# INTRODUCTION: CRISIS AND THE IM/POSSIBILITY OF THOUGHT

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We do not so much write *about* crisis as write *from* crisis. "Crisis" has become a ubiquitous shorthand for the *apparently* unsolvable: the disruptions of human-driven climate change, the displacement of millions of migrants and refugees, the decay of representational institutions and the rise of populism and demagogues, the ongoing debacle of carnage in Syria, and the reverberations of "the 2008 global financial crisis" (as if there was something particular to 2008!) as license for so-called austerity measures. But to describe these particular situations, each with its own particular history, as demonstrating some general category of 'crisis' is to perpetuate a narrative structure that is far from neutral or disinterested. There is a long history of the production and mobilization of crisis—a 'shock doctrine', as Naomi Klein (2007) diagnosed so influentially. Such a production is material, involving the slow or sudden emergence of a set of disruptive (and frequently unliveable) circumstances. But perhaps just as importantly, it is discursive: deploying 'crisis' as a description of those circumstances justifies interventions by interested parties, which are often interventions whose plans precede the crisis itself. As Klein puts it, 'crisis *works*' (155ff, emphasis added)—that is, the label of "crisis" is not just descriptive but performative, producing helplessness, legitimating a particular response, and pre-emptively negating the possibility of critical thought.

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A version of the Klein's thesis affected the circumstances of our production of this very collection: at the end of 2017, declaring a "pensions crisis", university employers in the UK proposed cuts to employer contributions and employee benefits; but the so-called crisis was based on questionable calculations, and the move was widely understood as symptomatic of the ongoing financialization of the higher education sector. In an unprecedented response, members of the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) at 65 universities took part in the largest industrial action in the history of UK higher education (Weale and Topping 2018). Withholding their academic labour and joining each other on picket lines, they found solidarity amongst bitter winter conditions over several weeks in February. Many of our authors and reviewers are based in the UK, so this edition has been somewhat delayed by these actions and their aftermath: a marked reminder that crisis is not just an object of study, but part of the conditions from which we work.

And in this committed mobilisation of our colleagues—as they rejected the terms that were being offered, forced new agreements, and turned the focus back onto the marketization of the university as cause rather than solution to this crisis—we can also see that the structure of crisis in fact contains the possibility for the very thing it is designed to foreclose: critical thought. Our colleague, Eve Katsouraki, with whom we began work on this special edition, made exactly this point in calling attention to the etymology of the word: in its earliest usage, *krisis* (κρίσιν) referred to the judgement passed within the Athenian theatre by audiences and designated judges, i.e. critics (κριταί). Eve reminded us that this theatrical judgement served as a prototype of the democratic paradigm for Plato—albeit one that he ultimately condemns for being based on aesthetic sensibilities, at odds with the superior mental work of philosophy. But this root connection between crisis and critique, and between performance and philosophy, is one that persists: in the 1930s, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin planned to launch a journal called *Krisis und Kritik*, and in their different ways each imagined the role that aesthetic "shock" might play in exposing the discontinuity of history, in imagining things a different way—perhaps an alternative kind of 'shock doctrine'.

For Benjamin, "crisis" was synonymous with modernity and capitalism. There was, he believed, no discreet time called crisis; rather, crisis was the mediality of the 19th century, and the goal to overcome the permanent state of crisis was to be achieved through philosophical reflection from within the immanent field of the crisis itself. Now, in its neoliberal definition, 'crisis' is ontologically linked with the increasingly complex, globalized world dominated by manufactured risk and perpetuated failure. As the historical sociologist Greta Krippner (2011) claims, the present crisis is another stage in the long, drawn-out departure of capitalist democracies that performs one fundamental act—financialization—that is, 'the tendency for profit making in the economy to occur increasingly through financial channels rather than through productive activities' (4).

Again, we have no independent place from which to critique these circumstances. And PING! Just as we are writing this introduction, one of us gets an email from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* with the subject line: 'How the job crisis has transformed faculty hiring.' This serendipitous arrival sparks a memory of recent headlines bedecked with "crisis". Walking into the grocery store a few weeks ago, Will reads the headline, 'Crisis at the Border'—a reference to the Mexican border and

the Trump-driven detainment of children in cages, but one that could apply equally to so many borders at the moment, from the Northern border of the African continent that abuts the Mediterranean Sea to the border between analytic and continental academic philosophy. If you search Google News for the keyword "crisis" you'll find at least a dozen headlines from major news outlets decrying various crises each day, from the Turkish response to Western sanctions to the impending hurricane season in the United States, to the ongoing sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests and the political turmoil of countries as geographically separate as Venezuela and Yemen. What can we do to think outside of this crisis echo chamber? In other words, what type of thought is possible within crisis? If crisis extends to thought itself, insofar as we find ourselves in a crisis of thought (i.e., the crisis of not being able to think beyond the crisis of thought), then what kind of thinking is possible anymore?

Answer: we must supply critical thought with creative thought in order to avoid discursive lines of flight already mapped out and monitored by the technicians of crisis. To see such a model in action, we can return to the Ancient Greek wor(l)d of *krisis* with Anne Carson as our guide:

> … I like the word *Krisis* which Sokrates taught me.
> It means Decision.
>
> Ruling (of a court). Middle (of the spinal column).
> Our first shot
>
> is Sokrates tapping the sleep spine—out pours his own dream:
> a woman
>
> in white who spoke to him in his sleep. *Krisis* means
> the crack that runs
>
> between Sokrates sitting on the edge of his bunk telling us Death is
> No Misfortune
>
> and his soul making little twitchy moves against the flesh,
> which show up
>
> on the film as bright dots or phosphorescence before
> storms….
>
> (Carson 1998)

This is a neo-baroque rendering of a classical scene. We can work backward through the excerpt to produce meaning. Socrates' bright and shiny soul over-exposes the film that is recording the scene and produces white spots that double (accidentally?) as metaphors for Truth's white-hot light. Before reaching the surface of the film, Socrates' soul must escape its body, which it will shortly do once Socrates is dispatched from the mortal realm. (We are not, however, to worry about this immanent death: Death is No Misfortune.) All of this, this classical scene of philosophical revelation, is transmitted not through docudrama or biographical narrative structures but, rather, through dream sequence. We are witnessing a televisual dream sequence, and it through this

conceit that Carson weaves into the poem her knowledge of a long-lost definition of *krisis*: the interpretation of dreams or portents (Liddell and Scott).

As she is apt to do, Carson takes it one step further. *Krisis* also referred to the middle of the spinal column, and this dramaturgical knowledge of the word's various significances allows for the graphic spinal tap that instigates the dream imagery. Ultimately, *krisis* is limited neither to dream interpretation nor the middle of the spinal column, nor even to the act of decision; rather, Carson renders *krisis* as the confluence of the body, the critical-intellectual apparatus, the divinatory powers of the clairvoyant, and the scene of spectatorship. *Krisis* means the 'crack that runs between […]', the crack that somehow divides and sutures the multiple nodes of the event of meaning-making. Poetry is Carson's chosen medium. Not essay. Not an actual television series starring Sokrates. A poem. Poems make us pause and force us to re-read and think through the conglomeration of thoughts placed before us. The crisis of meaning making falls to us, and the reward for our labor is the knowledge of how precisely Death is No Misfortune. This knowledge will strike us square in the spine and reverberate through our thoughts. For critical thought to surmount the crisis of Crisis, it must reestablish its ties with creative and artistic imagining.

In one way or another, each of the articles in this edition of the Performance Philosophy journal fuses the critical with the creative. You will find poems embedded in the contributions to this special edition, as well as videos, visual art, and scholarly thinkings-through of the multi-faceted deployment of "crisis/*krisis*". Each of the works, even those in which the conclusions seem dire, attempts to shake us free of the thought that thought is itself no longer possible within this never-ending stream of crises. The edition begins with a triptych of the "Greek Financial Crisis". **Christina Banalopoulou** excavates the Nietzschean strand of Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts on crisis to interrogate the logic of "debt" underpinning the clash between Greece and its creditors. By troubling the typically dichotomous relation between the debtor and the one in debt, Banalopoulou deconstructs the given circumstances through which many media outlets sought to convey the Greek people's referendum on whether or not to abide by the financial rules laid down by the European Union.

From there, **Maria Mytilinaki Kennedy** steers us into the conjuncture of the 'Greek Financial Crisis' and Greek theatre by examining the botched appointment of Jan Fabre as director of the Greek Festival in 2016. Mytilinaki Kennedy's strategy for this examination is historical, insofar as she approaches the Fabre misplacement from Adamantios Korais's principle of *metakénosis*, which served as a crucial historiographical tool during the Greek Enlightenment. By plotting the trajectory from Korais's time to the present, Mytilinaki Kennedy unearths the conditions that led to the revolt against Fabre and, simultaneously, reveals a cultural-critical dimension to the so-called Greek Crisis.

Finally, **Andreea S. Micu**'s contribution provides the third panel of the Greek triptych with her essay, 'Photographing the End of the World: Capitalist Temporality, Crisis, and the Performativity of Visual Objects.' In this work, Micu highlights the photographic work of a Greek artistic group called 'Depression Era', which sought to create an alternative archive of the Greek Crisis, one that

did not capitulate to readymade narratives of debt, financialization, and cultural poverty. Drawing on the work of D. Soyini Madison and Joshua Chambers-Letson, Micu reads the affective force of specific photographs and reveals glimpses of temporalities unbeholden to capitalist logic.

The next two essays remain tethered to Greece and its classical heritage through the keyword "tragedy". **Kate Katafiasz** brings a psychoanalytic perspective to the materials of the *skene* and *proskene* in classical tragedy. After first recognizing these scenographic elements as limens mediating the fictional worlds of the dramatic action and the historical reality of the Ancient Greek polis, Katafiasz then hones in on the dialectic of sight and blindness so crucial to dramatic revelation. The result is a penetrating analysis of the role of crisis within the interplay of dramatic blindness and spectatorial insight. After this essay, **Hannah Lammin** pursues the Ancient Greek paradigm of tragedy into the realm of Human Rights discourse, specifically the work of Werner Hamacher. Lammin contends that Hamacher's criticism of human rights discourse, while necessary and innovative, stops short of pursuing its full course. To see the plot through to the end, Lammin employs the non-philosophy of François Laruelle to radicalize Hamacher's classical literary foundations and advance a 'performance-fiction' of the generic human. The stakes of this argument arise in the need to surpass a purely juridical definition of humanity, and this challenge motivates Lammin to shine François Laurelle's creative philosophy on not only Hamacher's discourse but also the performance theory of Erika Fischer-Lichte. The end result is a theory of non-decisional judgement that reveals yet another angle of the Ancient Greek notion of *krisis*.

**Joel White** and **Jasper Delbecke** continue the historical analysis of this suite of papers, but their focus brings our attention to twentieth-century paradigms. For White, the primary question is that of Artaud and his so-called "madness". Cleverly, White parries the oft-cited paradigm of Artaudian insanity by summoning the unquestionable rationality of Immanuel Kant. His purpose in this juxtaposition is to expose a wisp of what White terms 'anarchic reflection' within Kant's *Critique*s, a wisp that receives its proper substantiation from Artaud's philosophical ruminations and his Theatre of Cruelty. White argues that we must read Kant with Artaud in order 'to understand better how the Theatre of Cruelty functions as a cruel crisis of the *krisis* of Form.' Delbecke, while departing from the gravitational field of Artaud, summons an equally well known aesthetico-historical paradigm in order to locate new terrain for thought. The paradigm in question for Delbecke is that of the essay. After tracing Montaigne's original work with the essay form and citing both Adorno's and Lukács's addenda to Montaigne's initial forays, Delbecke seeks a theatrical analogue to the essay in the contemporary documentary performance of Belgian theatre makers Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere. By offering neither Truth nor Totality in its form of judgement, the essay, for Delbecke, offers the Belgian theatre-makers a means for bypassing binary—good/bad, right/wrong—narrative structures when assessing an environmental and social catastrophe in a mining town in Brazil. For both White and Delbecke, the form of thought receives a critical jolt after considering how *krisis* itself constitutes theatrical thinking.

We follow the thread of critical climate change into the next essay, where **Jeanne Tiehen** brings our focus to the temporality governing the epistemological framework surrounding both media representation and the popular uptake of rising global temperatures. The keystone of this

framework is presentism and the guiding philosophical light is phenomenology, which, for Tiehen, helps us interrogate the seduction of "presentist" thinking. After sculpting a phenomenological method capable of revealing the illusions of presentism, Tiehen turns to two plays that demonstrate a model of critical-philosophical examination capable, perhaps, of persuading climate-change skeptics. Theatre serves a similarly important role in the philosophical thought of **Tony Fisher**'s subsequent article, but the special edition's theme of crisis gets a red light. Fisher uses the halt in momentum to parade the concept of "impasse", which, contrary to "crisis" operates in a realm beyond decision. In his own words, 'Where crisis finds no decision, there we discover the impasse.' Developed through a nuanced examination of political theology and Blitz Theatre Group's show *Late Night* (2016), Fisher philosophizes the waylessness of "impasse" and the ecotone of impasse and immanence. Particularly poignant for the ongoing discussion of Brexit and theatrical responses to stultified political discourse in the EU, Fisher's article offers a detailed map of the no-man's-land beyond crisis.

Where do we go from here? That might depend on how we imagine what constitutes 'here'. Love is the answer, we often hear, as in "Love Trumps Hate". But **Rachel Cockburn** points out that even something as apparently innocuous as the London Southbank's *Festival of Love* (2016) might be understood as a form of 'governmentalised love', seeking to produce 'the loving subject'. Glossing the critique of love for the state put forward in Gillian Rose's *The Broken Middle*, Cockburn argues that we should be wary of the ways in which ideals of love are appealed to during times of crisis—what she calls 'a love regime'—and argues that we need to think love differently, as 'an ethico-political practice'.

**Tom Drayton** also attempts a diagnosis of the present moment, engaging with the supposedly apolitical figure of the "millennial"—a generational marker with which Drayton himself identifies. Drayton picks up on the idea of "metamodernism" as a currently circulating term that describes an ambivalent attitude that encapsulwhile encapsulating both sincerity and cynicism, suggesting that it might be applicable as a millennial 'structure of feeling' (per Raymond Williams). Adapting the title of a book that lays out the tenets of metamodernism, *The Listening Society*, Drayton proposes a parallel in the form of 'The Listening Theatre': a socially-engaged theatre practice that is optimistic at the same time as it is self-critical, and is distinct from recent forms of relational aesthetics or dialogical art.

For **Daniela Perazzo Domm**, the present moment is shaped by post-Fordist conditions of labour, within which we face not only an economic and financial crisis, but, as Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has written, a crisis of imagination. Entering into vibrant dialogue with dance and performance theorists such as Randy Martin and Bojana Kunst, Perazzo Domm considers the ways in which performance is paradigmatic of virtuosic labour—but also offers modes of resistance and alternative relations with and between bodies. Whereas André Lepecki diagnosed a period of dance practice that utilized exhaustion as a strategy, Perazzo Domm suggests that a more recent shift has returned to movement—exertion, repetition, and rhythm—as exemplified in her analysis by the work of Igor and Moreno and Alessandro Sciarroni. Through what she describes as 'the

emotional body’, these dances ‘exceed the logic of exchange and instrumentality by reclaiming their creative, transformative, and relational power,’ offering a route to ‘another freedom’.

Finally, the [Margins] and ReView sections of this special edition offer even more food for thought. Though not designed to speak necessarily to the main theme of the journal, the five contributions in these sections do indeed provide fuel for theorizing numerous topics outlined in the preceding articles. A group of authors gathered together under the umbrella of the Performance Studies international (PSi) **Performance and Philosophy Working Group** (PPWG) forward a polyphonic symphony titled ‘What is Refugee’? Driven by the PSi meeting in Hamburg, the PPWG convened a six-hour conversation around the theme of the Refugee and the loose notion of a ‘conference in reverse.’ That is, instead of preparing papers ahead of time, the eight authors of the group decided to gather and pursue an improvisational dialogue in order to discern the content of their eventual collaboratively designed essay. After roughly a year of gestation, the result is a fragmentary and definitively uncertain proclamation about philosophical themes subtending the notion of ‘refugee’, and an analysis of several specific contours to the very real and palpable plight of millions of the earth’s inhabitants.

In the ReView section, we find a motley assortment of themes that, nevertheless, hang together within the overarching theme of crisis. A performance spectacle of outlandish proportions in North Korea, an artfully redacted and reimagined deployment of Timothy Morton’s *Hyperbobjects*, Spike Lee’s comedic and deathly serious critique of blackface in the 2000 film *Bamboozled*, and a repurposed coffee table book from 1980 that serves as ‘An accurately illustrated guidebook with theoretical space journeys through the universe.’ These are the materials reviewed by **Marc Kosciejew**, **Mel Keiser**, **Amma Y. Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin**, and **Matt Martin**, respectively. As a suite of offerings, these ReViews forward the section’s aims to rethink what an academic ‘review’ might look like and provoke you, our readers, into a creative posture from which you might respond. What crises do you glimpse here? What particular form of judgement is prepared by a deliberate and purposeful repeat encounter with a work of art and/or scholarship? Where do you situate yourself within this academic discourse? How does your body register the effects of the both crisis and *krisis*? Wherever you are, and whatever crisis you are reading *from* even as you read *about* crisis, what thinking does this collection make possible?

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## Biographies

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# THE TRAGEDY OF THE GREEK DEBT CRISIS: TO BE DONE WITH JUDGMENT

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Since the first memorandum "agreement" between Greece and its international creditors—the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—the "tragedy of the Greek debt crisis" has become one of the most popular narratives that frame Greece's condition of indebtedness. Representatives of the Greek joint government of SYRIZA-ANEL, of Greece's creditors, of Greece's official opposition, members of the Parliament of Greece, members of the European Parliament, journalists, activists, and so forth, all use notions of "tragedy" in order to associate the indebtization of Greece with what appears to be a "debt crisis."

Highlighting the interplay between appearances of "debt crisis" and notions of tragedy as its point of departure, the first section of this essay builds on Nietzsche's thought and introduces a rigorous philosophy of tragedy that understands what appears to be a "debt crisis" as, in fact, a crisis of the creditor's capacity to appropriate their debtor. For Nietzsche, in order for the creditor to find new ways to appropriate their debtor, the creditor stages a series of acts of judgment (κρίσις) that introduce masks and appearances of their debtor's redemption. Drawing upon the interplay between the notion of mask and its performative capacities, Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy frames redemption in terms of an appearance and an illusion that conceals and perpetuates the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor. Nietzsche's emphasis on the interrelations between masks of redemption and the reproduction of creditor/debtor power differentials, allow me to argue that Nietzsche's works on tragedy lay the ground for the emergence of becomings that are beyond indebtization, judgment and redemption.

In the second section of this essay I make the case that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari draw upon Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy in order to grasp the interdependencies between capitalistic

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modes of production and the production of infinite debt. I argue that just like redemption in Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy, exchange in Deleuze and Guattari introduces appearances of equalization that render debt infinite. I closely examine how, within frames of capitalistic production, the interdependencies between the production of infinite debt and appearances of exchange give capital the opportunity to generate itself from credit.

