. Longing defines my present experience and makes it more intense, as I am not dreaming of the moment of contact with people, but I am already in touch with them and their activities. This also means, though, that my existence is overwhelmed by longing; the same as metamorphosis as co-existence of opposites and new birth is not smooth, longing involves risk. Being desperate is not only related to loss of hope but to willingness for great risk as well (Partridge 1991, 168). Longing prepares for a future birth through a hybrid of vision and touch; it does not guarantee its advent. Being on the verge, the experience of urgency allows me to prepare to move “from longing to skin” (Cohen 2006, 68) by opening up towards a possibility. “Longing lasts longer than anything else,” as Arcade keeps repeating, because opening up lasts longer. Or in Merleau-Ponty’s words: “so long as we are alive, our situation is open” (2012, 467).

What time is it? I do not need to look at my laptop’s clock; it is the hour of metamorphosis, the hour of longing, the Hour Blue of the future of birth. By changing point of view upon distance, protection not only from the pandemic but also from isolation from past and future are achieved; only together may we protect each other, only together may we have a future. Thanks to distance I can become a hybrid body of longing, a body that risks the hope of the knight of despair. I can become a Castle in the Hour Blue and shape *my* Hour Blue, this essay that proposes the temporality of longing.

Her green light has sprouted.

“Why are you active so late at night? Are you all right? How about a brief chat? ... I am still sitting at my writing table,” is my message to her.

And when my friend and I make a video call, we always touch each other’s hands by touching our screens before we say good bye. The idea was mine. It is the gesture that Mr Monk made when he watched a video message that his beloved wife had recorded shortly before her death. Our new ritual of longing until we meet again. As we are longing for each other in order not to lose touch, we are already in touch with each other.

Acknowledgements

The author receives funding from the TECHNE/AHRC Doctoral Partnership

The author would like to thank Angelos/Jan Fabre for granting permission for the publication of images of Jan Fabre's works.

Notes

¹ The first draft of the essay was written in London, UK during the winter 2021 lockdown and the final version was revised in the same London room in December 2021, when work-from-home and "be cautious" guidance returned as a result of a surge of cases because of a variant of COVID-19.

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Biography

Sylvia Solakidi is at the final year of a PhD at the Centre for Performance Philosophy, University of Surrey, which explores contemporaneity, presence and duration in postdramatic theatre. She has published research papers in: *Platform Postgraduate Journal*, *Antennae Journal*, *Kronoscope Journal*, *Performance Research Journal*, *Global Performance Studies Journal*, *Streetnotes Journal*, *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques*.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

BEING AND SHOWTIME ReVIEW

!

ReViewer: Beverly Fresh

Artist Object of Focus: *Being And Showtime* by H. Peter Steeves

Nature of Repetition: In the ReView I will re-experience notions of time explored in "The About Time Show" (Chapter 6 of *Being And Showtime*) which repeats and extends Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology and Time-Consciousness. I first became interested in using common language to disorient the audience in a 2015 iteration of my traveling one-man show called "MR. MDWST." From 2017-2019 I further explored how language can dislocate time through guttural chanting, repetition, and call and response in "Wild American Dogs Big Time Traveling Tent Revival," another performance project. Reading Steeves' chapter on time revived and deepened my interest in the

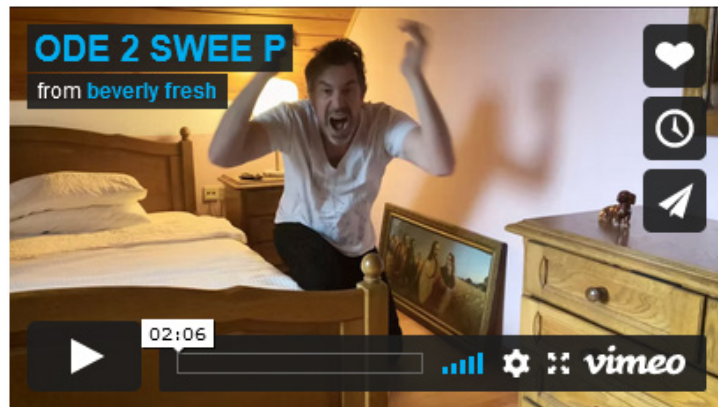


With this book Steeves recaptures the Greek notion of logos through 20th century phenomenology by showing us that thinking is inseparable from acting, and that this act has to take place in community and by a body in action. Each chapter in the book invites understanding not through a strict philosophical argument but through song, dance, magic tricks, and art intended to reveal insights into the subject we may never have considered before. My review is similarly and accordingly multimodal. Each component is summarized below.

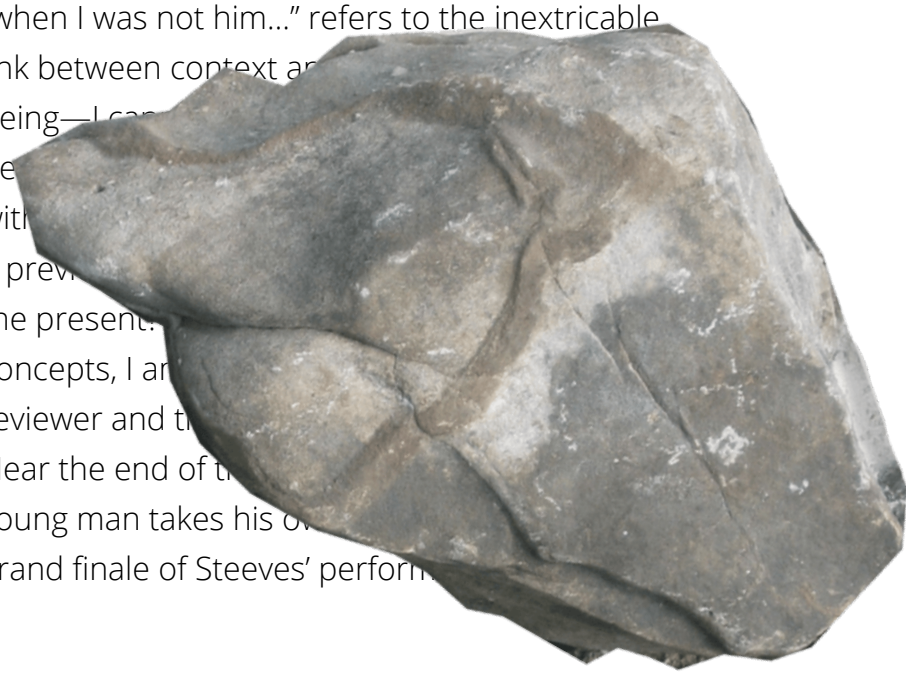
potential of vocal performance to confuse time and space and inspired me to compose “Ode to H. Peter Steeves” and to resurrect my own examination of time through a newly created series of multi-modal, multi-dimensional performances re-presenting Steeves’ investigation in new forms of action. This ReView will lead **Performance Philosophy** audiences to re-experience notions of time by intentionally disorientating through an expanded ReView format and the performance of language thus disrupting our shared experiences of time.

!

ReVIEW OUTLINE The collection of performative lectures that comprise *Being And Showtime* by philosopher **H. Peter Steeves** shows us that to be alive is to perform, and that **there is no true, singular, or authentic state of being** but rather a constantly shifting series of performances dependent upon a given context. Each chapter and the very form of the book itself convey the “to-ness” of performance—a deliberate target which gives the performance meaning. In picking up the book, we physically begin to embody this concept as we engage with the book and become aware of ourselves performing the role of reader. Further, the form of the book initiates us to do something physical with the book itself (flipping, smelling, scratching, peeling etc.) and



1) Ode To Swee P aka H. Peter Steeves aka The Godfather of Philosophy by Beverly Fresh is a performance for video (approximately 2 minutes) that expands on the form of the Greek irregular ode, with the purpose of honoring and amplifying the person known as H. Peter Steeves and his work, *Being And Showtime*. With “Ode” I re-experience notions of time explored in “The About Time Show” (Chapter 6 of *Being And Showtime*) which repeats and extends Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology and TimeConsciousness. For example, the opening refrain of “Ode” repeats the lines “now, no now, no now..,” activating the concepts of retention and protention. The line “when I was not him...” refers to the inextricable link between context and being—I can be with a previous concept, I am in the present. Near the end of the performance, a young man takes his own grand finale of Steeves’ performance.