In the third section of this essay I build on Deleuze and Guattari's readings of Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy and on Maurizio Lazzarato's works on Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari and I argue that what appears to be a "Greek debt crisis" is a crisis of capital's capacity to secure its growth. I understand the austerity projects that were launched in Europe of the so-called financial crisis of 2008–9 as capital's experimentations with new ways of exploitation. In the fourth and final section of this essay I place particular emphasis on the "YES" and "NO" demonstrations that occurred two days before the Greek bailout referendum of 2015. I make the case that while the "YES" demonstration reenacted the infinitization of Greece's indebtedness to its creditors, the "NO" demonstration celebrated collective conceptualizations of politics that exceed debt and austerity.

If the indebtization of Greece builds on appearances of debt resolution then we need scholarship that grasps the interconnections between the performative capacities of these appearances and what is often promoted and experienced as "the reality" of indebted Greece. In *What is Philosophy?* (1994), Deleuze and Guattari call for a philosophy that profits from "donning a mask" (43) by turning the force of the mask—a force that, I contend, is both theatrical and performative—towards the mask itself. From this point of view, the "task" of philosophy is to keep scattering the mask into multiple masks by continuously dressing it up. As a scholarship concerned with the common grounds between performance and philosophy, Performance Philosophy not only sheds light on the interconnections between the "real" aspects of the mask and the masked aspects of "reality" but also grasps the revolutionary potentialities that the scattering of the mask into multiple masks entails. In the comments that follow I introduce a philosophy of tragedy that draws upon the works of Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari and that, I argue, understands debt resolution as a mask the performative capacities of which are linked to the reproduction of the asymmetries between Greece and its international creditors. I trace the disruption of these asymmetries in the diffusion of the masks of redemption into multiple masks that move beyond notions of resolution.

## Nietzsche's Philosophy of Tragedy and Performances of Redemption

In *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche introduces a philosophy of tragedy that grasps that redemption can often perform as an illusion, a mask, and an appearance of resolution that conceals and perpetuates the non-resolvability of the power relations between a creditor and a debtor. From this point of view, the relation between resolution and the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor is not a relation of opposition or contradiction. The masks and appearances of resolution are part of the production of the creditor/debtor power differentials.

The notion of “redemption by illusion” first appears in *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 1993) where Nietzsche conceptualizes attic tragedy in terms of two forces: the Apolline and the Dionysiac. Apollo is the one who finds “pleasure” and “delight” in “longing for illusion and for redemption by illusion” (24). Additionally, according to Nietzsche, that illusion performs as if it is not an illusion but reality. Nietzsche writes “an illusion that we, utterly caught up in it and consisting of it—as a continuous becoming in time, space and causality, in other words—are required to see as empirical reality” (24). However, this grasp of illusionary redemption as appearances and performances of reality does not imply that the destruction of the illusion will reveal a supposed actual reality that lies underneath.

On the contrary, for Nietzsche the disruption of the Apolline “redemption by illusion” can only emerge from the Dionysiac affirmation of the Apolline mask. The force of Dionysus is a force that affirms that redemption is an illusion that performs as the one and only reality that there is. As Nietzsche writes, with Dionysus “the spell […] is broken” (71). However, the force of Dionysus is not negatively defined by and through the destruction of the Apolline illusion. Dionysus affirms that the Apolline illusion is just a mask (and not the only empirical reality that exists), not through the destruction of the one mask, but through the creation of multiple masks. The destruction of the Apolline mask is a contingent outcome of the multiplicities of masks that Dionysus creates.

If the destruction of the Apolline “redemption by illusion” occurs, it occurs because of the Dionysiac “excess” of masks and “multiplicities of figures” (51). For Nietzsche the “doctrine of tragedy” (52) lies in this continuous interplay between “the Apolline deception […] which has the effect of relieving us of the burden of Dionysiac surge and excess” (103)—the Dionysiac excess becomes a burden since Dionysus affirms that redemption is by design illusionary and thus unreachable—and the Dionysiac excess and multiplicities of masks that, as Nietzsche writes, “is capable of intensifying Apolline effects” (102) that regard the effects of the mask. Tragedy is a continuous and simultaneous dramatization of illusions of redemption in the making (Apollo) and of the scattering of these illusions that emerges from the excessive multiplicities of masks that affirm the illusionary foundations of redemption (Dionysus).

What Nietzsche leaves implicit in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and makes more explicit when he revisits his philosophy of tragedy in *The Genealogy of Morals* ([1887] 2013), is that redemption performs as a seeming appearance and an elusive promise of resolution that conceals, produces and perpetuates the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, the Apolline notion of “redemption by illusion” that was introduced in *The Birth of Tragedy* becomes “the (debtor’s) impossibility of paying the debt” (62). Debt resolution becomes an “adamantine impossibility” (62) so that debt is rendered unpayable and the power of the creditor over the debtor is never challenged.

The non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor are hidden and concealed beneath appearances and seeming promises of resolution that, nevertheless, remain elusive. For Nietzsche “it is at this juncture that the very hope of an eventual redemption has to put itself once for all into the prison of pessimism, it is at this juncture that the eye has to recoil and rebound in

despair from off an adamantine impossibility" (61). Once the debtor affirms that debt resolution performs as a mask in order to never be reached—it is the unreachability of redemption that Nietzsche describes as "the prison of pessimism"—then the debtor will turn both against themselves and the creditor (62). The debtor will no longer define themselves through notions of impossible redemption and the creditor will no longer be able to extract profit from imposing unpayable debt onto the debtor.

Tragedy dramatizes how the creditor imposes excess of credit onto their debtor. The creditor's goal is to bond their debtor and perpetuate the non-resolvable power relations between them. Earlier I argued that Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy grasps that redemption performs as a mask that produces and reproduces unpayable debt. Un-payable debt needs to appear as concrete debt—in order to introduce the possibility of its resolution—and simultaneously to perform in abstract terms—to turn continuously that possibility (even when that possibility occurs) into what Nietzsche described as an "adamantine impossibility."

The debtor is evaluated by their creditor both for their ability to keep paying without ever fully repaying their debt and for valuing their indebtedness to their creditors. The creditor not only evaluates their debtor's value and but also judges their debtor's values of values. For Nietzsche these acts of judgment carry a "double distinction: first, the relatively permanent element, the custom, the act, the 'drama' a certain rigid sequence of methods of procedure; on the other hand, the fluid element, the meaning, the end, the expectation which is attached to the operation of such procedure" (52). The "relatively permanent element," the "drama," the "act" regards the staging of processes of evaluation that build on appearances of concreteness. The "fluid element of the expectation" regards acts of judgment that conceal beneath appearances of concreteness the fact that are founded on abstract values of values.

For Nietzsche the interplay between the "permanent procedures" of evaluation and the "fluid expectations" of judgment provides the debtor with a memory of their "debt" (40). Because of this mnemonic production the debtor remembers not only their promise to endlessly repay an unpayable debt but also the creditor's elusive promise to redeem them. As a result both the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor, and the debt that these relations produce are carried to infinity.

Tragedy is the worst enemy of the creditor's power over their debtor because it dramatizes the diffusion of these masks of concreteness into more masks of abstraction. To sum up, Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy grasps that redemption performs as an illusion, an appearance, and an elusive promise of resolution of a so-called debt crisis that builds on series of acts of judgment. Furthermore, Nietzsche's works on tragedy demonstrate how these acts of judgment conceal their basis on abstraction—abstraction that can also be understood as the values of values—beneath masks of concreteness.

From this point of view, tragedy dramatizes both the theatricality of redemption—a theatricality that regards the performance of redemption as mask and illusion—and the performative capacities and potentialities of redemption that regard the interdependencies between masks of

resolution and the reproduction of the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor. I contend that for Nietzsche it is the affirmation that the performative force of redemption draws its momentum from a mask, an appearance, and an illusion, that entails revolutionary potentialities. From this point of view, revolution occurs not when the performative capacities of a mask are disrupted or even appropriated but when the mask is affirmed as a mask and is diffused to multiplicities of masks.

Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy demonstrates that when it comes to redemption and conditions of indebtedness the affirmation of debt resolution as a mask lays the ground for the emergence of becomings that are beyond indebtization, calculability, and judgment. In *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (1994), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that "the many contemporary attempts to employ 'performance' or 'performativity' as a paradigm for social analysis and social practice […] highlights the social importance of signifying or discursive practices" but cannot grasp "value-creating practices," or, in other words, "the production of production" (8). Contrary to Hardt and Negri, in this section I made the case that Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy grasps the interdependencies between the production of values and performances of redemption. The next section builds on Deleuze and Guattari's readings of Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy in order to grasp the links between appearances of debt resolution, the production of the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor, and capitalism. Connecting this theorization back to the Greek situation I contend that the indebtization of Greece builds on masks of debt resolution that reproduce the asymmetries between Greece and its creditors.

## Deleuze, Guattari and the Tragedy of Capitalism

For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the production of the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor that Nietzsche grasps in his philosophy of tragedy also understands how capitalistic modes of production often perform. In the previous section I demonstrated that for Nietzsche tragedy is the dramatization of the affirmation that redemption is an illusion that "needs to be out once for all into the prison of pessimism" (Nietzsche [1872] 2003, 61) in order to stop reproducing the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari build on Nietzsche and argue that, within frames of capitalism, the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor remain hidden beneath appearances of exchange. Just like redemption in Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy, exchange in *Anti-Oedipus* introduces elusive promises of equality in order to reproduce inequality. The tragedy of *Anti-Oedipus* lies in Deleuze and Guattari's multiple, ongoing, and restless calls for understanding exchange as an appearance that perpetuates asymmetries.

According to Deleuze and Guattari understanding the irresolvable asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor in relation to exchange is one of Nietzsche's most important contributions to theories of contemporary capitalism. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, "Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* […] is an attempt—and a success without equal—at interpreting economy in terms of debt, in the debtor-creditor relationship, by eliminating every consideration of exchange" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 180). However, every consideration of exchange as a process of

equalization needs to be "eliminated" because what remains is the deceptive performance of exchange.

Just like Nietzsche wanted to put once and for all the illusion of redemption into a "prison of pessimism," Deleuze and Guattari want to eliminate once and for all the appearance and the elusive promise of exchange that implies equalization. For Deleuze and Guattari, "Exchange is only an appearance: each partner or group assesses the value of the last receivable object (limit-object), and the apparent equivalence derives from that" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 439). The "assessment" of the pre-existing or pre-established value—the value of the last receivable object—does not transform an unequal distribution to an equal distribution. On the contrary it reproduces the asymmetrical relations between the involved parties. This does not mean that the asymmetries remain the same since mobility within the power relations between the involved parties might occur, but that asymmetry is reproduced.

Similarly to the mask of redemption, the appearance of exchange carries performative potentialities. The appearance of exchange does not perform on a level of artificiality or similitude that is opposed to reality. On the contrary the appearance of exchange acts upon lived experience by reproducing debt. Deleuze and Guattari are very clear about that: "Far from being a mere imitator, the artisan of the signs accomplishes a work" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 189). The work that "the artisan of the signs" (i.e., the appearance of exchange) accomplishes is the production and reproduction of debt: "Far from being an appearance assumed by exchange, debt is (an) immediate effect" (180). The most important characteristic of the debt that is produced by appearances of exchange is that it is irresolvable and infinite.

Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy grasps that what appears to be an accumulation of debt, or, in other words a debt crisis, is an excess of credit built on judgment (*krisis*). Additionally, according to Nietzsche, the abstract aspect of judgment—"the fluid element and expectation" as Nietzsche called it—is concealed beneath the "drama," and the "act" of concreteness. Drawing upon Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari understand credit excess—"money begetting money" (227) as they call it—and thus irresolvable debt and debt crises as integral parts of capitalistic modes of production. For Deleuze and Guattari capitalism reinvents itself every time "debt is rendered infinite" (197) through simultaneously introducing the appearance of and eliminating any possibility for a "final discharge" (132). Within frames of capitalism, "the infinite creditor and infinite credit have replaced the blocks of mobile and finite debt [...] the creditor has not yet lent while the debtor never quits repaying" (197). Debt remains infinite and the power relations between a creditor and a debtor infinitely irresolvable.

The infinitization of debt and thus of the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor is so important to reinventions of capitalism because it enables capital to create and generate more capital without necessarily relying on material production. Infinite credit is a form of production that "operates less on a quantity of labor than by a complex qualitative process" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 492). Deleuze and Guattari are arguing that the production of infinite credit appropriates, and does not oppose, labor. Deleuze and Guattari understand this process of

appropriation as "anti-production (production that builds on excess of credit) operating retroactively on (*se rabattre sur*) productive forms and appropriate them" (31). The most important characteristic of anti-production is that it "does not oppose production […] on the contrary, it insinuates itself everywhere in the productive machine and becomes firmly wedded to it in order to regulate its productivity and realize surplus value" (235). Production and anti-production are part of the endless production of capital generating capital.

Capital generating capital or, echoing Deleuze and Guattari, "money begetting money," builds on the appropriation of production by anti-production. According to Deleuze and Guattari the appropriation of production by anti-production is the "signs of the power of capital, flows of financing, a system of differential quotients of production that bear witness to a prospective force or to a long-term evaluation, not realizable *hic et nunc*, and functioning as an axiomatic of abstract quantities" (228). In order for the evaluation that defines the profit that emerges from profit to remain a "long-term" and open-ended evaluation it needs to perform in terms of judgment. Therefore, in order to produce infinite debt, capitalistic modes of production not only require masks of debt resolution and appearances of "equalizing" exchange but also a theatre of judgment of the debtor by their creditor.

For Deleuze it is the infinitization of debt and the "long-term" evaluation of the debtor by their creditor—a process that is designed to remain infinitely without a *telos* while the process itself becomes the *telos*—that stages a theatre of judgment. In "To Have Done With Judgment"—an essay in which Deleuze reflects both on Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy and Antonin Artaud's radio play *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1947)—Deleuze argues that "it is not as if the judgment itself were postponed, put off until tomorrow, pushed back to infinity; on the contrary, it is the act of postponing, of carrying to infinity, that makes judgment possible. The condition of judgment lies in a supposed relation between existence and the infinite order of time" (Deleuze 1997, 127). In *Anti-Oedipus* this relation between existence and the infinite order of time—a relation that forms existence in terms of the creditor/debtor asymmetries—becomes a relation of appropriation of anti-production by production.

In order for this relation to remain, it needs to "create a memory for a man": a memory according to which all modes of existence are calculable, redeemable, and shaped by and within the power relations between a creditor and a debtor. Drawing upon Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari argue that this production of memory of calculable existence performs in terms of "marking" and "inscription." In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche argues that in order for any kind of power relations to last—especially the ones between a creditor and a debtor—a "system of mnemonics" is required. For Nietzsche "something is burnt in so as to remain in [man's] memory: only that which never stops hurting remains in [their] memory" (Nietzsche [1872] 2003, 37). Deleuze and Guattari understand this kind of production of memory as an "other memory, one that is collective, a memory of words and no longer a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 145). This memory of "words" and "signs" is also a memory of masks that fuels the forgetting of the direct effects of the masks.

In the case of the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor what needs to be remembered is the mask and the appearance of debt resolution and not the direct effect of the infinite debt that this mask produces. The production of infinite debt needs to be inscribed, marked and internalized in ways that it becomes forgotten as the only reality that can be. For Nietzsche, tragedy, understood as a continuous affirmation of the mask as a mask, can potentially disrupt the production of infinite debt. This affirmation is both cruel and celebratory. Celebratory because it disrupts the power relations between a creditor and a debtor by recognizing redemption as an illusion that carries performative capacities—for instance infinite debt—and cruel because it no longer hides behind "pleasurable" illusions that perpetuate pain by numbing it. Nietzsche writes "Without cruelty no feast" (Nietzsche [1872] 2003, 42). The cruelty of the feast involves the painfully "ecstatic"—the taking out of the condition of stasis—diffusion of the stasis of one mask to ongoing movements of multiplicities of masks.

According to Deleuze, this cruel affirmation of the appearances as appearances that perform and produce direct effects is also found in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. In "To Have Done With Judgment" (1997), Deleuze writes "Artaud will give sublime developments to the system of cruelty [...] the system of cruelty expresses the finite relations of the existing body with the forces that affect it, whereas the doctrine of infinite debt determines the relationships of the immortal soul with judgments. The system of cruelty is everywhere opposed to the doctrine of judgment" (128). The next two sections closely investigate whether this system of cruelty that exceeds judgment and redemption can be found in indebted Greece and in what appears to be a "Greek debt crisis."

## The Crisis/*Krisis* of Indebted Greece

Since the launch of the euro in January 1999 the private banks of the eurozone's core—Germany, France, Italy and the countries of the former Benelux—have been building their growth on the indebtization of the eurozone's periphery: Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain also known as PIGS (Castells 2017, Galbraith 2016, Varoufakis 2016, Phillips 2014). In order to generate cheap debt in the periphery of the eurozone, the private banks of the eurozone's core borrowed in US dollars at low rates and lent this money at higher rates to the eurozone's periphery (Phillips 2014, 35). After the US financial crisis of 2008, the European credit bubble burst.

Due to that burst, the capital that derived from the credit issued by the private banks of the eurozone could no longer increase its growth. In the previous section I made the case that what I understand as the "tragedy of capitalism" builds on Deleuze and Guattari's understandings of the interdependencies between the profit that emerges from the generation of debt, or, in other words from credit, and the appropriation of production by anti-production. In *Governing by Debt*, also drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari, Maurizio Lazzarato (2015) makes the case that the roots of the crisis lie in the fact that capital could "no longer ensure new forms of exploitation/appropriation" (38). According to Lazzarato the causes of the co-called European Sovereign Debt Crisis do not lie in the inability of several eurozone member states to pay off their debts, as it often appears. On the contrary what appears to be a crisis of debt accumulation caused

by increased public spending is a crisis of excessive credit and, more particularly, a crisis of credit's capacity to generate profit.

However, credit's inability to "increase in value" (38) is simultaneously an opportunity for credit, and also for the capital produced by credit, to use different means in order to grow. A crisis of the means of appropriation is simultaneously an opportunity for the exploration of new ways of appropriation. According to Deleuze and Guattari "capitalism [...] was able to interpret the general principle according to which things work well only providing they break down, crises being 'the means immanent to the capitalistic mode of production" (Deleuze 1983, 230). I contend that the austerity projects that were launched in Europe of the so-called financial crisis of 2008–9 were experimentations for the capital that derives from credit accumulation to find ways to keep securing its growth.

In brief, austerity policies include heavy taxation, wage reductions, cuts in any kind of spending that involves the welfare programs, and privatizations. Lazzarato understands austerity policies as "forced levies" (2015, 39) that use secure heavy taxation in order to experiment with new ways of exploitation. Even though European austerity projects are promoted as necessary means for the indebted member states of the eurozone's periphery to pay back their debts, austerity imposes more loans, heavy taxation, reduces wages, enforces privatizations, and annihilates welfare in order to bail out the banks since the banks are considered "too big to fail." What appeared to be public debts are private debts that have been imposed to the taxpayer. From this point of view austerity becomes the "new" common ground between monetary experimentations and fiscal policies.

In *Anti-Oedipus*—where I contend Deleuze and Guattari contextualize Nietzsche's elaboration on the performative capacities of appearances of debt resolution to reproduce the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor, within frames of capitalism—Deleuze and Guattari argue that taxation enhances the production of infinite debt and keeps the creditors alive. They write, "As if the Greeks[1] had discovered in their own way what the Americans discovered after the New Deal: that heavy taxes are good for business. In a word money—the circulation of money—is the means for rendering the debt infinite" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 197). Austerity uses the heavy taxes that are imposed on the member states of the eurozone's periphery in order to do "good" to the business of the creditors.

Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari Lazzarato argues that, during the so-called financial crisis in Europe, heavy taxation was a way for capital to explore new means for its growth. According to Lazzarato, "During the crisis, taxation has served both to destroy the forms of (constant and variable) capital that fail to conform to the logic of financial valorization and, from this destruction, to establish a possible new phase of accumulation" (2015, 39). Financial valorization refers to capital assessing and expanding itself. What appears to be a "debt-crisis" is an opportunity for credit to overcome its burst and find new ways to appropriate production.

The "Greek debt crisis" was an opportunity for the indebted banks of the eurozone to be saved. Especially since the first memorandum agreement—the first austerity package—between Greece

and its international creditors, public discourse is saturated with narratives of the so-called "Greek debt crisis" that are often associated with notions of tragedy. Advocates of austerity associate the "Greek debt crisis" with notions of tragedy in order to "legitimize" severe austerity measures as necessary and inevitable. However, the philosophy of tragedy that builds on Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari conceptualizes becomings that are beyond indebtization and disrupt the imposition of the supposedly "inevitable" austerity.

Let's take a closer look at what appears to be the "debt crisis" of Greece. In February 2010 the Greek governing party of PA.SO.K—an acronym that stands for Panhellenic Socialist Movement—announced that the statistics regarding the debt of Greece had been falsified so that Greece could enter the euro area in 2001. In response to this "revelation" Troika—"the group of three"—was established in May 2010. Troika was a committee containing representatives of the world's international creditors. In the case of Greece these creditors were the EC, the ECB, and the IMF. The role of Troika was to evaluate and assess Greece's implementation of the severe austerity measures, often promoted as economic adjustment programs, assistance or bailout packages, that come in the form of memorandum agreements, imposed by Greece's international creditors. What is of particular importance is that Troika is not answerable to any elected government either on a national or on a European level.

Between 2010 and the Greek snap elections of January 2015 Greece had signed two memorandum agreements and a series of complementary additions collectively called "medium-term budgetary framework" in exchange for loans that were literally more debt. Bridging Greece's memoranda to the thought process that was elaborated in the previous sections I contend that in the case of Greece the elusive promise remained the same: Greece's debt resolution "achieved" through the infinitization of debt. During the years of the two memorandum agreements Troika's representatives kept coming to Greece in order to evaluate Greece's "progress" regarding the implementation of the austerity measures imposed by its creditors.

Public discourse often described Greece's evaluations by Troika as "choreographies" staged on a theatre of judgment. Every time Troika came to Greece the streets were kept empty for the "safety" of its representatives. Troika's representatives spent days behind the closed doors of the Greek ministries and administration buildings, and the results of the evaluations were announced as "facts" by the government. Every evaluation asked for more imposed debt, more wage reductions, more privatizations, more pension cuts, and less welfare. Every evaluation performed as an appearance and an elusive promise of debt resolution that reproduced the non-resolvable power relations between Greece and its international creditors.

Echoing Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari, Troika's evaluations were acts in an endless theatre of judgment where judgment is a way for the creditor to find new ways to exploit their debtor. In indebted Greece judgment became the solution to the crisis of appropriation. As one Greek etymology suggests *κρίσις* (*krisis*) is the activity of judgment the outcome of which is to be determined. However, in the case of the so-called "Greek debt crisis" *krisis* is transformed to a tool used by Greece's creditors to experiment with their debtor's exploitation. The crisis of the creditor's

capacity to profit from their debtor entails a kind of *krisis* the outcome of which is not to be determined but it is always-already in favor of the creditor. The *krisis* of Greece as a debtor is part of a theatre of judgment staged by Greece's creditors so that Greece's indebtization continues. For Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari in order for the theatre of judgment to simultaneously be "carried to infinity" while also performing as the "final authority" it needs to be inscribed in memory. The memorandum agreements between Greece and its international creditors are produced and imposed memory that shapes existence merely in terms of the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor.

For Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari, the inscribed memory of judgment helps judgment perform on a level of infinity through appearances of finitude: the "final authority" as Deleuze calls it. The memoranda between Greece and its creditors set the scene for the theatre of judgment of Greece by its creditors; a theatre that uses appearances of debt resolution in order to infinitize Greece's debt. What appears to be a "Greek debt crisis" is a crisis of debt's appropriation by credit that relies on *krisis* (judgment) in order to overcome itself.

Earlier I argued that according to Nietzsche, because it affirms masks as appearances that carry performative capacities, Dionysian tragedy can disrupt any theatre of judgment that builds on and reproduces the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor. I also made the case that Deleuze and Guattari relate Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. According to the authors of *Anti-Oedipus*, both Nietzsche and Artaud conceptualize becomings that "escape judgment" (Deleuze 1997, 131). The question then that I contend needs to be addressed asks whether and how Greece can stage its own theatre of cruelty and escape judgment.

## The Theatre of Cruelty of the "NO" demonstration and the Theatre of Judgment of the "YES" demonstration

> *No*
> then
> to negation;
> and this point
> comes when they press me
>
> Antonin Artaud,
> *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1947)

Endless austerity led to intense political turmoil. As a result, on December 29, 2014, the Greek parliament failed to elect a new president. The Greek snap elections of January 2015 were a direct result of this failure. The left party of SYRIZA—an acronym that stands for Greece's radical left—won the elections because of its promise and commitment not to sign a third memorandum agreement, to put an end to austerity, and to actualize political visions that are beyond politics of

debt. However SYRIZA did not form an absolute majority. As a result they collaborated with the right wing party of ANEL (Independent Greeks) in order to form a government.

Between January and June 2015 the tensions between the newly elected joint government of SYRIZA-ANEL and Greece's international creditors kept increasing. One of the most catalytic moments was when, during a joint press conference between the, at the time, Greek minister of finance Yianis Varoufakis, and the, also at the time, president of eurogroup[2] and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), Jeroen Dijsselbloem, Varoufakis stated that "with this (Troika) if you want—and according to the European Parliament—implausibly-constructed committee we have no intention to cooperate. Thank you" (newsIT.gr 2015). Up to the eurogroup meeting that was scheduled for June 27, 2015, SYRIZA kept pushing for no austerity while Greece's creditors kept pushing for more austerity.

On June 28, 2015, the Greek Prime Minister and President of SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras froze the negotiations with Greece's creditors and called for a Greek referendum scheduled for July 5, 2015. According to Tsipra's announcement the referendum would ask the citizens of Greece whether they accept (NAI, YES vote) or reject (OXI, NO vote) the most recent proposal of austerity measures "suggested" by Greece's international creditors. On Friday, July 3, 2015, two different and massive demonstrations were staged in the city of Athens: the NAI (YES) demonstration and the OXI (NO) demonstration.

The estimated numbers of the participants provided by the media vary, since the "accurate statistics" that referred to the demonstrations depended on the different political orientations of the individual media outlets. According to research that determined the participants based on the capacity of the occupied spaces, between 360,000 and 400,000 people participated in the "NO" and between 25,000 and 30,000 people participated in the "YES" demonstration. The "NO" demonstration was staged on Syntagma Square in Athens— the Square located directly in front of the Greek Parliament and that in Greek means "constitution." Historically the Syntagma Square has staged various uprisings, protests, occupations, and demonstrations. Some of the largest and longest series of occupations occurred during the first two years of Greek austerity. Mostly known as Κίνημα Αγανακτισμένων Πολιτών (Movement of Indignant Citizens), between 2010 and 2012, thousands of people that had no ties to any political party and that wanted to directly challenge austerity and politics of debt had been living on the square in tents and self-organizing street performances, public festivals, strikes, protests, demonstrations, and so forth. Three years after the disappearance of the Indignant Citizens from the Syntagma Square, the "NO" demonstration refueled the anti-austerity movement in Greece.

The "YES" demonstration took place at Παναθηναϊκό Στάδιο (Panathenaic Stadium) also known as Καλλιμάρμαρο (Kalimarmaro). As opposed to Syntagma's long history of staging protests against European politics of austerity, Kalimarmaro performs as a reminder of Greece's "Europeanness." As the last Greek venue from where the Olympic flame is handed over to the country/host of the Olympic games, the Kalimarmaro is "admired" and "celebrated" as part of classic Greece and an "origin" of Western civilization. I contend that Greece's indebtization is closely linked to the

construction of "classical Greece" as the "origin" of Western civilization. "Classic" Greece "helped" Greece to perform its "modernity" and "Europeanness" for the European gaze, and concealed its dependence upon its European creditors beneath narratives of independence. This however can be the topic of another paper.

Going back to the two demonstrations, in spite of their major differences, the "NO" and "YES" demonstrations had one thing in common: they both moved beyond the communicated language of "no" and "yes." While both the "NO" and the "YES" demonstrations were associated with either a "NO" or a "YES" answer to the question that the upcoming referendum was going to address, the "NO" demonstration became a celebration of politics beyond debt and austerity and thus beyond judgment and creditor/debtor power relations, and the "YES" demonstration became a reactionary response to that praxis of collective and public politics beyond conditions of indebtedness.

For the "YES" demonstration any alternative conceptualization of politics that exceeds the non-resolvable relations between a creditor and a debtor, or, more particularly that does not define Greece via and by these relations, would lead not only to the immediate exclusion of Greece from the eurozone—a process known as Grexit—but also to the exclusion of Greece from Europe. According to the "YES" demonstration Greece can be part of Europe as long as it remains indebted to its creditors and it conceals this relation of indebtedness beneath narratives of nationally oriented "independence." The "YES We Are Staying in Europe" slogan of the "YES" demonstration not only indicated but also reproduced this perceived interdependency between "European" and indebted Greece.

From this point of view the "YES" demonstration exceeded the seemingly affirmative "YES" by defining and shaping existence, and more particularly Greek citizenship, merely through the negatively charged position of the debtor in relation to their creditor. In this essay I made the case that Nietzsche understands tragedy as a potential disruption of the debtor's judgment by their creditor. I argued that according to Deleuze and Guattari the common ground between Nietzsche's tragedy and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty lies in both tragedy and Theatre of Cruelty's capacities to conceptualize and actualize becomings that exceed the asymmetries between a creditor and a debtor. I made the case that for Deleuze and Guattari the becomings that move beyond the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor can directly challenge the capitalistic modes of production that generate capital from credit.

Drawing upon this thought process I contend that the "YES" demonstration reenacted a theatre of judgment that kept the memory of the debtor alive. Because of the affirmative appearance of the "YES" demonstration—which is not an affirmation of the appearance as an appearance but a continuation of the preexisting performative functions of the appearance—the "YES" demonstration re-performed, and thus reproduced, the non-resolvable power relations between Greece and its international creditors. Earlier I built on Deleuze and Guattari and Lazzarato in order to argue that what appears to be a "Greek debt crisis" is a crisis of the appropriation of Greece by its creditors. From this point of view the "YES" demonstration reminded Greece's creditors that

they could continue their experimentation until they find new efficacious ways to appropriate their debtor.

While the "YES" demonstration reenacted the infinitization of Greece's indebtedness to its creditors, the "NO" demonstration celebrated collective conceptualizations of politics that exceed debt and austerity. Manifesting Nietzsche's philosophy of tragedy and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, including Deleuze and Guattari's readings of Nietzsche and Artaud, the "NO" demonstration affirmed any appearances of debt-resolution as masks that conceal and perpetuate the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor, and envisioned politics beyond notions of judgment. Put differently, the "NO" demonstration imagined becomings that are not defined through and by their negatively charged condition of indebtedness to their supposed creditors. The "NO" demonstration dramatized the collective imagination of becomings that exceed redemption by choosing to experience the cruelty of the effects of the appearance of debt-resolution over the illusionary happiness of masks of redemption.

One should take into serious consideration that after Tsipras' call for the Greek referendum on June 28, 2015, the ESM stopped providing the Greek banks with money causing their immediate closure. On the day of the "NO" demonstration the banks had been closed for a week. Capital controls were introduced reducing the maximum amount for daily withdrawals down to 60 euros so that deposits did not get transferred to banks outside of Greece. As a result employees were not getting paid, grocery stores were running out of groceries, hospitals were under-functioning, and so forth. I contend that the 400,000 people that participated in the "NO" demonstration celebrated the praxis of envisioning politics beyond notions of debt and redemption not in spite of but because of this uncertainty. This, however, does not imply a relation of causality. On the contrary it understands the "NO" demonstration not as a reaction to but as a celebration of this uncertainty.

The 400,000 people together with the dozens the representatives of the joint government SYRIZA-ANEL and the dozens of artists that performed during the demonstration all affirmed and celebrated the shattering of the masks of debt resolution that infinitize Greece's indebtedness to its creditors. The "NO" demonstration disrupted the production of memory of the debtor—a production that, as argued, builds on appearances of debt resolution—by remembering, experiencing, and celebrating the cruelty of the direct effects of masks of redemption. Even though representatives of Greece's creditors, Greece's official opposition, and the media kept arguing that the referendum would radically increase Greece's debt, the "NO" demonstration celebrated the emergence of becomings beyond indebtedness and redemption.

Earlier I argued that what appears to be a "Greek debt crisis" is a crisis of Greece's appropriation by its creditors. I also made the case that Greek austerity was an experiment that tried to provide the creditors with new means of appropriation. Since the beginning of the closure of the banks on June 28, 2015, Greece became impossible to appropriate not because of an oppositional response to its creditors but because of experiencing time that is beyond the time of infinite debt and introducing becomings that are beyond notions of debt, judgment, and redemption.

According to the results of the Greek bailout referendum of 2015 the turnout was 62.5%: a turnout that far exceeded the turnout of the Greek snap legislative elections of January 2015, which was 56.6%. Some 61.31% of the referendum's voters voted "NO" rejecting the austerity measures "suggested" by Greece's international creditors; 38.69% voted "YES" and only 5.8% of the votes were blank or invalid. In spite of Greek people's vote and resistance—as described earlier the Greek banks had remained closed and thus money stopped circulating for approximately two and a half months—on July 13, 2015, Tsipras ended up agreeing to a third memorandum of understanding between Greece and Greece's international creditors. On August 13, 2015, the Greek Parliament approved that memorandum agreement.

## Anti-Conclusion

One could argue that the "NO" demonstration performed as a pressure valve that ended up reproducing the asymmetries between Greece and its international creditors. However, the "NO" demonstration was a collective celebration of not performing as a debtor within conditions of imposed indebtedness. The negation in that sentence is not a product of hetero-determination. On the contrary it emerges from the affirmation of existence beyond debt, judgment and redemption. To echo Deleuze, the negative aspect of not performing as a debtor is not the source but one of the many manifestations of becomings that exceed the non-resolvable power relations between a creditor and a debtor and becomings that are done with judgment.

The emergence of becomings that are done with judgment is what remains of the "NO" demonstration. Many would say that what remains is not important since it never became structuralized. I contend otherwise for two reasons: one, because not having become structuralized means maintaining certain revolutionary potentialities that any kind of absorption by a structure—even the most radical one—would take away, and two, because we know from performance that what remains haunts and, just like the mask, what haunts performs.

## Notes

[1] Deleuze and Guattari here refer to Michel Foucault's research on certain tyrannies of Greece. According to the authors of Anti-Oedipus Foucault's work demonstrates that in Greek tyrannies heavy taxes on the rich distribute money to the poor only to return more money back to the rich and to perpetuate the indebtization of the poor.

[2] eurogroup are series of informal meetings among the ministers of finance of the member states of the euro area that are both not minuted and not answerable to any kind of elected body

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# DURING THE LONG GREEK CRISIS: JAN FABRE, THE GREEK FESTIVAL, AND *METAKÉNOSIS*

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Currently Greek culture is received internationally through two externally imposed frames of reference: Hellenism, the admiration for the ancient Greek spirit, and the more recent negative associations with modern Greece provoked by the Eurozone crisis. I argue that the crisis has prompted a re-examination of Greece's ambivalent position between East and West and its European identity, through the renewed interest in its modern and contemporary history. The Enlightenment's principles have influenced Modern Greek identity enormously, perhaps more than was previously recognized before the crisis. Historical theories of cultural transmission specific to the Greek paradigm, such as Adamantios Korais's highly consequential principle of *metakénosis*, provide a way into the complex issue of national, European, and global identity under the pressure of the crisis. After a brief analysis of the historical concept and its legacy, I turn to a recent scandal in the Greek theatre world, that of Jan Fabre's short-lived appointment as artistic director of the Greek Festival in 2016. A large group of Greek theatre artists circulated a letter of protest in which they asked Fabre to resign. In their responses to Fabre's perceived appropriation of their festival, these artists seemed to be reversing the *metakénosis* model as they expressed their opposition to standards of cultural value imposed from abroad. The context of the crisis, as fiscal crisis, but also as a new paradigm of *krisis* as historiographical judgment, was instrumental in voicing this protest.

## The crisis, the continuity myth, and Korais's *metakénosis*

The negative representations of Greece's image abroad during the Eurozone crisis, as well as internal developments within the country, have had a substantial impact on Greeks' sense of their

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history, and consequently an important cultural trend emerged: the repercussions of the crisis have prompted a reevaluation of the past in all spheres of culture. In their discussion on the role of history in current affairs, Antonis Liakos and Hara Kouki (2015) explain that Greeks "turned with urgency to the national past and re-read its transition to democracy, so as to make sense and render meaningful its troubled present" (58). The choice to examine *recent* history is important because the Greek tendency to resort to the past is not novel in itself and did not begin with the present crisis. In Greek culture, modernity has always been synonymous with a selective historiography that primarily focused on preserving a valuable past.[1] In the early nineteenth century, the classical past was seen as the only road to modernization, which, following Western preoccupations, mandated a parallel obliteration of other pasts, perceived to be not so useful, such as the centuries between ancient Greece and the new Greek state founded in 1828.[2] During the current crisis, however, a distinct shift occurred: domestic interest turned to the repressed periods and modern Greek culture moved to the foreground. Greek Enlightenment figure Adamantios Korais's idea of *metakénosis* and its historical influence constitute a key investigation for my study of the new historiographical model that emerged during the crisis.

Perhaps prompted by the dual meaning of the word *krisis* (κρίση) to mean both crisis *and* judgment in Greek, consistent with this special journal issue, recent Modern Greek scholarship has focused on cultural phenomena that study the current recession not simply as a rupture, or a break with the past, but instead as historiographic assessment that promotes the past. In several recent works, the crisis is first and foremost a selection process that elucidates obscure aspects of Greek history. For example, Antonis Liakos (2014) explains that, starting with the 2008 riots in response to the killing of fifteen-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos, youth movements exhibited an ambivalent relationship with history, which he describes as a "double bond with the past: Break with the past, appeal to continuity, again rejection of the past." He illustrates the contrast of sacrilege and appropriation of national history through the study of graffiti messages on national monuments in Athens, in which the national heroes of the nineteenth-century Greek revolution were pressed into the service of Euroskepticism. On a similar mode, Kostis Kornetis (2010) analyzes the reappearances of past activist poetics in the December 2008 riots. The widely observed performative practice of rejecting the past while adopting its language emphasizes the younger generation's ambivalence in handling the resurgence of a more recent, largely repressed history.