eludes a passive reading experience. Throughout, Steeves juggles conditions and continually poses unexpected demands from this dual performance (both author and audience/readers) and the context (the book and the lecture). Expectations are destabilized and the default constraints of both viewership and format are loosened, freeing us to experience things anew—concurrently intellectual, emotional, and entertaining. In my review I will animate *Being And Showtime* through three distinct modes of performance and their respective contexts:

1) The Rogue

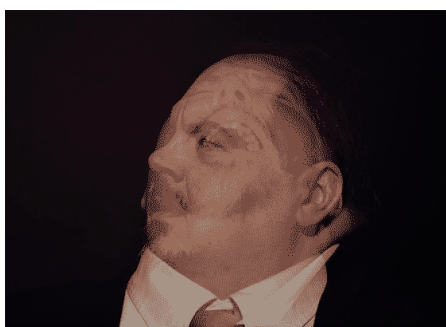
(role/performance), Video (context)

2) The Existential Disc Jockey

(role/performance), Pirate Radio Broadcast (context)

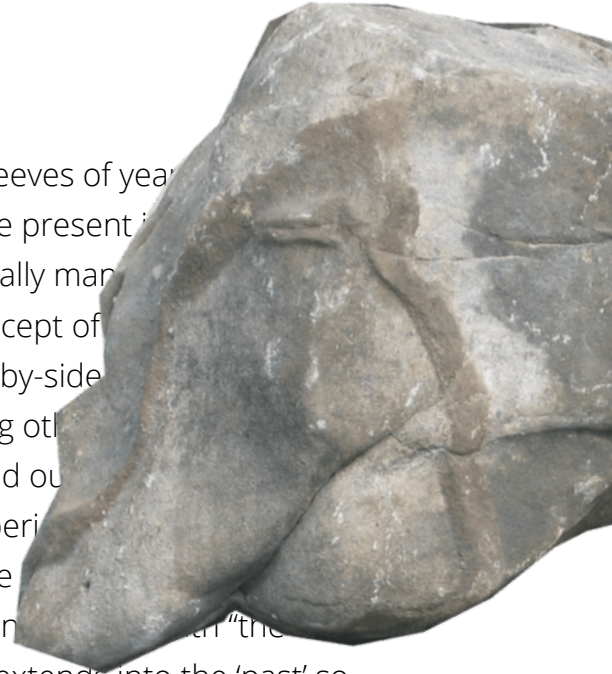
3) The Alternative Scholar (role/performance), Multimedia Web Page (context)

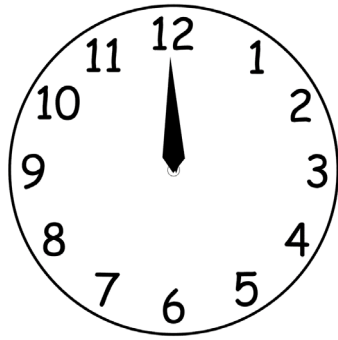
👍 BUY YOUR COPY OF *BEING AND SHOWTIME* OR FIND OUT MORE [?](#)



where the H. Peter Steeves of year H. Peter Steeves of the present space on stage physically man phenomenology's concept of present appears side-by-side the result is something other concept of present and out but instead a new experience last words of "Ode" are when Steeves summons the nowmoment actually extends into the 'past' so that what 'now' means is a thick slice of time—a portion of time that includes what we used to think of as the past, but now we realize is actually still the present." The entire performance of "Ode" takes place crouched near the corner of a bed as a nod to Steeves' reference to sleep as a little taste of death in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* with a vocal delivery that is simultaneously compelling and unsettling. In the act of paying tribute, the rogue has taken the subject and made it a work completely his own, becoming part of Beverly Fresh's ongoing series of *odes* dating back to 2005.

2) The live broadcast, aired August 1, 2021 on the pirate radio project spaz.radio featured strange sonic song selections and cosmic commentary that correspond to and extend the themes in each chapter of *Being And Showtime*. Following Steeves' interpretation of logos being communal, songs were sourced with help from the *Weird Rap* online community. Just as *Being And Showtime* reimagines the book as an expanded and interactive object, my reimagining bends and





stretches the limits of a radio show through the guise of an introspective, psychedelic Wolfman Jack dj of pirate radio frequencies.



no now no now No now no now

EPILOGUE:

In the early 1900s Dada and Surrealism exploded the printed word through typographic experiments that challenged our notion of the page as a space. Mass-market publishing throughout the 60s and 70s created a new context for graphic artists, designers, and editors to step out from behind the stage and radically reconfigure what it means for something "to be a book." During this era, designers Jerome Agel and Quentin Fiore transformed media theorist Marshall McLuhan's seminal work into "an inventory of effects" in *The Medium Is the Massage*, a book aware of its "bookness" where the interaction of text, image and layout worked in concert to expand the authors concepts.