From brief allusions to elaborate treatments of historical events, history seems to have become a standard feature in Greek dramaturgy in the decade 2008–2018. During this period, forgotten classics of the Greek nineteenth and twentieth centuries reappeared in earnest. As Savas Patsalidis and Anna Stavrakopoulou (2014) put it, "whether in the form of an 'alteration' or an 'imitation,' 'spinoff,' 'appropriation,' 'abridgement,' 'transformation,' 'version,' 'offshoot' or 'tradaptation,' the past, ancient and more recent, is constantly reshuffled, reterritorialized, and rehistoricized in order to suit better the situation created by the economic crash" (13). The two scholars understand the 2010–2013 repertories of the National Theatre and the National Theatre of Northern Greece in particular as the epitome of this retrospective tendency. With the outbreak of the economic crisis, these two institutions took a conscious direction in search of Greek cultural identity. Their repertory was dominated by contemporary and modern Greek plays, adaptations of ancient

drama, and even innovative use of folk elements in visual and aural elements of their productions. However, the "affective encounter with the past" (Zaroulia 2015, 15) was not restricted in national stages, but also concerned smaller companies, in their attempt to question grand narratives, genealogies, and borders (Patsalidis 2016, 5).

The renewed interest in history is also noted in publishing activity. Socrates Kabouropoulos (2016) presents statistics on the "extended usage of literature as a means of reaffirming notions of cultural identity, identifying with- and, at the same time, escaping from the harsh realities of the crisis." He follows Greek readers' turn to introspection during the crisis, demonstrated by a significant increase in Greek titles and a simultaneous decline of published translations. In non-fiction, an enhanced interest in publications on contemporary history prevails over economics and political science.

In summing up the above trends, therefore, the skepticism surrounding Greece's European identity brought about a retrospective glance that sought to subvert established images and restrictive uses of the past. Greek performance, in a variety of forms, proposed a novel historiographic approach that challenged the continuity myth by calling into question the enduring image of modern Greece as "the quintessential archive of a perennial past" (Papanikolaou 2011). Dimitris Papanikolaou considers this reaction to the crisis as a "disturbing of the archive," where the assumed "undisturbed relationship between past and present," until now nurtured by the wiping out of the middle periods, is most fiercely attacked (ibid.). The crisis itself is the "very point from which the past should be reviewed, revisited, re-collated, reassembled and reassessed, both in political and in identitarian terms." As early as 2011, Papanikolaou saw in artistic responses to the crisis the distinct preoccupation with history as "a radical political position," a questioning of a national identity and "a trend characterized by its effort to critique, undermine and performatively disturb the very logics through which the story of Greece—the narrative of its national, political, sociocultural cohesion in synchrony and diachrony—has until now been told." The reconsideration of the past, then, brings to the fore not only instances of obscure history but also targets popular preconceived notions about the classical era and the assumed continuum between that high moment in history and today. During this period of profound political and social upheaval, the perpetual backward glance in Greek thought, which ordinarily functioned as a mode of cultural coherence, has instead become a subversive historiography.

In order to perceive the dramatic historiographical shifts that the crisis produced, it is worth unpacking the instrumentalized uses of the past as these occurred under the cultural paradigm that until recently dominated Greek historical and philosophical thought. The philosophical tradition of continuity that forgoes a large part of Greek history by focusing on the classical era harks back to another moment of crisis: the preamble of the Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire. During the last turn of the eighteenth century, proponents of the Greek Enlightenment were actively gathering forces across a geographical network beyond the Balkan region and within the centers of European Enlightenment. The forceful cultural movement was seen as the intellectual preparation for Greek-speaking populations to revolt against their Ottoman ruler in 1821 (Kondylis 1998, 200–205). At the time, translating the ancients was pivotal to formulating a

national identity. However, translation from Western European languages was also considered central to ensuring that the citizens of the emerging Greek state were Europeanized (Korais 1958, 119).[3] In the dominant intellectual views of the era, particularly as expressed by Korais, the ancient past and the European present became one and the same.

It must be said that the conflation of classical Greece and Enlightenment Europe was not an idea that began with the Greek intellectuals of the diaspora. The contemporaneous philhellenic movement in Europe also relied on the belief that classical Greece was the cradle of European civilization (Augustinos 2008, 188). A decisive step towards the idea that Ottoman Greeks were descendants of classical Greeks was provided with the Greek translation of Charles Rollin's *Histoire ancienne*, published in Venice in 1750 (Kitromilides 2013, 71). Rollin advocated that eighteenth-century Greeks could claim the ancients as their direct ancestors, based on the common geographical space (72). Once the connection was solidly in place in Greek cultural consciousness, the continuity principle became part of their historical narrative: "For Greeks to feel as national subjects means to internalize their relationship with ancient Greece" (Liakos 2008, 205). Greeks then needed to find a way to catch up with their ancestors.

The Enlightenment first, as well as the Romantic period soon afterward, provided examples where familiarity could be regained by means of translation. Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), a leading figure of the Greek cultural reform and architect of the new Greek language, best exemplifies the doctrine of continuity in his writings. In one of his many addresses to his fellow patriots he coined the term *metakénosis* (decanting) to describe the process of transferring those elements that distinguished Western Europeans as progressive to the intellectually deprived Greeks, (Korais 1958, 163) who, in his view, suffered under the ignorance imposed by the Ottomans (Coray 1877, 452). Translation was to become the bridge between the medieval darkness and the "Lights" of Europe (Kitromilides 2013, 8). Korais's *metakénosis* first appears in his "Αυτοσχέδιοι Στοχασμοί" [Impromptu Reflections], the prefaces to his numerous translations, where he compares the Greece of his time to fifteenth-century Western Europe (Korais 1958, 163). In his view, Western Europe used the same ancient Greek materials to build its modern nations. The Greeks could now benefit from them as well, not only because they were so valuable to the Europeans, but even more so since they themselves are the descendants of an ancient civilization. In the fifteenth century, Korais writes, the process was harder because the artifacts were scattered, but now that Europe had safeguarded the ancient treasures, this same process should be easier for the new nation of the Greeks: "The transmission of the sciences in Greece, if you follow the proper method, is a real *metakénosis* from the baskets of the foreigners to the baskets of the Greeks, and it does not differ in any other way besides that we can replenish our own without emptying theirs" (ibid.).[4] According to the *metakénosis* model, translation was a form of transfer in space *and* time: from Western Europe to Greece, and from ancient to modern times.

Clearly, *metakénosis* was not simply a translation method or theory, but also a model of historiographical practice that relied on the awakening of a cultural memory. As Augustinos (2008) relates, the emphasis Korais put on the significance of the classical era and its potential for the nation's rebirth in the early nineteenth century separated historical time into two phases: "the

Hellenic era and the post-Hellenic era" (172). All the centuries in between needed to be suppressed in order for contemporary Greeks to regain the required intimacy with their classical ancestors. In Korais's doctrine, proximity to that valuable past was conditioned upon the success of the transfer: if the Greeks could become "classical" again through their Europeanized liberal education, then the ties were indeed strong, and the Byzantine and Ottoman periods would become insignificant in the Greek national narrative. By reclaiming their forgotten classical heritage through translation, Ottoman Greeks could reorganize their view of their history. The concept of *metakénosis*, which follows this historical logic while adding the parameter of Western Europe as keeper of the ancient treasures, becomes a historiographical paradigm.

An important aspect in Korais's philosophical thesis was the implication of *debt* in the relationship between Ancient Greeks and Europeans. Korais believed that Europe had borrowed from classical Greece, and therefore the *re*-translation of this material did not demean his contemporaries (Korais 1958, 163). On the contrary, he proclaimed, Greeks had rights to the European Enlightenment as much as the Europeans who had enjoyed its fruits for years before (ibid.). *Metakénosis* presupposes a cultural debt about to yield profit to the Greeks, as beneficiaries of the valued heritage. In his address to the *Société des observateurs de l'homme* in 1803, he used monetary terms to paint a picture of Greeks and Europeans as two sides bound by a historical exchange of cultural goods: "The Greeks, proud of their origins, are far from closing their eyes to the lights of Europe; they have considered the Europeans as debtors, that will reimburse them for the capital they have received from their ancestors with very high interest" (Coray 1877, 457).[5] The assumption that Europeans were bound by this debt and had an ethical responsibility to the Greeks has had a long-term impact in forging the complex relationship between Greece and Western Europe. The fiscal language that Korais employs moves *metakénosis*—and its association with debt—front and center in the current domestic questioning of Greek cultural politics in relation to Europe.

Implicit in the image of Europe as the container of knowledge and Greece as the receptacle, the former pouring into the latter, is a certain degree of cultural asymmetry. Much like Patrice Pavis's image of the hourglass in intercultural communication (1992, 4–5), the movement is narrowly understood as unidirectional. As per Korais, the writings of the European Enlightenment were to enrich Greek thought by means of their translation into the receiving language. Consistent with its use of imagery, the concept of *metakénosis* fueled nationalism and a sense of cultural superiority among the Greeks, while at the same time nourished the insecurities and an overwhelming sentiment of absolute cultural subordination to external powers—the Western colonial forces of the era—in the fight for intellectual independence from the Ottoman Empire. This paradox of superiority and inferiority, central to the Greek identity and widely analyzed in Modern Greek studies,[6] resurfaced particularly in present times in the discussion of debt and sovereignty.[7] For example, several recent works on the crisis deal with Nikiforos Diamandouros's concept of cultural dualism, which directly takes on the perception of the Western modernized versus the Ottoman-as-regressive segment of the population (2000, 8).

*Metakénosis*'s significance today is founded on the fact that it was instrumental in the construction of modern Greek identity by providing a theory of continuity between ancient and modern Greece,

and therefore conditioned the ways by which Greeks sought—and still largely seek—to relate to Western Europe. Cultural production during the crisis exhibits ambivalent attitudes that, on the one hand, seem to reject the model of cultural dependency that Korais put forth, while on the other, embrace the study of the past as a means to analyze the present. Even when a more recent history is foregrounded, there is still an evident reliance on the past. In this moment of agonizing reassessment of national history, elements that deviate from the narrative of Western historiography receive greater attention. The theory of *metakénosis* seems to still function as the overarching principle in the intense comparisons to Western Europe as Greeks negotiate their sentiments of national pride and inferiority.

I now turn to the ways this re-examination and questioning of prior cultural thought and practice informs present-day political positions, stereotypes in international relations, and knee-jerk reactions, as these occur in the theatre world. A recent scandal that involved cultural asymmetry and stereotypical reading of "Greekness" occurred in the spring of 2016. In February of that year, Jan Fabre took over as artistic director of the Greek Festival (also known as the Festival of Athens and Epidaurus). His appointment, however, was rather short-lived as he was forced to resign within weeks as a result of vocal demands by a group of Greek artists. But before delving into the particulars of this incident, I will briefly sketch the situation in Greek theatre under a failing economy.

## The theatrical landscape and the Greek Festival

Despite the shocking rates of unemployment in the long years of continuous austerity, theatre in Greece remains surprisingly rich and varied, with a large number of people maintaining professional activity in a society that struggles with alarming rates of unemployment.[8] Here, it is important to define growth and activity in the current circumstances. The extreme conditions have changed the standards of acceptable professional practice. Overwhelming unemployment pushed theatres to operate on the basis of steep decreases in admission prices, and in some cases through voluntary contributions, as well as subscription packages that put the price of a show as low as one euro (Sykka 2015). The results are full auditoria and an involved public, often faced with tangible ways to ponder the relationship between art and politics. At the same time, these practices encourage the maintaining of a large number of unpaid collaborators, even in more traditional settings. The few artists that are paid are forced to make do without any benefits. Granted, the system largely offers substantial opportunities for artists' collectives to self-regulate and to maintain full control over their processes and products. But Claire Bishop's definition of the contemporary artist as "the role model for the flexible, mobile, non-specialised labourer" (2012, 12) unfortunately seems particularly on-point in the Greek case.

In the above practices under the crisis, important institutions such as the Greek Festival provide performers with substantial support to reach a significant number of spectators. The Greek Festival is a major event for the performing arts in Greece that spans throughout the summer period. Established in 1955, it is the only theatre event of such a long tenure and magnitude in the country.

Initially, its program included only ancient Greek drama and classical music performed by Greek and foreign artists. After 2006, the institution changed rapidly and supported contemporary Greek performance by smaller companies along more established national and international stages (Greek Festival website, "History"). The year 2006 is significant, as it marks Yorgos Loukos taking over following his post as artistic director of the Lyon Opera. Loukos managed the institution for ten consecutive years before Fabre's appointment in 2016. Under Loukos's direction, the festival became an outward-facing event that included a wide range of performance by Greek artists and invited productions.[9] While Loukos's work was widely seen as a very positive contribution to Greek cultural matters, he was accused of overspending and asked to resign in December 2015 (Kanellopoulos 2015).

For several participating artists, the festival represents an opportunity to secure funding for their productions, perhaps for the first time in the season, given the dire financial circumstances of the recession. Speaking of the decision to include smaller-scale work from independent Greek companies, Eleftheria Ioannidou and Natascha Siouzouli (2014) argue that financial pressures, felt particularly after 2012 in the Festival's programming, propelled the institution towards an era of "a destabilizing new dynamic which challenges the existing institutional and cultural practices in a more radical way than the international collaborations of the preceding years" (115). Reluctant to take the risks involved in performing in crisis-stricken Athens, foreign companies left the space to local artists to access the festival's stages for the first time in the organization's history (ibid.). The crisis seems to have created the opportunity for emerging Greek artists to share their work with a larger audience in co-productions with an institution highly involved in forging a Greek cultural identity. This is the context in which the Fabre incident should be placed.

## Jan Fabre takes over as curator

Jan Fabre, already known in Greece for his creative work, was not a surprising choice for the office of artistic director. The implicit concept behind Fabre's appointment was the idea that an artist with an international reputation would assist Greek theatre production in its connections abroad, as contemporary Greek theatre has not yet reached its potential beyond national borders. Fabre himself seemed to understand the requirement to promote Greek work, when, for example, he explained his insistence on being called a "curator" rather than an "artistic director:" "I am not here to design an artistic program, but to create ties, networks, contacts, and to bring new ideas and perspectives" (Dimadi 2016a). His expressed intentions directly responded to Greek artists' desire to become better known inside and outside their country.

However, the press release of Fabre's vision for the new festival was received amidst great disappointment and intense reactions by Greek artists, as the program that Fabre designed was one that showcased Belgium and Belgian art. In the first year of Fabre's tenure, out of a total of ten productions, the Festival was to produce eight pieces by Fabre himself and his collaborators. The response in circulation in social media was succinctly expressed in the phrase "*Le Festival c'est moi*" (Georgakopoulou 2016). The following year was designed to enlarge Fabre's Belgian vision to include invited artists from other countries. Greek works were not to be admitted again until two

years later. The name of the festival was also changed from the Greek Festival of Athens and Epidaurus to the International Festival of Athens and Epidaurus (Dimadi 2016a).

The complete absence of Greek productions was the most incendiary aspect of Fabre's proposed program. Immediately following the announcement, a large group of Greek theatre artists, mainly based in Athens, circulated a letter of protest in which they denounced the ministry's selection of artistic director. They also directly addressed Fabre and asked him to resign. In their letter, they name Fabre "*persona non grata*" (*Proto Thema* 2016). A section of the artists' grievances reads:

> You admit that you do not have the slightest idea about contemporary Greek artistic activity and yet you consider yourself capable of leading (as curator!) the most important cultural institution of the country. You thus reduce Greek artists to a murky, artistically insignificant mass that supposedly ought to be grateful to you.[10]

The protests centered upon Fabre's insistence on promoting Belgian art at a time when Greek artists face real hardship in presenting their work even in their own country. According to an anonymous stage photographer based in Athens, "Athens and Epidaurus festival is much more than a festival; it's a cultural institution and already an international one. [...] We welcome international participations, not international takeovers" (quoted in Stefanou 2016). The Greek artists' comments openly questioned what they read as Fabre's attempt to degrade them. Their choice of words reveals that they experienced Fabre's Belgian vision as an attack on their culture, and felt dismissed since their own artistic level was not recognized. Fabre's appointment ended immediately; he resigned the next day, only five days after announcing the festival's program for the first summer of his tenure (Maltezou 2016). After Fabre's resignation, the then minister of culture, Aristeidis Baltas, appointed Greek director Vangelis Theodoropoulos, who was among the protestors and a well-known figure in the Greek theatre world. The new program was announced in the following month and featured 72 productions of both Greek and foreign work (Dimadi 2016b).

One of the most intriguing aspects of this debacle was Fabre's complaint about the Greek artists' language, which was, predictably, Greek. In a letter co-signed by his collaborators and posted on Fabre's company Facebook page, Fabre informed Greek artists: "To read your letter, we had to find it on the Internet in a Greek article and use Google Translate to get a grasp of the content" (Troubleyn Jan Fabre 2016). Evidently, Fabre considered this move as evidence of the Greek artists' lack of desire to communicate directly. While his allegation about not being invited to the meeting is justified and understandable, he *was* in fact directly addressed in the letter. But the mere thought that using Greek was a problem is indicative of scandalous cultural asymmetry—and linguistic entitlement. Why would a body of local artists be expected to address their festival's artistic director in a foreign language? Instead, Fabre might have attempted to learn the language before accepting the position, or employed translators for all communications in his new post. It is certainly not the duty of the artists in the host country to attempt to communicate in a mediating language. Similarly, Fabre's insistence on using English for his communications with the Greeks is incongruous for artists from two members of the European Union, an institution that has heavily invested in translation and the preservation of linguistic plurality.

Fabre's contempt for the Greek artists' natural language of choice seems similar to his treatment of their work. His attitude showed that he valued the access to venues such as the Epidaurus theatre and the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in the Acropolis, which the Greek Festival manages, more than the contemporary Greek artists and theatre system that he was supposed to promote. The Greek artists' performance of confidence in their work comes at a time when Greeks are reconsidering their relationship with their heritage, the value of their contemporary culture in relation to their classical past, and their options in a global future, often in anarchic modes. The crisis created the community for this voice of opposition to be heard. The timing of Fabre's designs coincided with a period of mistrust in Western Europe, where Brussels in particular has become the symbol of European Union bureaucracy: "Others have accused Fabre of cultural colonialism, drawing parallels with the treatment Athens is perceived to have received from Brussels during the eurozone crisis" (Stefanou 2016). Indeed, the artists' knee-jerk reaction indicates the sensitivity analogous to Greece's "crypto-colonial" position, in Herzfeld's term (2002, 900), but also carries the resistance that stems from an intense search for a new identity. Fabre's lack of regard for the artistic scene in Athens was aligned with the financial treatment coming from European officials, who worked to reform the "disobedient" subjects of the Eurozone. The response from the Greek theatre world seems to have been enhanced by the anti-European sentiment that was gathering momentum in the past several years. In Marilena Zaroulia's iteration, this "alternative politics" that has become more and more visible in the streets as in the theatre, has raised hope in political philosophers who "saw in the Greek paradigm the arena that could host a bigger battle—that between neoliberalism and the potentialities of resistance" (2015, 8–9).

In the rest of his letter, Fabre asks: "Why didn't you have the decency to address us directly, to invite us in person to your meeting, to challenge us with your questions, your worries, your complaints? Why did you not even send us your letter? Why did you choose to act anonymously? Why do you reject any form of serious dialogue, any form of debate?" (Troubleyn Jan Fabre 2016). Indeed, the fact that the artists' reaction was immediate and centered upon the demand that Fabre resigns, rather than perhaps a request to open a dialogue on the matter, speaks to a charged environment that fosters polarization among the artistic community. The leadership of the important institution changed hands amidst a specific socioeconomic context that placed artists in a position of indignation. Greek artists evidently do not wish to be educated in foreign models of cultural production that do not allow for their own local needs and particular artistic expression. Their resistance rejects the unidirectional movement of cultural value, as envisioned by Korais in his *metakénosis*. Those involved saw no benefit in importing Europe for their advancement, but instead wanted to participate in an international scene without adapting to foreign models. The cultural exchange in the context of the Greek Festival would have to take place on more inclusive terms that take into account the specific socio-political moment. Instead, Fabre's questions above criticize the Greeks for entering this exchange in a way that he deemed as not "serious."

As a response, Fabre added insult to injury, so to speak: Some days after resigning, he published another post on his Facebook page that expressed his opinion of Greek artists:

> Apparently a professional Greek curator had to explain the word and the function of a 'curator.' My position as a curator was clearly from the start 'lost in translation.' While it is an international term that everybody in the art and theatre world in Europe is familiar with. From what I understand, the Greek artists who already have the guarantee that they will perform in the festival this summer, were not present anymore, which is quite significant. I want to express my concern about the nationalistic reflex of a dominant group of mediocre and frustrated Greek artists mainly rejecting new visions and approaches from outside. I hope serious Greek artists will have a positive contribution to the changes that are needed to come to a challenging, new situation for the cultural context of the Hellenic Festival. (Troubleyn Jan Fabre 2016)

The expression "lost in translation" was used ironically, to attribute fault to the receivers of the message. Fabre's comments contain the value judgment that Greek artists are not proficient in European theatre talk. With this accusation, the Belgian artist tapped into the age-old Greek anxiety to catch up culturally with the rest of Europe, echoing Korais and his contemporaries, who labored over the intellectual advancement of the nation. As Fabre suggests in his post, the cultural inferiority of those who were backward enough not to understand the concept of "curator" puts them in the "underdog" segment of the population, per Diamandouros's influential paradigm of cultural dichotomy (2000, 8). In this reading, the Greek artists targeted by Fabre's comment, particularly by way of their intense reaction, are seen by him as exhibiting the traits of the "highly defensive culture," backward and introverted, that has been named the culprit of everything that is wrong with the economy and the country in general (Liakos and Kouki 2015, 54). Fabre's publicly expressed attitude on the occasion of his resignation combines many of the above stereotypes that undervalue Greek culture, which remains trapped in a perennial comparison with a Eurocentric and anachronistic classical ideal.

While Greeks turn their attention to their recent past and reconsider their history as they bring it to bear on the present, foreign attitudes are obsessively limited to classical Greece. The foreign press often painted a dire picture, with images of distorted ancient Greek monuments employed to denote the Greek recession. For Greeks today these external projections put contemporary culture in an unfair comparison with classical times, as they emphasize the disparity between ancient Greek culture and the reality nowadays. The recent European crisis may have put Greece under the limelight and, in doing so, gave Greek culture a contemporary identity abroad. The Greek crisis may indeed be "modern"; however, its frame of reference remains "ancient." These new, unfavorable attributes are still dependent on Greece's classical image. The almost parodic images of mishandled ancient heritage serve more than to produce enticing visuals for news coverage: they indicate a deep crisis in historiographical practice. The bankrupt Greeks are portrayed as not worthy or capable of safeguarding the ancient lineage.

In the updated Festival's website, under the directorship of Theodoropoulos, the mission description at the end of the history section acknowledges the crisis as a factor in their decision making:

> In these times of social and cultural crisis, it is imperative that the Athens & Epidaurus Festival contributes to social cultivation, encouraging love for high art. At the same time, the Festival needs to actively support contemporary artists. Highlighting contemporary art and paving the road for audiences that are more critically engaged are both instrumental in enabling the operation of a progressive, cultural institution insofar as they promote a better society: a society of proactive thinkers rather than a society of helpless people at the mercy of market forces. ("History," The Greek Festival website)

The political position expressed in the period of activism against Fabre was folded into the new wording, and expanded to express an important concern about cultural stereotyping: "It is of paramount importance to make sure that the Festival is actively engaged with the production of Greek culture, the goal being to re-introduce an aspect of Greekness that is divested of any stereotypical folklore elements" (ibid.) This short description summarizes the wider cultural movement in Greece in the post(?)-crisis era with regards to history and self-representation.

The uses of the past during the Eurozone crisis took different forms in Greece and abroad, but in both contexts the past was prominently positioned. Images of ruined monuments and statues digitally manipulated into offensive gestures may have been intended as a shameful reminder of the country's inadequacies, but indigenous views on Greek culture bypassed the classical past and focused instead on a more recent and largely repressed history. Criticism coming from inside the country mainly sought to make sense of how the crisis happened, how it related to political decisions since the country's foundation in 1828, and particularly how this understudied past came to bear on the present. The subversive historiographical approach that emerged with the crisis, informed by the cultural tensions that Greeks and other peoples experience, has the potential to update the ways we understand, analyze, and perform the past. During the crisis, more than ever, the historical theory of continuity between ancient and modern Greece and, consequently, the philosophical principles that support it, such as Korais's *metakénosis*, have been under intense examination. In an attempt to exercise control on the ways they represent themselves within the country and abroad, Greek artists create work that challenges stereotypes and restrictive readings of national history, and instead promotes a more nuanced image that recontextualizes the Greek past. In the past ten years, Greek stages have mounted bold attempts to address the wider symbolic framework of Greece as Europe's myth of origin, to question its assumptions, and to negotiate a new place for Greek identity. However, institutions in Greece and abroad are sometimes slow in catching up with the sentiment of the people they serve, as seen in the example of Fabre's unfitting placement as curator to the Greek Festival. Building on the confidence afforded by *metakénosis* and its legacy, while rejecting its hierarchical model of Western/Ancient/Eastern culture, the Greek artists involved took ownership of their festival and in doing so, pointed to the need for a democratic alternative: a more inclusive process by which to fill the office of leader in a cultural institution. The Fabre scandal, arguably an intriguing episode in the Greek crisis saga, may well prove most impactful in regards to Greek cultural policy.

## Notes

[1] The selective aspect of this burden to remember and preserve a heavy but largely usable past is the focus of an important number of works in Modern Greek Studies. See, among others, Mackridge (2008); Liakos (2008).

[2] Mackridge illustrates this point in his discussion of the term *anapalaiosi*. The invention of the word, which means "the process of making old again" (as opposed to renovation, to make new again), was necessary to describe the developments in the restitution of the Parthenon in the nineteenth century and similar work that followed on other ancient sites. The whitewashing that took place pushed to oblivion the Byzantine and Ottoman past of the monument. A new classicist (and Westernized) national symbol emerged. Like many ancient Greek monuments, the Parthenon had been in continuous use for religious and secular purposes throughout the centuries. Mackridge deftly points out that in fact its restitution according to the Western imagination only managed to destroy the evidence of continuity that the Greek state was so invested in. (2008, 308).

[3] Greek intellectual Adamantios Korais urged his contemporaries to translate from European philosophers, as well as the Ancient Greeks. "Επιστολή προς Αλέξανδρο Βασιλείου," [Letter to Alexandros Vasileiou] in *Ο Κοραής και η Εποχή του* [*Korais and His Time*] ed. K. Th. Dimaras (Athens: Zacharopoulos, 1958), 119.

[4] My translation. Original text: "η μετάδοσις των επιστημών εις την Ελλάδα, αν ακολουθήσετε την καλήν μέθοδον, είναι αληθινή μετακένωσις από τα κοφίνια των αλλογενών εις τα κοφίνια των Ελλήνων, και κατ' άλλο δεν διαφέρει πλην ότι γεμίζομεν ταύτα χωρίς να ευκαιρώσωμεν εκείνα" (Korais 1958, 163).

[5] My translation. Original text: "Les Grecs, vains de leur origine, loin de fermer les yeux aux lumières de l' Europe, n'ont regardé les Européens que comme des débiteurs, qui leur remboursoient avec de très-gros intérêts un capital qu'ils avoient reçu de ces ancêtres" (Coray 1877, 457).

[6] Michael Herzfeld further checks this discourse of "living ancestors and wretched orientals" for its orientalist prejudices in his critique *Anthropology Through the Looking Glass* (1987, 49).

[7] See, among others, Triandafyllidou, Gropas, and Kouki (2013), Murray-Leach (2014), Liakos and Kouki (2015).

[8] In a study published in *Kathimerini* newspaper in June 2015, unemployment in the general population reached 26.6%, with 30.6% the estimate for women. Among people aged 18–25, a shocking 51% is surpassed by the 57% of unemployed women in the same category (*I Kathimerini* 2015). For figures on theatre production during the crisis, see Lymperopoulou (2013); Patsalidis and Stavrakopoulou (2014, 11).

[9] Loukos's tenure is often acknowledged as a "turning point" in the Festival's history. See Ioannidis (2016, 76), Ioannidou and Siouzouli (2014, 109).

[10] My translation. Original text: "Παραδεχθήκατε ότι δεν έχετε την παραμικρή ιδέα για τη σύγχρονη ελληνική καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία, αλλά, παρ' όλα αυτά, θεωρείτε εαυτόν ικανό να αναλάβει (ως curator!) τον κορυφαίο πολιτιστικό θεσμό της χώρας, υποβιβάζοντας έτσι τους Έλληνες δημιουργούς σε μία θολή, καλλιτεχνικά ανυπόληπτη μάζα, που θα'πρεπε να σας οφείλει και ευγνωμοσύνη" (Proto Thema 2016).

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# PHOTOGRAPHING THE END OF THE WORLD: CAPITALIST TEMPORALITY, CRISIS, AND THE PERFORMATIVITY OF VISUAL OBJECTS

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In the fall of 2011, the Greek economic crisis was flooding international media outlets with stories of starved pensioners, debt-induced suicides, and riots in front of the Greek parliament. Meanwhile, a group of photographers named Depression Era were striving to create a different archive of the Greek crisis, avoiding what they considered to be trite media representations that spectacularized poverty and political struggles. The group had started in March, but grew with new additions, eventually bringing together over thirty photographers and video artists. They set off to depict the urban landscape and its peripheries in everyday, ordinary moments, capturing the affects of crisis and austerity.

The Depression Era exhibition opened at the Benaki Museum, in Athens, in November 2014, and was later featured in 5th Thessaloniki Biennale in 2015, and the Athens Biennale 2015–2017. In these spaces, Depression Era's work encountered a variety of audiences, including a majority of Greeks as well as people of other nationalities who visit these art institutions. I came into contact with Depression Era's work in 2015 while on a fieldwork trip to Athens, during which I interviewed several members of the collective. Rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of all the works by Depression Era, for the purpose of this essay, I will focus on four images taken from Marinos Tsagkarakis's series *Paradise Inn*, Yiannis Hadjiaslanis's series *After Dark*, Pavlos Fysakis's series *Nea Helvetia*, and Georges Salameh's series *Spleen*. These four images depict urban landscapes of abandonment, emptiness, solitude, or quotidian economic collapse. I argue that these images are performative disruptions of capitalist understandings of linear time that capture and foster desires

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for non-capitalist temporalities. I discuss how these works disrupt linear notions of time as progress and measure of productivity and economic growth, which are intrinsic to modernity, debt, and austerity. Against capitalist linear temporality, these Depression Era images enable a realm of visual experimentation in which the spectator is invited to feel time differently, to imagine alternative temporalities that might emerge from a sense of crisis.

Capitalism[1] cannot function without a linear conception of time. Jean-Luc Nancy (2015) has referred to this capitalist linear temporality as "the equivalence of catastrophes," the compulsory need of our society to rush towards the future even when this future announces itself as catastrophic. For Nancy, this "means to an end" approach defines our political and economic organization, and explains our inability to find a way out of a technological paradigm that leads to destruction. This teleology defines the very idea of modernity and development, and shapes notions of what it is to be fully human as opposed to primitive (Wynter 1996, 2003). It also explains why economic growth is the supreme goal that justifies all forms of sacrifice and violence, such as the ones that austerity demands. Capitalism needs to grow in order to survive. The very structures of credit that uphold its reproduction are based on this linear orientation towards the future (Karatani 2003). A future orientation that is often sustained by promises of wealth that can make present misery bearable for the exploited (Berlant 2011).

This teleology does not only define the reproduction of capital, but also our subjective experience of time. Walter Benjamin ([1940] 2007) defined this as "homogeneous empty time," an eternal present, an accumulation of moments devoid of particular differentiated meanings that could make those moments unique. Benjamin opposes homogeneous empty time to both pre-capitalist notions of time based on cyclical relationships between moments of the past, present, and future, and revolutionary time, which imposes a break in the continuity of linear time. Essential in Benjamin's argument is the link between the linearity of the homogeneous empty time of capitalism and historical progress understood from the perspective of modernity. He states that, "the concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself" (261).

Benjamin's argument is akin to Antonio Negri's distinction between *telos* and *kairòs* (2003). Articulating a critique of the transcendental tradition within Western philosophy, Negri argues that in transcendental philosophy the act of naming—the adequation of name and thing—and therefore the act of knowing is placed outside of time. Thus, time is thought of as an envelope of everything that exists but which does not constitute anything; time is *telos*, a succession of moments rather than an event, measure rather than creative force. For Negri, the hegemony of this ontology of time suits power, because it empties time from its essential creative potential. Instead, he argues for the need of a materialist philosophical project that thinks time and being as mutually constitutive. For Negri, this time is *kairòs*, "the instant, that is to say, the quality of the time of the instant, the moment of rupture and opening of temporality" (156). Behind Negri's insistence in the inseparability of name and action, of knowing and doing, lies a fundamental concern: How can a revolutionary subjectivity still exist when capitalist time has subsumed the entirety of life?

Drawing on these Marxist philosophical approaches to time, I argue that the Depression Era images that I discuss in this essay disrupt capitalist linear temporality and offer audiences other affective explorations of time.

My use of *affect* throughout this essay attempts to capture the epochal social imaginary that characterizes the Greek crisis beyond its strictly material conditions and which is akin to what Raymond Williams (1977) defined as "structures of feeling". Crisis and austerity loom large in the social imaginaries of Southern Europeans, circulating through images, discourses, and affects. In this sense, the Greek crisis functions not unlike the *figural* economy of deindustrialization in the American Midwest described by Judith Hamera (2017). Hamera argues that, "even the most seemingly dispassionate discourses of deindustrialization and financialization are partnered by, and circulate within, a field of affect-saturated images, performances, and text that inspire optimistic attachments, industrial nostalgia, and deindustrial melancholy" (14). The same is true about the Greek economic crisis, which is both a set of economic conditions and the societal discourses, images, and feelings that emerge from those conditions. In this sense, we can understand affect as that which "saturates the corporeal, intimate, and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable" (Berlant 2011, 16)

My methodological approach to reading these images draws on D. Soyini Madison's discussion of the performative as a "heightened or symbolic act that makes something happen, disturbs, re-invents or creates—large or small—a consequence. In other words, a performative serves as a distinct moment, a punctum or rupture, from the ordinary and familiar that result in a specific causal effect" (2013, 218). Drawing on Madison and applying a performance perspective to the analysis of visual objects, Joshua Chambers-Letson has argued that, "photographs are scenes of encounter, whereby the photograph *performs* for the spectator, creating an affective relationship with the spectator that invites him or her to *perform* in response to the photograph" (2013, 137). Both Madison and Chambers-Letson gesture towards Roland Barthes's punctum, "the element that rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the spectator]" (1981, 26). In the Depression Era images I discuss here spectators encounter scenes from the economic crisis that explore non-linear notions of time. These images offer to audiences momentary experiences of detachment from capitalist temporality by critiquing future-oriented notions of progress, insisting on the cyclicality of crisis in capitalism, or refusing a narrative of causality altogether. Together they reveal an epochal sense of failure attached to capitalist teleology that is a quintessential affect of the Greek economic crisis.

## Landscapes of Crisis

In one of the pictures from his series *Nea Helvetia*, Pavlos Fysakis captures a waste ground on the outskirts of the city. Piles of discarded plastic and glass bottles, aluminum cans, and shopping bags cover the soil, extending into the horizon. Their original colors have faded into a palette of grey and ochre, the indefinite color of decomposing trash. Nothing seems to grow on this soil, with the exception of a few scattered twigs barely standing among the piles of waste. The air is charged and polluted.

*Image 1: Pavlos Fysakis.* Dump, Aspropirgos*. From* Nea Helvetia*, 2011.*

Nea Helvetia (Image 1) is the name of a working-class area in the periphery of Athens that in Greek means "New Switzerland." Traditionally populated by industrial workers, Nea Helvetia was struck by poverty and unemployment before the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis, but its situation has rapidly deteriorated in the years of austerity. The name "New Switzerland" becomes a form of cruel irony in the series. In the European imaginary, Switzerland is a neoliberal utopia of efficiency, with ever-mobile flows of financial capital, millionaire banking operations, ironclad safes, and expensive watches that measure time with utmost precision. In the European South, Switzerland is also the place where national elites and politicians keep succulent bank accounts beyond the reach of national taxation laws. The promise of the infinite mobility of financial capital that Switzerland represents stands in contrast with the limited mobility of the people who live in "New Switzerland." In the series, Fysakis conveys the slow unbearable passing of days for jobless people who have no money to pay for gas or a ticket to ride the bus out of the neighborhood. Life in Nea Helvetia seems to have stopped with the economic crisis.

The photo disrupts a capitalist understanding of time as progress through the depiction of waste generated from unsustainable modes of production/consumption. Dwelling in the presence of material waste that capitalism constantly creates but strives to make invisible, this image is a meditation on what the new always brings back, or to put it differently, of the continuous piling up of discarded newness and its potentially catastrophic consequences. The composition, with its horizontal symmetry between land and sky, and the wide angle of the camera cites landscape photography. However, instead of reveling in majestic views of nature, the image disrupts this genre by portraying a dystopian polluted environment. This is a landscape resulting from human activity and yet completely inhospitable to humans––a result of human actions whose consequences are no longer under human control.

Capitalism infuses the new with desirability, making commodities into the "sensuous things that are at the same time suprasensuous or social" (Marx [1867] 1990, 165). As a result, capitalism cannot escape generating ever-growing amounts of waste in its process of reproduction, because it is the pulse to create commodities that drives production and not the imperative to satisfy real needs (Marx [1857] 2010, 28). Making the new a value in itself is essential for our notion of modernity, which as Nancy has argued is "conceived as an incessant 'before,' as the time that precedes itself, that anticipates its future" (2015, 15). When we apprehend time as an incessant before, we need the constant production of the new as self-fulfilling prophecy of our history. Capitalist time is the time of compulsive newness. But of course, an economic system based on the compulsive production of the new conceals that it actually has no place for all that it produces. The production of the new thus runs parallel with the pilling up of everything that is discarded as soon as it ceases to be new. Or to put it differently, the production of the new is the production of waste, of that for which we have no use. Capitalism is the production of waste, mediated and realized through consumption. Not surprisingly, Benjamin's "angel of history" is irresistibly propelled to the future "while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" ([1940] 2007, 258).

As much as capitalism would have us believe that inanimate things disappear when we stop using them, they stay with us forever in some form or other, entering ecosystems and eventually transforming the bodies they come in contact with (Bennett 2010). Matter refuses to be contained in a linear narrative of progress, according to which what we produce can simply be left behind. It is against that idea of disappearance that Fysakis' picture works, as we are reminded that what was once new is constantly pilling up around us. Plastic containers, cans, bags, bottles––things no longer useful––have a life well beyond the use that we give them. As they are discarded and left to decompose, they seep into ecosystems and return to our bodies in various forms. The new accumulates to become catastrophic. "New Switzerland" also invokes an old colonial practice of naming new places after existing ones, hiding dispossession and destruction under the label of creation. But whereas the new of colonial naming disguised dispossession and genocide of the colonized under the promise of wealth for the colonizer, the new in the photographic series of New Switzerland is a refusal of this disguising practice. Here, the new is equated with the failure of all promises, with land and nature pollution, with lost unoccupied people that wander seamlessly in the landscapes. The picture demystifies the desirability of the new not as a nostalgic turn to the

past, or a romantic look upon some golden time previous to the economic crisis, but as a rejection of capitalist notions of the future as endless growth.