Being And Showtime is a contemporary masterpiece that launches from these precedents into an entirely new atmosphere. HPS proves he truly is The Hardest



This episode of the Weird Rap podcast and my ongoing service to the hip-hop community is dedicated to paying respect to the founders of this cultural movement and honoring the art form, with special attention to marginalized, underrepresented, and emerging artists.

3) All of this content will ultimately be embedded in a multimedia web page (**THIS WEB PAGE YOU ARE CURRENTLY NOT LOOKING AT**) featuring the outline described here (written as the alternative scholar) along with **hyperlinks**, **gifs**, **videos**, **notations**, and **additional text** amplifying various

Working Man in Academia, in this performative object that puts theory into action and brings it into being. This book is an all-embracing artform that could only come from one of the wildest minds at large. When The Godfather performs on page it is felt, and Steeves is undeniably generous and caring as a performer. He puts sincerity in showtime and offers us one of the most wig-blowing combinations of thought and printed matter in existence.

*Just as HPS reconfigures our notions of how a book behaves and his performative lectures call on us to perform our active viewership, my ReView of his work calls the passive reader into action. The hyperlinks and additional media on this page all directly relate to the contents of *Being And Showtime* while also opening up new experiences and possibilities of meaning.

This is not the end of the page.

points of the outline including more on “the ode,” “the rogue,” “the bed,” and the performance of self. The purpose of this ReView is to put the concepts of *Being And Showtime* into action and to think through them publicly via my own performance of being both a performer and a reviewer.



ODE 2 SWEE P

By Beverly Fresh
(lyrics for reference)

No now no now no now No now no now
no now No now no now no now Thinking
upon an itty bitty sweet peetah An so
below a time When I was not him And was
was not in And in was not on Our side or
up on top of gone Long is is on wrong
worn worn On gone! a little
a little deaaaade a little deaaaad,
deaaaade a little deaaaad, a little
ade (come on!) a little deaaaad, a
e deaaaade a little deaaaad, a little





deaaaade a little deaaaad, a little deaaaade
(come on!) The young man takes his own
hand “Nothing I cared In the lamb
days That time, would take ME Up
allow thronged loft By the shadow of
hand.....nowww” !NOT NOW! (Thiiiiick
iiiiice)

Works Cited

Steves, H. Peter. 2020. *Being and Showtime*. Chicago: Sawbuck. <https://www.beingandshowtime.com/>

Biography

BEVERLY FRESH (Zack Ostrowski) is a contemporary artist and musician.

Beverly has exhibited and performed throughout the United States and internationally, including China, Japan, Peru, Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic, France and Germany. Recent notable exhibitions and performances include, REALLY SOMETHIN ELSE (2018), a solo exhibition at the DePaul Art Museum, MR MDWST - A REAL GOOD TIME (2015), a solo exhibition at the Cranbrook Museum of Art, TAKE THE BACK ROADS AND COLLECT MYSELF (2014) and a solo exhibition at the Pavillon am Milchhof (Berlin). He is the co-founder of sUPERIORbelly (1999), a multi-media art and design collective and record label based in Detroit, and cofounder of WILD AMERICAN DOGS (2013), an interdisciplinary art duo focused on producing experimental feature films and performance. In 2016, he co-founded the Archive of Midwestern Culture with Sociologist Greg Scott.

He has a BFA in Graphic Design/Interactive Media from the College for Creative Studies and an MFA from the 2D Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he was the 2009 recipient of the Daimler AG Emerging Artist Award.

In 2017, he was the Visiting Designer-In-Residence and Head of the 2D Department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He is an Associate Professor and Area Head of Graphic Art at DePaul University in Chicago, IL.

In 2021, Beverly Fresh was recognized with the Meier Achievement Award for mid-career arts professionals.

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