Pavlos Fysakis' pessimistic take on capitalist progress is also shared by Marinos Tsagkarakis. Both authors frame their work as depicting the present of the economic crisis, but their images could certainly be read as playfully conveying post-apocalyptic tones, as if inviting their spectators to look upon the ruins of an entire way of life that has been abruptly interrupted. In one of his images (Image 2), Tsagkarakis depicts a winter day in a Cretan village, one of those uncountable places overdeveloped in the last decades of the twentieth century for the tourists that take over the Greek islands during high season. Empty, abandoned, or decaying tourist destinations are a recurring theme in Tsagkarakis' work. The photographer invites the spectator's gaze to roam around these places like it would on old theatre sets, framing commercial decay in ways that denaturalizes it and invests it with a spectacular quality. In his series *Paradise Inn*, the architecture of places made entirely for peoples' leisure does not only become strange when completely empty, but also affectively charged with haunting absence. Where did everyone go? What happened to them?

Without people, the promise of vacational enjoyment vanishes, leaving us with a place that looks cheap and unexceptional. If material surfaces communicate, the plastic, wood, and plaster in these

*Image 2: Marinos Tsagkarakis.* Heaven Can Wait*. From* Paradise Inn*, 2013.*

buildings tell stories of rapid development seeking to turn a quick profit out of the tourist flow. It is unclear in the picture whether the tourists are supposed to arrive again with good weather, or if we are looking at a place that has been permanently left behind by the industry. This ambiguity, however, does not diminish the picture's affective force. Whether in between seasons or at the end of a larger economic cycle, it is the future promise of wealth that the picture reveals bankrupt. Tsagkarakis' body of work depicts economic and environmental decay as the result of capitalist development. In his pictures, random material remains appear left over from economic processes that have finished, leaving behind a geography of uselessness, of places that cannot be used for that which they were once created, but that cannot return either to the state in which they were before their development.

The photographic composition allows us to recognize and name specific forms of economic destruction. The effect of making strange everyday economic decay is heightened in the picture through the inclusion of the "heaven" sign, which works as an ironic punctum. The composition of the frame, with the "heaven" sign placed on the top right recalls road signs, such as those that we would see from the car during a road trip. Thus, heaven is not just the name of the dance club, but also a sarcastic brand of the whole setting. The composition suggests that we are entering a place called "heaven," although "heaven" is just an empty, rainy, abandoned street intersection in a vacation village during wintertime. Our attention is captured by this formal juxtaposition of the banality of the scene and the connotations that the notion of heaven conjures up to immediately disavow.

"Heaven" also playfully gestures towards the notion of time that capitalism borrowed as a secular version of Christian teleology. As Giorgio Agamben has pointed out, the capitalist version of this teleology is "sundered from any notion of end," which makes progress infinite (1993, 96). Both versions of this teleology, Christian and secular, are predicated on future fulfillment that rewards only those whose present behavior suits the precepts of a higher power––the precepts of Christian morale, or those of the free market, respectively. As heaven awaits for good Christians, so does wealth awaits for those who have been diligent laborers within the system of production. Both are also predicated on a future promise. Neoliberal discourses about austerity are evidence of this, promising future bliss (economic growth) in exchange for present sacrifice. But the temporality of the promise is one of endless deferral, or as Lauren Berlant has argued, of "cruel optimism" (2011). "Cruel optimism" is a set of affective attachments through which subjects in neoliberal economy hope for future material fulfillment, and it is precisely this future-oriented promise what allows for the endurance of oppressive conditions in the present.

It was Walter Benjamin ([1921] 1999) who argued that "capitalism is a pure religious cult, perhaps the most extreme there ever was" (259). Benjamin stresses the cult's "permanent duration," the fact that capitalism structures the entirety of time according to its own rules, so that even time that is not directly dedicated to labor is still seeped into capitalist temporal arrangements. If this was true for Western societies in Benjamin's time, when Fordism was the central model of production driving accumulation, the current conjuncture of financial global capitalism has only exacerbated this tendency, collapsing the differences between work and rest time to generate profit from

activities that are not always identifiable as labor. Under neoliberalism, Benjamin's concern that capitalism's temporality is that of a religious cult that structures the entirety of life have become all the more pertinent.

Tsagkarakis' image of the demise of a holiday spot evokes this similitude between Christian and capitalist teleology from an ironic perspective. He cites the Christian notion of "heaven" only to playfully disavow the transcendence of material life that heaven is associated with. Instead of transcendence, the image anchors heaven to a place in which economic and material constraints cannot be easily transcended, neither by a local population whose livelihood might depend on or be greatly affected by the tourist industry, or by visitors who are ultimately confronted with the banality of flashy business fronts that they could encounter anywhere else. Looking at these images, one almost becomes a future observer who dwells with archeological curiosity upon the ruins of bars, hotels, and dance halls and speculates about the civilization that inhabited them. Tsagkarakis' work resembles Fysakis' in that both seem to offer to their viewers the possibility to momentarily inhabit a post-capitalist future, a place from which to look behind at the havoc created by contemporary capitalism. Once a place is ecologically destroyed, once an economic cycle ends, once livelihoods have been compromised, once money can no longer be made, what comes next?

Whereas Fysakis' and Tsagkarakis' work disrupt the linearity of capitalist time by gesturing towards catastrophic futures, George Salameh's work dwells on the duration of crisis to question neoliberal discourses that present it as an isolated accident in a temporality of endless growth. In one of his photographs (Image 3), we contemplate a moment in the unfolding of a quotidian street scene. A man in white shirt, blue pants, and blue cap sweeps the sidewalk. To his left, an old white car is parked under in the shade of a tree; to his right, a black car. Three other trees with abundant bright green foliage indicate it is spring, perhaps summer. On the left side of the sidewalk, a woman dressed in dark colors is walking out of the frame, possibly running errands. Our attention barely brushes through this quotidian scene on the sidewalk before moving to the background. There, an immense partially torn canvas features a panoramic view of the Acropolis. Through the tear, we see the decrepit condition of the building underneath.

Although Salameh contributed this picture to Depression Era, he took it a few years earlier, around 2004. At that time, the city administration undertook massive political economic transformations to host the 2004 Olympic Games. These transformations involved real estate operations benefiting private interests over public ones, and the effort to cover those parts of the city deemed unsuited for the gaze of the Olympic Committee, international spectators, and expected tourists (Boycoff 2014). By covering certain buildings with large canvases, the Olympic audience would get a carefully curated version of Athens as the archeological treasure that appears in travel guides and postcards, avoiding the reality of housing conditions for the poor. Presumably accidental, the tear in the canvas attracts and captures our attention in this photograph. The tear does not only reveal what was supposed to remain hidden, but it also makes visible the politics of masking reality undertaken by the city administration.

*Image 3: Georges Salameh.* Sweeper. *From* Spleen, *2004.*

The building belongs to the Kountouriotika complex on Alexandras Avenue, a group of eight apartment buildings erected in the 1930s to host the refugees from the Greco-Turkish war of 1922.[2] At the time of the picture, the complex had been in a ruinous state for years. The city's plan was to demolish it and sell the land to private development in order to build a mall, but popular resistance forced it to declare the Kountouriotika buildings a protected site of historical relevance. In the years since the eruption of the economic crisis and as of this writing, the buildings have been occupied by low income and homeless people.

In the foot accompanying the photograph, Salameh explains his choice to include in Depression Era an image that he took in 2004 in terms of the image's ability to act as a "premonition of a new era for Athens." Salameh thus points out that Greek economic policies in the early 2000s were already signaling larger neoliberal trends of disassembling of state social services in favor of private capital, a trend that has surely worsened in the aftermath of the economic crisis, but that the crisis did not initiate. By foregrounding the divinatory nature of the image, the photographer makes a political economic commentary on the contemporary moment, while stating his aesthetic engagement with temporal tropes of repetition and cyclicality. The trope of premonition, of the image's ability to reveal the economic future, is essential to how the image performs for the spectator, taking several meanings. First, in the most literal sense, the photograph makes visible what is underneath the canvas, the ruinous façade that would otherwise remain hidden. Second, it reveals the official attempts to hide poverty during the celebration of the Olympics. Third, in the photographer's words, it reveals a future time of economic crisis, which has not happened yet when the image was taken in 2004. The photographer makes the image perform several distinct moments in time that refuse linearity and that he presents instead as overlapping, collapsing onto

each other. These moments reveal a recurrence, a cyclicality of crisis that is inherent to the normal functioning of capitalism.

Salameh's image counters narratives of the economic crisis as an accident provoked by a malfunctioning of financial markets, depicting it instead as inherent to capitalism. In his photo, poverty and urban destruction are part of the everyday. The desolation of the building underneath the canvas does not reach the category of something eventful or catastrophic, but rather ordinary. He depicts what Elisabeth Povinelli has defined as "economies of abandonment," entire geographies left behind because they are deemed unproductive by capital, and social groups whose material life conditions slowly but surely erode their ability to endure and survive (Povinelli 2011). Salameh's picture demonstrates that crisis is part of economies of abandonment, a letting die that is essential to the functioning of neoliberalism. Despite official EU discourses casting the crisis as an accident that can be overcome through sacrifice, the reality of the crisis is that of slow erosion, the perpetuation of dispossession as the normal functioning of the economy. The discourse of crisis as an event, however, is essential to justify austerity, because it holds the promise of an economic cure that is attainable though budget cuts, restrained public spending, and dismantling of state social protections. Salameh's image insists in excavating the connections between present and past moments, drawing their similarities, refusing the discourse that presents crisis as an isolated event instead of neoliberalism as usual.

In the last picture (Image 4), we see the base and the lower part of a white marble column, part of a white marble tiled floor, and in the background, a white surveillance camera that stands out against the dark red wall. This is a picture of the entrance of the Archaeological Museum in Athens, part of Yiannis Hadjiaslanis' series *After Dark*. In this series, Hadjiaslanis shot Athens' centre at night, during the weeks following an intense period of riots in February 2012. These riots, the most violent ones in the city since those following the murder of 14-year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by police in December of 2008, coincided with the negotiations of the Second Memorandum to the Greek economy between the Troika[3] and the national government. During the riots, many buildings in the city centre were set on fire, eliciting rumors whether the perpetrators of all the fires were indeed anarchists, as the media and political establishment argued, or if groups affiliated with fascist party Golden Dawn were also responsible. The period of negotiations and the ensuing riots marked a moment of political contingency, a heightened intensity in the life of the nation in which radical political change seemed possible.

*Image 4: Yiannis Hadjiaslanis.*
Mouseio II. *From* After Dark*, 2012.*

Although the shooting of *After Dark* coincides with a moment of urban upheaval, in this series Hadjiaslanis purposefully dwells on settings that seem solitary and quiet. In intimate proximity with the objects he shoots, Hadjiaslanis uses close ups rather than the wide shots that these settings usually call for. In this way, he calls attention to the details of the settings, the textures of the architectural surfaces, the traces of human activity, the materials, almost as if he were collecting the evidence of a social cataclysm so he could order it into a logical narrative at a later date. These compositional choices are essential to the stillness that Hadjiaslanis depicts and that we can understand as a photographic documentation of a halt in homogeneous empty time, a historical moment of contingency in Greek political and public life.

Throughout the history of Western civilization, white columns––of marble or other materials––seem to have been a preferred architectural staple to mark the places where power, in its diverse secular or religious forms, holds its ground in spectacular, monumental ways. From the Athenian Parthenon to the Washington Capitol Building, white columns are an element of institutional staging, a performative device through which existing power evokes authority, permanence, and historical legitimacy. In Hadjiaslanis' image, the white marble column thematically cites these tropes of monumentality, but the composition disavows them. Stripped to their bare bones, the camera and the marble column become the central elements. Through this juxtaposition of a monumental setting with a composition that undermines monumentality and foregrounds panoptical[4] economies of surveillance, the photograph represents neoliberal biopower at a time when the Greek economic crisis seemed to have reached its climax.

In the period of 2011–2012, the Archaeological Museum and the surrounding area were part of an urban vortex of rioting and street battles. A neo-classical building on Patission Street, the Museum sits right next to the Polytechnic University, where the social movement that overthrew the Junta dictatorship started in the 1970s, and which has been ever since a central location in the local geography of Athenian leftist radical movements. The same can be said of the adjacent streets of Exarcheia, the neighborhood where 14-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos was killed by police, and where the riots motivated by his death started and spread out from in December 2008. Each year, Exarcheia's anarchists commemorate Alexis' death by engaging the police in a street fight that takes place steps away from the Museum. In the surrounding streets, cars and dumpsters are set on fire, and the explosions of homemade Molotov cocktails and responding police tear gas last from sunset until dawn. After the 2008 riots and until the 2015 election of Syriza, Exarcheia was permanently under siege by anti-riot police units, which were daily camped in the streets leading to the neighborhood, stopping pedestrians, requesting identifications, and conducting searches. Since the eruption of the economic crisis, the Museum entrance, its garden, and the surrounding area have also become a hangout spot for homeless heroin addicts, an ever-growing group that cannot count anymore on structures of public assistance eliminated by austerity.

Although it might seem like a casual setting, as an urban location affected by drastic social changes, political violence, and the presence of vulnerable social groups, the entrance of the Archaeological Museum is politically charged. Looking at the image from a historical materialist perspective that excavates this political charge, we can find in the picture the signs of what Benjamin calls

"revolutionary time." For Benjamin, revolutionary time animates struggles of the past beyond just tracing their causal relation to the present. A historical materialist "approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" ([1940] 2007, 263). Underneath what might look at first sight as a casual reference to archeological treasures, the picture contains references to recent episodes of Greek history. Hadjiaslanis' picture works against the relationship of causality that underscores narratives of historical progress, suggesting that there's much more to history that the eye can see, or that official narratives recount. He presents us with an intentional incompleteness that we confront but that we cannot easily resolve. To some extent, the picture is obfuscating, refusing any narrative of causality. Without the frame of causation, we are just left contemplating a historical object placed out of linear time. And yet, the setting captured in the picture is a place in which different but interlocking processes related to the contemporary immiseration of Greek urban life unfold. It is a document of history that refuses progress and instead looks for a deeper form of engagement with past, present, and future.

## Afterword: Afterward

At the end of his reflections on catastrophes, Jean Luc Nancy speculates that our way out of impending doom demands a different conception of time, one that does not rush towards the future but instead appreciates the fullness of the present. This is not a present in which we know of the coming catastrophes but pretend to ignore them through immediate hedonistic gratification, but a present of making things anew (2015, 38). It is a process of creating material conditions that are not hijacked by capitalist notions of progress and growth and their disastrous environmental and social consequences. Although speculative and abstract, Nancy's notion of the present is also intriguing, posing important questions: If our hegemonic notion of time is that of linear progress, if our modes of organizing politically, economically, and socially are compulsively teleological, how can we even start imagining time differently?

Given the essential relationship of photography and time, the realm of the visual might be a starting place to imagine temporalities that are not compromised by catastrophic capitalist futures. In Depression Era's work, we are offered a variety of performative encounters with time, whether we are taken to post-apocalyptic landscapes that are at once our present and our future, prompted to look ironically at promises of future wealth, allowed to reflect on the cyclicality of what always comes back or perhaps never leaves, or refused the recourse of causality to explain our historical present. Shooting the Greek economic crisis, the Depression Era photographers that I have examined in this essay force us to look at the failure of our present modes of social organization. We are momentarily confronted with palpable catastrophe and made to wonder: What now? Instead of answers, we are invited to dwell in the question. And the place of the question, the place from which all that is left to us is to gaze on the emptiness of our notion of progress might constitute the very place where we finally let go of our attachment to it.

## Notes

[1] Throughout this essay, I use the terms capitalism and neoliberalism to talk about similar yet different phenomena. I understand neoliberalism to be a phase in the development of capitalism (Harvey 2005), and yet also a qualitatively different form of organizing the economy and social life more broadly. In neoliberalism, not only does financial capital become the engine of economy in substitution of industrial production (Hardt and Negri 2005), but we also see an increasing decoupling between finance and production (Marazzi 2011), and the subjugation and management of populations through debt (Lazzarato 2012). Moreover, neoliberalism is also a form of governance in which economic growth is the end legitimation of government. This mode of governance evacuates democratic principles from the political to order all spheres of life according to the market (Brown 2015). Crucial to this form of governance, neoliberalism shapes the formation of the self, subjecting individuals to a perpetual sense of precarity (Lorey 2015), as well as expectations to constantly improve the self to adapt to the market and achieve beyond the limits of exhaustion (Chul Han 2015).

[2] At the end of the First World War and as part of the process of dismantling the former Ottoman Empire, Western Allies supported Greece's war against Turkey. The nationalist plan of the Greek state was to claim territories in Asia Minor that were under Greek influence during the ancient period but that had become part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1922, after three years of civilian massacres on both sides, the two countries reached an agreement involving a major displace of population. Turkey sent to Greece about one million Greek Orthodox Christians who had been living on Turkish territory; in exchange, Greece reciprocated with half a million Muslims who had been living on Greek territory.

[3] IMF, European Central Bank, and European Commission.

[4] My use of panoptical derives from Michel Foucault's definition of "panopticon" in *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

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## Biography

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# BEING IN CRISIS: SCENES OF BLINDNESS AND INSIGHT IN TRAGEDY

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> *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.*
> If I cannot deflect the will of heaven, then I shall move the river Acheron.
>
> (Virgil qtd. in Freud [1899] 1997, 1)

## Staging crisis

This investigation of crisis in ancient tragedy begins, appropriately enough, at the Theatre of Dionysus, to explore how the prototypical theatre space involved its audiences aesthetically in very particular ways. In the city beyond the theatre, citizens look and are looked-at, speak and listen. But as soon as we cross the first boundary to enter the auditorium, the social gaze leaves us; the auditorium becomes a space of public privacy because each person's gaze is subtly guided away from the other, and onto the performance space below, by 'open sight lines [which] converge from every angle on the huge uncluttered orchestra and what lay beyond it' (Gould 1989, 11).

The same architectural features that focus the audience gaze amplify the performers' voices with the acoustics of the megaphone, which famously allow a single actor to be audible at the back of the auditorium. So the theatre's second boundary between stage and auditorium not only delimits the lives of the citizens in the auditorium from the fictional situation inhabited by the *dramatis personae* of the play they are watching, but it also carefully separates and articulates the active and receptive functions of the gaze and voice. The audience give their gaze and receive the voice in one direction; while the performers give their voice and receive the gaze in the other. This phenomenon


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may shed light on what was for the Greeks a vital relationship between drama and democracy. These dramatic—democratic—aesthetics give each side—stage and auditorium, fiction and real life—physical dominion over, and at the same time exposure to, a different aspect of the other's sensory or ontological being. Interestingly, gaze and voice form the components of Lacanian desire (2006, 692), suggesting a structural relationship between drama and desire that will bear fruit later in this article in several ways. Indeed, it is the theatre's third boundary that may have been most instrumental in this respect, because the stage/backstage threshold, or *skene*, mediates between the fictional situation and the city in which it is staged most directly. In terms of circulating audience desire, it is the *skene* that stretches the relationship between gaze and voice most dramatically. The *skene* comes into play during the critical phase of the drama that is under particular investigation here: when violent events are indicated offstage. Gould tells us that behind the *skene* at the Theatre of Dionysus there was a backstage space, which

> served as a store-room for masks, costumes, and props, and as a green room for actors preparing to make their entrances. But by the early 450s at least the *skene* is thought of as bounding the scene of action and in certain moments part of it [...] violent death characteristically occurs within, that is, inside the *skene*, and has its dramatic impact through the death-cries of the victim and the controlled passion of the messenger speech. (1989, 11, 13)

At such critical moments the eye cannot penetrate the *skene*; but the ear can, to afford audiences an intimate imaginative engagement with the fictional events taking place behind it. So when Simon Critchley asks: 'And what exactly is the pleasure we take in spectacles of pain?' (2017, 38), it may be useful to note that for the Greeks there were no such spectacles. The *skene* meant that violent death was not usually visually available to audiences. With regard to what Critchley calls tragedy's 'ghostly porosity of the frontier separating the living from the dead' (37), the reader's attention is drawn here to the fact that both aspects of the third boundary or *skene* can be activated by the drama: its painted surface and its blind side.

It may be worth observing at this point that one way to think of the innovations of the twentieth-century theatre is in terms of dismantling these three dramatic thresholds. For instance, Augusto Boal's Invisible Theatre dispensed with the boundary between city and auditorium. Boal took the stage to the street, producing performances in public spaces that privileged dramatic actions to the extent that they were to be mistaken for actual events. Antonin Artaud abolished the second boundary between the stage and the auditorium and replaced it 'by a single site without partition or barrier of any kind' ([1932] 1986, 61). Although audiences in this situation know they have crossed the first boundary from street to performance space, without an auditorium they may momentarily experience a sort of hallucinatory uncertainty as to whether the events that pass before them are real or imagined. Bertolt Brecht's famous 'street scene' ([1945] 1986) brought street to stage in a way that privileged the aesthetics of the street; dramatic action was to be constantly interrupted by reportage and explanation; death cries and messenger speeches were no longer separated by a *skene*.

The relationship between structure and crisis would appear paradoxical, which may be why the Modernists, seeking radical change, attacked these prototypical theatre aesthetics. Structure lets us know where we are, while crisis is flux and disorientation. As Critchley puts it: 'In play after play of the great tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides), what we see are characters who are utterly disorientated by the situation in which they find themselves' (26). It is my proposal here that the *skene* is a structure that precipitates crisis; that the Oedipal metaphor of blindness as insight may have been intended to impact not just the tragic characters as Critchley has it, but also their audiences; that at key moments of dramatic crisis, play and *skene* seem to restrict the visual range of their audience, disorienting them *alongside* the fictional protagonists; and that such restrictions constitute a vital part of the critical function of Greek tragedy.

## Thinking through crisis

We can elucidate this proposed relationship between *skene*, crisis, and critical thought further if we investigate two key terms used by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* to describe a journey down to the sea at Piraeus and back up to Athens. According to Jacob Howland,

> Piraeus leaves little doubt that we are initially, as Eva Brann writes, 'in the city of shades, the house of Pluto': in the name Piraeus (especially in the accusative phrase *eis Peiraia*, which Socrates employs in the first line of the dialogue) one hears peraia or "beyond-land." (Howland 2000, 878)

Howland suggests that the themes of descent and ascent, or *katabasis* and *anabasis*, are echoed several times in the *Republic* involving Gyges' ring of invisibility in book 2, the famous cave image of education in book 7, and the myth of Er in book 10, which sees Er's *katabatic* descent into Hades and *anabatic* return to consciousness on his funeral pyre at daybreak. Movement 'from the land of the dead to the land of the living, from darkness to light and from confusion to clarity' is reflected in the *Odyssey*, and in the *Republic*, where Socrates is depicted as a philosophical Odysseus. Xenophon went on to write about his own *Anabasis*, a military adventure interwoven with his own ascent to self-knowledge (Howland 2000, 878). As Luce Irigaray notes, in Plato's cave image of education critical thought moves from the blind cavern, via the speaking 'world', to the 'good', a place of insight. In Irigaray's terms and with her emphasis, the movement is '*uni-directional*'—i.e. it ascends in Socratic terms *anabatically*, from darkness to light, confusion to clarity. For Irigaray, this Platonic move creates a 'blind spot' preventing 'intercourse' between the sensible (maternal 'cave') and the intelligible (paternal 'good'), except where language (culture) mediates between them (Whitford 2006, 109). But we can see from Socrates and Xenophon that crisis, or *katabasis*, is an important constituent of the ascent to *anabatic* self-knowledge, something the Platonic move would appear to erase. It is the wager of this paper that we can view the use of the *skene* in tragedy as a way to short circuit Plato's arrangement; the paper will investigate how tragedy's *katabatic* move from the painted to the blind side of the *skene* may conflate blindness and insight, body and intellect, to call culture to account.

## Dramatizing crisis

Euripides' *Herakles* ([c416BCE] 1997) offers interesting instances of the porous *skene*. As with much ancient drama, the action initially takes place on the street outside the palace. As the play's crisis intensifies its action shifts by degrees inside the palace, where it cannot be seen by its audience, to re-emerge later as the extent of the catastrophe becomes apparent. It may help the reader to visualise the dramatic short-circuit I am proposing here if we view the theatre, the play being staged, and Plato's cave analogy as palimpsests of each other. In this scenario the backstage obscene space/palace interior corresponds with Plato's blind cave; the stage/street outside the palace corresponds with Plato's world; while the auditorium is a place of potential insight. Onstage, words and images synchronise to show and tell us the play's fictional events in a space which mediates between the obscene/cave and the 'good' insightful auditorium.

Herakles begins the play off-stage in Hades, having failed to return from his labours there. His unprotected family are about to be slaughtered by usurping King Lykos. Herakles' wife Megara has bought a little time for her children by persuading Lykos to let her back into the palace to dress them properly for sacrifice. This movement behind the *skene* confers invisibility and can be said to be *katabatic*; in this sense the *skene* would seem to mirror the river Charon, tributary to the Styx, in its function as a boundary between life and death. Megara and her children re-emerge alive, but ominously dressed for death and on borrowed time. Two *parados* at the sides of the stage and the palace doors in the middle of the *skene* penetrate its invisibility, but it is usually only the characters in the play who can 'see' into the imagined world beyond. These entrances give the boundary scope to flex and shift. For instance, when Megara glimpses Herakles in the *parados*, she says she thinks she is 'seeing things' (l. 519). But Herakles' trajectory back from Hades is *anabatic*; he is not a ghost or shade from the underworld. Herakles enters and is quickly appraised of the horror of his family's situation. He says of his children:

> All they had was my name,
> And they were to die for that. (l. 578–9)

Words are then made flesh; Euripides equips Herakles with striking metaphors that conjure dramatic actions and images to define him tangibly as a kind and loving husband and father. The words that follow cannot fail to give substance to Herakles' heroic reputation: his children literally cling to him.

> Children, let go. What's the matter—
> Afraid I'll fly away?
> Aah.
> They're like burrs, like barnacles, they won't let go. (l. 626–629)

These metaphors are strikingly *ekphrastic*. If a name alone means death to the children, the subsequent staged collaboration of word, image, and action conjures a poignant liveliness with which the audience may relate on many levels: the modalities of eye and ear illuminating each other to produce the vivid illusory *mimesis* that so worried Plato. Here, the soon-to-die meet the

resurrected and we are likely to be emotionally affected by the powerful corroboration of word and image. Critchley unearths evidence that ancient audiences of tragedies did indeed find emotional consolation; he posits: 'We might say that tragedy consoles through an imaginative enthrallment with an almost trance-like, other-worldly state that is linked, for Timocles and Aristotle and us, to pleasure, *hedone*' (2017, 37). But such *anabatic* moments of *mimesis* do not last long in tragedy and serve only to set the stage so that their tragic reversal will have more impact. When the blind side of the *skene* is activated in crisis, obscene events we hear but cannot see will take place behind it, and word and image will fail to corroborate or 'ground' each other. Without semblance, such moments are far from *mimetic*; their blinding, de-centring, *katabatic* impact on their audience, hardly entrancing or pleasurable.

Crisis soon returns and with it, uncertainty for Herakles' audience. Herakles, Megara and the children go inside the palace, bait for an unsuspecting Lykos, who soon reappears. In front of the *skene*, Amphitryon, Herakles' step-father, tells Lykos he can see Megara and the children on their knees praying inside the palace; if Lykos wants to slaughter them he will have to go inside and do it there. This reported—and from the auditorium, visually uncorroborated—'view' behind the *skene* into an otherwise unrepresented imagined world functions technically like the *parados* as we have seen; ghosts, hallucinations, and now lies, stalk this inchoate zone. So, with this second activation of the blind side of the *skene* begins the critical phase of the drama in earnest. As the action of the play moves into the *obskene*, even the chorus in front of the *skene* will be as blind as we. We may wait for the pleasure of hearing Lykos unexpectedly encounter the might of Herakles inside the palace. Simon Critchley claims that 'tragedy requires some degree of complicity on our part in the disaster that destroys us' (2017, 31). In *Herakles*, I suggest that the pleasure of waiting for Lykos and Herakles to meet implicates the audience in the murderous events that follow, making us jointly responsible with the protagonist for his fate.

The fact that news of the encounter between Lykos and Herakles reaches us in a range of different auditory modalities makes our collusion even more difficult to shake off: if 'shame lies on the eyelids' as Critchley has it (33), 'the ears have no lids' according to Lacan (in Dolar 2006, 78). Lykos' incoherent death cries sound through the *skene*; a servant's voice tells us this is 'the song we longed for' (l. 753); then Lykos himself becomes intelligible, crying: 'Thebans! Help me! Help me!' (l. 757–8). But it is his silence, auditory equivalent of blindness, that pronounces him dead; as the chorus puts it: 'Listen! Nothing' (l. 760). Then they step in with a celebratory song and dance. If crisis interrupts the powerful gaze of the audience, it renders the commanding voice of the stage wordless; we are caught between word and voice, then sound and silence, as words and then bodies fail. The blind side of the *skene* would seem to be activated intensively for its audience by this deathly silence, but only momentarily; their eye and ear are soon in synch again, the *anabatic* pulse of the stage restored, as the chorus sing and dance.

The next iteration of crisis follows swiftly, with a *katabatic* reversal or *peripety*. The choral song and dance is interrupted by the appearance of two immortals atop the *skene*. Madness, Night's daughter, and Iris, God's messenger, terrify the chorus, whose music disintegrates into a speechless cry: 'e-a, e-a' (l. 813). Madness and Iris announce that since Herakles is Zeus's illegitimate

son, they have been sent by Zeus' jealous wife Hera to drive him mad so that he will kill his own family. As Madness goes inside to stalk Herakles, she makes us privy to her own blinding technique: 'He can't see me now, but see! He's mine!' (l. 873). Words fail the chorus, who cry: 'Otototoee' (l. 874), regaining the power of speech to tell us they can see madness riding and goading Herakles inside the palace. Soon we hear Amphitryon similarly caught between voice and word in horror: 'Eeoh moee. Help us!' (l. 885). For a while, from line 886 to line 898, we do not know what is happening inside the palace. The chorus tells us they hear sounds like treading grapes, which they think may be 'stamping blood'; they report thudding music, pounding horns and shrieking flutes, inferring the horrific notion that Herakles is hunting down his own children in sport. This speculative commentary on the cacophony going on inside is itself cut short: the roof breaks and there is a huge shriek from inside the palace.

## Psychoanalysing crisis

Let us put the tragedy of Herakles on pause at this point to propose that in crisis, whether dramatic or otherwise, we depart from the comforts of language and of semblance, and so from representation and mimesis, to enter what Lacan terms the register of the real. We have already noted how, on entering the Theatre of Dionysus, audiences cross the first boundary between the street and the theatre, which choreographs their gaze to focus on the stage below; how the second boundary, which demarcates stage from auditorium, choreographs the performing voice. In this way the prototypical theatre space distributes Lacanian desire, the active and receptive functions of gaze and voice, equitably; the auditorium gives the gaze and receives the voice, while the stage gives the voice and receives the gaze. While the play's action takes place in front of the *skene* in the *proskene*, in view of the audience, these democratic dynamics pertain. But when the action crosses beyond the *skene* at the third boundary as it does in crisis, the powerful audience gaze is thwarted. Thanks to the work of the Ljubljana School we can understand the significance of what follows. As Mladen Dolar observes, when we cannot see, distance collapses:

> The ears have no lids, as Lacan never tires of repeating; they cannot be closed, one is constantly exposed, no distance to sound can be maintained. There is a stark opposition between the visible and the audible: the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance. (2006, 78–9)

Seeing and hearing in synchrony would seem to be *anabatic*, because it allows us to orient our bodies in space and time; our ears engaging personally with our surroundings while our eyes keep our identity—our distinctness from our surroundings, intact. When the action of the drama moves out of sight as it reaches its crisis, our sense of separation from the fictional events that pass before us may be compromised; audiences may be decentred by their (visual) failure to identify what is happening in the drama, and their (auditory) inability to differentiate from it. This critical, or *katabatic*, state of affairs, may conjure the genuine states of fear and pity (respectively) which Aristotle associates with Tragedy.

We can get closer to explicating how this new way of looking at the ancient dramatic crisis articulates criticality if we investigate the different types of sign produced by each side of the *skene*. This will allow me to add semiotics to my existing palimpsest of dramatic and philosophical structures. Iconic and symbolic signifiers onstage resemble and substitute for their objects in front of the *skene*. In contrast, signifiers from backstage index, or make us physically contiguous with their objects. Indices are the most primal and urgent of the signs; the indexical signifier literally points to its object as a child who has not yet learned to speak may point. An indexical signifier is like 'a fragment torn away from the object [...] anything which focuses the attention is an index. Anything which startles us is an index'. Indices 'direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion' (Pierce quoted in Chandler 2002, 41).

The way that the indexical signifier causes such an urgent focus of attention would seem to define crisis. We have seen in *Herakles* several ways in which the dark side of the *skene* can activate this state of affairs for audiences; a staged speaker tells us what they 'see' offstage; or someone behind the *skene* speaks, voices a sound, or makes a noise. Such crises seem to be structured so that we experience them bodily, without mediation. If we compare this with the engagingly televisual (yet separate) *mimetic* and *ekphratic* semblances and substitutions on the visible side of the *skene*, we may come closer to understanding the critical positionality that comes into play for audiences when both sides of the *skene* are activated. Theoretically, Lykos deserves what he gets, but when we hear his death cries things may not seem so clear-cut. Bodily mediated signifiers, which have to be actively disavowed in authoritarian societies, are privileged in dramatic crisis to confront culturally mediated signifiers and expose the gaps and *lacunae* that the social mirror fails to reflect. As Critchley puts it, 'the question of theory (spectatorship) and practice, or the gap between theory and practice first opens in theatre and as theatre' (2017, 27).

In a dramatic crisis, each side of the *skene* may impact its audience in structurally very different ways to open an ontological or contemplative gap that sits between metaphor and metonymy. The *skene* endows us with the clarity and stability of the spectator; but in crisis we pivot between this and the immanent flux of unidentifiable sound. We have seen Plato and Xenophon lead philosophy and history towards an *anabatic* state of criticality, keen to bring us into the light of *logos*; while as we shall see the more recent psychoanalytic insights of Freud and Lacan err more towards an emphasis on *pathos*, crossing the River Charon into the *katabatic* territory of the underworld, which we associate here with the blind side of the *skene*.

According to Critchley, tragedy's criticality takes the form of adversarial reasoning whereby we '*audi alteram partem'*, or hear the other side' (2017, 39). But the line of thinking developing here would suggest that the 'other side' we hear in drama is not another reasoned perspective as in a court of law, but the very personal contemplative 'play' that results when eye is split from ear, as it is by the *skene*, to separate the visible from the invisible. This 'play' seems to conjure the movements between darkness and light, confusion and clarity, the lands of the dead and living that Socrates describes as *anabatic* and *katabatic* in his Piraeus story. Plato in turn seems to have adapted these ideas in his cave image of education, but, as Irigiray notes, in a way that represses *katabasis*, and therefore empathy. When we understand it in this way, the obscene dark side of the *skene* provides

audiences with a *katabatic* shortcut into the corporeal; into a pre-linguistic register that Lacan claims resists symbolic representation altogether to conjure things that society naturally represses:

> What we experience as reality is not the 'thing itself', it is always-already symbolised, constituted, structured by symbolic mechanisms—and the problem resides in the fact that symbolization always fails, that it never succeeds in fully 'covering' the real, that it always involves some unsettled, unredeemed symbolic debt. This real (the part of reality that remains non-symbolized) returns in the guise of spectral apparitions. (Lacan qtd. in Žižek 1999, 73–4)

Critchley quotes Timocles in one of the earliest recorded responses to tragedy saying something strikingly similar: 'tragedy is described as a *parapsuche*, an emotional consolation, cooling or coping with life's troubles, but also as a *psychagogia*, an enthralling persuasion that can also denote the conjuring of souls from another world' (2017, 37). Critchley, following Gorgias the Sicilian rhetorician, sees these apparitions in terms of illusion or deception:

> Tragedy, by means of legends and emotions, creates a deception in which the deceiver is more honest than the non-deceiver, and the deceived is wiser than the non-deceived. (Qtd. in Critchley 2017, 36)

For Critchley, in watching tragedies we acquire 'wisdom through deception, through an emotionally psychotropic experience' (37). My point here is that deceptive or illusory practices tend to invert or deliberately blur these visual and auditory lands of the living and dead, as in a séance or an act of ventriloquism. Like *trompes l'oeil*, these practices dress icons and symbols up as indices. When substituting signs masquerade as contiguities in this way, words and bodies seem to swap places; inanimate objects appear to spring uncannily to life, while the living are mesmerised, as if sapped of energy. For Freud this happens when 'a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes' ([1919] 2003, 150). In such situations we may become 'interpellated' (Althusser 1971) or entrapped like Freud's delusional patient President Schreber for whom, as Alenka Zupaničič points out, 'symbolic relations appear as real—like "nerves" and "cosmic rays"' (2008, 161).

The *skene*, on the other hand, generates *anabatic* and *katabatic* 'play'; but it does not create confusion as to which is which to drive us mad: indeed, we could say it drives us sane. In a dramatic crisis both sides of the *skene* are activated; the ear penetrates it so that audiences may imaginatively inhabit the dramatic situation backstage; but the eye has to rest on its painted side, orienting the viewer firmly in a theatre building. This makes audiences unlikely to believe the fictional situation to be true in a literal sense. But at the same time, it allows us to grasp the realities the fictional situation dramatizes. On the one hand, as we have seen, the auditory register collapses distance so that dramatic events become close to the point of intimacy; on the other hand, because the two sides of the *skene* play out between the eye and ear, it is as if drama's critical flux takes place quite literally inside our skull.

In spite of this, the relation between exteriority and imaginative interiority does not blur in drama, as it does in altered or psychotropic states of consciousness such as hallucination and psychosis. According to child psychologist Lev Vygotski, in play a child may stare at a stick yet with the mind's eye see a horse (Minick 2005, 48). Crucially the child experiences a form of double vision because the stick itself never disappears; indeed, it serves as an important boundary protecting children from the horror of *not* being able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. The *skene* would seem to serve a similar pivotal function in the performance of tragedies, which is, as Freud points out, 'the form of play and imitation practiced by adults' ([1920] 2006, 143).

Rather than deceiving us by confusing the auditory with the visual, internality with externality, or fantasy with reality, we may be able to see the *skene* in tragedy as a way of delivering wisdom by maintaining a clear boundary between *seeing* and what happens to us *when we cannot see*. This boundary allows us to pivot between Timocles' *parapsuche* and *psychagogia*; between the *anabatic* and *katabatic* states described by Socrates; between the consoling, yet illusory, clarity and stability of the spectator if we pay attention to its painted side, and a very personal sense of disintegration, reminiscent perhaps of childhood fears of the dark, if we pay attention to its invisible side. Lacan describes how with a mere 'shift of the gaze', the *trompe l'oeil* can yield the very secrets its illusion conceals:

> What is it that attracts and satisfies us in *trompe l'oeil*? When is it that it captures our attention and delights us? At the moment when, by a mere shift of our gaze, we are able to realize that the representation does not move with the gaze and that it is merely a *trompe l'oeil*. For it appears at that moment as something other than it seemed, or rather it now seems to be that something else. […] This other thing is the *petit a*. (1998, 112)

Lacan's *petit a* famously refers to spectral intimations of a repressed primal scene, and it appears at precisely the moment we stop being mesmerised by illusion and regain our physical agency. For Freud the primal scene refers to the moment of our conception; instead of taking this too literally, we may be able to understand the *petit a*, or primal scene, in the broader terms expressed by Irigaray. As we have seen, Irigaray indicates the need for primal 'intercourse' between the sensible (maternal cave) and the intelligible (paternal 'good'), to instigate the very *katabatic* movement that Plato's unidirectional *anabatic* system represses. Rather than an inter-psychic (or social) manoeuvre, this is an intra-psychic (or personal) one; it puts us in touch with ourselves to inaugurate a process of self-creation or *autopoiesis*. The *skene*, collapsing the visual stage/world as it does when it invites its audience to enter the inchoate auditory realm in crisis, would seem to short-circuit the gap between the auditorium/'good', and the obscene/cave, bringing the audience and their imagined backstage world into an intimate and fruitful proximity. If we think of the *skene* as it may have originally existed, as a piece of animal skin, its use in the theatre in this way allows us to live on both sides of our skin. According to the thinking I am developing here we can see this as the critical insight we may gain when we lose the ability to distance ourselves: the insight we may gain from blindness.

## Crises of desire

The ancient stage, then, seems to have been endowed by its *skene* with this capacity for collapse, to disorient audiences alongside the dramatic protagonists, bringing metaphor and metonymy, words and bodies, into radical play. So it is not as if, as Critchley sees it, in watching tragedies we take pleasure 'in spectacles of pain' (2017, 38). Do we then take masochistic pleasure in joining the protagonists in their agonies? In his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' ([1920] 2006), Freud discusses why 'the un-pleasurable nature of an experience does not always render it unusable for play purposes' (142). But he dismisses queasy concerns regarding any sort of pleasure-in-pain to suggest that something more profound than pleasure is at work in enacting painful experiences:

> Some economically oriented aesthetic theory may wish to concern itself with these cases and situations where un-pleasure leads ultimately to a gain in pleasure; for our particular purposes, however, they are of no value at all, for they presuppose the dominion of the pleasure principle, and offer no evidence for the prevalence of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle. (143; Freud's emphasis)

Freud suggests that *mimesis*, 'a specific imitative drive', is not the driving force in the performance of tragedies; that something more primal than, and independent of, visual pleasure is at work in plays and playing, whereby we exchange a 'passive role in the actual experience for an active role within the game' (ibid.). To understand this it would seem important to theorise a distinction between pleasure and desire.

It is striking that later in the same essay Freud uses Socrates' terms from the Piraeus story in his efforts to get beyond the notion of pleasure. Freud describes two processes or drives running 'in opposite directions to each other. One that is anabolic or "assimilative"', which he associates with life drives or the pleasure principle; 'and another that is catabolic or "dissimilative"', which he associates with death drives 'beyond' pleasure (178). So while pleasure can be associated with *anabasis*, for Freud the need to dis-integrate is more primal, and plays and playing are driven by '*the need to restore a prior state*' (186, original emphasis). Freud concludes his essay with the observation that 'the pleasure principle seems to be positively subservient to the death drives' (194). Freud may have associated *katabasis* with death because of the inflection Socrates gave it, but it is a mistake to associate the 'prior state' or the 'death drives' he mentions with morbidity. In a footnote added a year or so later, Freud supposes these two drives to have been dynamically engaged, 'locked in a battle from the very beginning' (191), to produce the play or 'peculiar tension' (194) that motivates both drama and child-play. Lacan later examined these tensions in his 'graph of desire' (2006, 692). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the graph in detail here, but it may be useful to note that the graph describes two antagonistic movements of desire; an anabolic tendency to condense or unify, assimilating sound and thought to make linguistic communication possible; and a catabolic propensity to displace, opening gaps which expose misrecognitions or *hamartia*. Thanks to Lacan's rapprochement between psychoanalysis and linguistics we can perhaps identify Freud's 'prior state' less in terms of something moribund or inanimate, and more in terms of the way Euripides crashes down through the communicative gears in *Herakles* into crisis

mode; from the lip-synched filmic deception of symbolic and imaginary words and semblances in the *proskene*; to the pre-linguistic, monadic, undifferentiated register of the 'real'; characterised as we have seen by indices, and conjured by the dark side of the *skene*.

These ideas are beautifully illustrated earlier in Freud's essay by a game played by his eighteen-month-old nephew with a cotton reel which had some string tied around it, known as the 'fort/da' (in English, the 'gone/here') game. In this game the child comes to terms with the traumatic comings and goings of his mother, to whom he was 'fondly attached' (140).

> Keeping hold of the string, he very skilfully threw the reel over the edge of his curtained cot so that it disappeared inside, all the while making his expressive 'o-o-o-o' sound, then used the string to pull the reel out of the cot again, but this time greeting its reappearance with a joyful *Da!* ('Here!'). That then was the entire game—disappearing and coming back—only the first act of which one normally got to see; and this first act was tirelessly repeated on its own, even though the greater pleasure was undoubtedly attached to the second. (141)

The two acts would seem to demonstrate the *anabati*c and *katabatic* movements of desire; the 'to be or not to be' of dramatic experience. The more frequently performed upsetting disappearance of the reel whereby (according to Lacan) the reel is 'a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained' (1998, 62). And its' more pleasurable, but less frequently performed, assimilative reunion. Lacanian desire finds release in the muscular spasms of *jouissance* which are most commonly associated with erotic, or sexual pleasure. But here we join Socrates at the tail end of Plato's *Symposium* ([c. 385–370 BCE] 2005) (when his own colleagues were too drunk to engage with him), to associate desire with tragedy and comedy; to propose *jouissance* as the embodied and sometimes surprising release of anabolic (comic), and catabolic (tragic) tension that occurs in theatres; in which like Aristophanes' humans 'cut in half like flatfish' (29), and like Freud's child, we play by splitting and reunifying ourselves; by being as Lacan puts it, 'the *fort* of the *da*, and the *da* of the *fort*' (1998, 63).

## Revolutionary crises

When seen in this way, drama appears to be a quintessentially human activity, hardwired into our playfully desirous ontology, and associated with our most primal, pre-linguistic, drives and releases of energy. The ancient Greeks seem to have used the critical practice of child-play to make *autopoiesis* available to adults on a grand social scale, and we can understand its revolutionary potential if we focus our attention on the pivot itself as the place that instigates the precipitous splitting process. It is here that logical *anabatic* and more empathic *katabatic* states impact on and alter each other to create Irigaray's desired state of embodied cognition, or 'flow', sought after by practice-as-research methodology and performance philosophy, whereby thought and action intersect. Thucydides describes this state of intellectual and physical coherence, some thirty years after the practice of drama had become seriously taken up by the Athenians:

> The Athenians are addicted to innovation, and their designs are characterised by a swiftness alike in conception and execution; you (the Lacedaemonians) have a genius for keeping what you have got, accompanied by a total want of invention, and when forced to act, you never go far enough. (Cited in Castoriadis 1987, 208)

The culture of the ancient Athenians seems to have been envied by people such as the Lacedaemonians, who did not yet practice drama themselves. We can perhaps see the dramatic *skene* as the physical pivot between the conservative state of 'keeping what you have got', and the desired innovative or *autopoietic* practices of the Athenians, if we relate it to the way two very different temporalities were represented in the iconography of the time. *Chronos* is depicted as an old man, while *kairos* is shown as a youth in full flight. Kairos' hair is shaved at the back and long at the front to show that we must seize the opportunity to catch him bodily as he comes at us head-on, before he—and the *kairotic* moment he represents—passes us by. The nature of this pivotal *kairotic* instant is emphasised in the image by a set of scales the young man is holding, balanced on a razor's edge. According to Smith (1969), *chronos* and *kairos* 'embrace the uniform time of the cosmic system [...] and the time of opportunity or occasion come and gone which marks the significant moments of historical action' (1). *Chronos* is associated with the predictability delivered by measurable or linear temporality which we connect here with the icons and symbols produced by the *skene*'s visible aspect, reflecting 'what you have got'. *Kairos*, on the other hand, is associated with the more precarious metonymic contingencies of the site or situation, which we connect here with the dark side of the *skene*. Comic timing can be said to be *kairotic*; and as Critchley has it, 'tragedy twists the linear conception of time out of joint' (2017, 40). Poised in this way between transcendence and immanence, words and bodies, representation and the real, drama's *skene* would certainly seem to be designed to help audiences wrangle these temporalities; to shift predictable social paradigms in ways that release the primal, pre-linguistic bursts of comic and tragic energy that may change the lexicon, and so what can be socially understood.

Around 427 BCE the ancients invented a structure at the Theatre of Dionysus that was activated by the plays they staged there to produce for audiences a state of flux, of 'being in crisis': a highly serious, vital, and vitalising social critique. Drama's critical, or 'primal' scenes permitted the sensible to inform the intelligible; so the consolations of representation could be checked out by decentring spectral *psychagogia,* which operated in connection with the dark side of the *skene*, in the Lacanian register of the real. In this way the *skene* took the ancients from states of psychic integration into crises of disintegration and back, to release embodied comic and tragic insights that called their personal and social identities to account. If they could not change the will of heaven, at least they could understand themselves better; and they may have found these two things to be connected because, as Critchley puts it, tragedies 'show us the way in which we collude, seemingly unknowingly, with the calamity that befalls us' (2017, 31). Here in the twenty-first century we would seem considerably less likely to look beyond the surface of our screens than the ancient Greeks. It means we are less well in touch with ourselves than they were. But this exploration of their critical play with borders may usefully open up ways in which we could be.

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# *KRISIS* AS THE SCENE OF NON-DECISIONAL JUDGEMENT: A PERFORMANCE-FICTION FOR THE GENERIC HUMAN

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'Performance philosophy', as a field of inquiry concerned with the 'relationship, encounter or interaction between "performance" and "philosophy"' (Cull 2014, 16), challenges us to develop ways of thinking this relationship other than through an illustrative model—that is, neither by applying philosophy to performance, using the former to explain the latter, nor by taking specific performance works or practices as exemplars of philosophical theories. Instead, Laura Cull proposes that it experiments with the idea that, '*performance itself thinks*, that performance itself philosophizes—not in a way that reduces it to being the "same as" philosophy [...] but in a way that enriches our very concept of philosophy' (23). Hence, Tony Fisher suggests that the term 'performance philosophy should in fact be thought less as designating a field so much as asserting a hypothesis' (Fisher 2015, 182), one which posits as a principle the equality of these two heterogeneous disciplines—as modes of both thought and practice.

Cull and Fisher both look to François Laruelle's 'non-standard philosophy' as an approach to thinking that holds 'seeds of hope' for such an egalitarian project, because of the way it 'reopen[s] the question of *what counts as philosophical thought*' (Cull 2014, 24). Laruelle challenges philosophy's tendency to position itself as a master discourse with the unique ability to ground our understanding of the world and proposes a way of redeploying the conceptual materials philosophy produces, which proceeds from the supposition that 'all thoughts are equal' (Ó Maoilearca 2015). Thus, he proposes to bring philosophy into a new relation with other modes of thought, including the arts, 'substituting for the conflict of art and philosophy the conjugation of their means' (Laruelle 2012a, 1), via a framework or 'matrix' that he characterises as 'scientific'. This

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conjugation would produce a 'non-standard aesthetic' that is less a theory of art than an 'art of thought' (5). Moreover, what this 'art of thought' produces can be understood as a kind of *performance*; as John Ó Maoilearca remarks, 'Laruelle's "non-philosophical" practice is connected to its performative language, such that to the question "what is it to think?", non-philosophy responds that thinking is not "thought", but performing' (2017, abstract). As a 'performing', non-standard thinking does not produce an object of thought that could be isolated from the context of its enactment; rather, it must be *experienced*: 'non-philosophy is a practice, it is enacted, [...] this is the only way of demonstrating it' (Laruelle 2014, 149).

Laruelle's motivation for staging such a performance is that he sees philosophy as a constitutively dominating form of reason which harbours presuppositions that are 'not very favourable to man', and he proposes non-philosophy as a 'weapon of last defense' against this mode of conceptual domination. Its aim is to re-focus thought 'on the generic plane, on the human plane' (Gracieuse et al. 2012, 241). Thus, what is at stake in assuming this posture toward thinking is ultimately the way that we, as human beings, ground ourselves—how we present our identity conceptually, and how this presentation determines our thoughts and actions. This article will explore what it means for thought to be re-focused on a 'generic' and 'human' plane in this way by attempting to effectuate such an experience. That is, I will attempt to stage a performance of Laruellian pragmatics which 'conjugates' philosophy with performance, in order to demonstrate how the 'human' may be presented in a generic mode.

This will entail enacting a non-standard re-description of two sets of theoretical materials: one 'philosophical', the other arising out of the context of 'performance theory'. The 'philosophical' text I will examine is an essay by Werner Hamacher (2006) which deconstructs the enunciative structure of human rights declarations, and the manner in which they ontologically determine the 'human'. The concerns of Hamacher's analysis resonate with Laruelle's desire to defend the human against philosophical overdetermination. However, I will argue that his response to the issue—a proposed reform of this enunciative logic which appeals to the mythical scene of *krisis* in the court of the dead, related by Socrates at the end of Plato's *Gorgias* (1984, 523a–26d)—ultimately remains problematically 'philosophical' in Laruelle's terms, and positions the capacity to resist conceptual closure beyond theorisation.

Having identified how this philosophical critique of human rights discourse falls short of accomplishing a generic presentation of the human, I will then examine how aesthetic materials are brought into the non-standard matrix in order to enact such a presentation. Thus, I will outline the manner in which aesthetic elements are 'conjugated' with philosophical ones—how Laruelle proposes to extract their immanent identity in order to utilise them as models for thinking. I will then demonstrate this in practice by subjecting Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) aesthetic theory of performance to a formal analysis, similar to my reading of Hamacher. This particular aesthetic material has been selected because Fischer-Lichte's conception of performance as a transformational *event* resonates with Hamacher's discussion in interesting ways, grounding itself with a similarly performative logic. My aim is to show in practice how, by bringing to light a certain identity shared by the two sets of materials, the latter can be used, in a reduced form, to construct

a model that allows us to view the former differently. Bringing 'performance' and 'philosophy' together in this way allows us to radicalise Hamacher's notion of *krisis,* and so to bring it back from the aporetic beyond of thought to be enacted as a theorisable instance of a-critical judgement. This non-standard re-deployment of Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of performance ultimately enables us to manifest the 'human' as a generic instance of thinking.

Fisher notes that the effects of adopting a Laruellian posture as an approach to performance philosophy 'would be as startling to the field of performance as it already is to the epistemological field of philosophy' (2015, 182). Which is to say that bringing performance and philosophy together according to the non-standard matrix entails re-describing *each* term, in a way that underdetermines them *both.* Enacting such a re-description will allow us to demonstrate these effects on performance, and so will add a new perspective to the growing range of literature examining how Laruelle's thinking mutates philosophy. This will enable us to better assess the consequences of assuming this posture for performance philosophy.

## Decision: Philosophy as Crisis—A Primer on Laruelle's Practice

In order to orient ourselves in the context of Laruelle's rather strange manner of thinking, I will begin by explaining some key terms he uses, and outlining the nature of his performative practice. The non-philosophical approach hinges on Laruelle's claim to have discovered an invariant formal trait shared by all philosophies. This trait, which he names the 'philosophical Decision', can be understood as the critical mechanism by which philosophy legitimates itself (Laruelle 2013b, *passim*; see especially 231–236). Philosophy 'decides' in the sense that it produces its objects by isolating a part of the immanent-real and binding the latter to its own transcendent structures. Consequently, the image of the world produced by philosophy is dyadic, containing both empirical and transcendental parts. This is to say that each philosophical concept not only represents its object, but in the same gesture also presents an auto-reflexive image of philosophy itself: a meta-philosophy. This, Laruelle argues, is how philosophy dominates what it theorises: every aesthetic theory of performance, for example, is also a theory of *how to think performance*—and, moreover, a claim that *only* this way of thinking performance is legitimate.

One way of understanding the critical economy grounded and perpetuated through this decisional mechanism is as an economy of *crisis*. Mattia Paganelli observes that 'the notion of crisis is directly linked to the paradigm of representation' and suggests that far from being exceptional states, crises should be understood as events of emergence which are necessary for the production of sense (Paganelli 2012, 60). Paganelli proposes that crisis indicates the process of individuation, whereby the 'thing in itself', which has no logical depth, is experienced phenomenologically through an 'epistemological presupposition that tends to foreclose it' (71). Thus, the individuation of an object of thought is a moment of *convergence*—the constellation of a given phenomenon with a structure of givenness which enables its perception—which is also a *divergence* from the 'in itself'. For Laruelle, philosophy's auto-foundational logic constitutes just such an event; the Decision is a crisis at the basis of thought, and the economy it gives rise to is a restless one: thought circles back to itself, and in doing so occludes the very thing it is attempting to grasp. The consequence of

grounding thinking in this way, of individuating objects by separating them from the immanence of the real, is that the object is only ever grasped in a partial manner, so the image of the world produced by philosophy is always incomplete. As such, each Decision—each claim about the proper way to think the world—can be challenged by any other, creating a situation of perpetual conflict.

Non-philosophy does not attempt to adjudicate this conflict between different philosophical positions because it views each Decision as equal. Every mixture of immanence and transcendence occludes the real as much as any other, and so each is equally arbitrary. Instead of deciding between one or another philosophical position, Laruelle proposes a means for escaping the vicious circularity of philosophy's self-grounding crisis by adopting a different posture of thinking, which allows the concepts that philosophy produces to manifest in an immanent mode. Thus, it entails elucidating another vision of the phenomenal reality of thought. It proceeds by proposing as a hypothesis that it is possible for thought to materialise without separating itself from the immanence that is its enabling condition—without the crisis of the decisional cut—and then testing the consequences that follow from this idea. Laruelle's method is an axiomatic one, which is to say that it posits a set of rules or procedures for transforming thinking and then performs a re-description of some extant philosophical text that it takes as 'material', according to these rules. An axiom, by definition, can neither be proved nor disproved and so '[n]on-philosophy must remain an explicative theoretical hypothesis' (Laruelle 2013b, 11); this is why it must be tested through practice (rather than, for example, according to its logical consistency). We can think of non-philosophy as deploying its axioms in the 'as if' mode of a theatrical play—as fiction. Yet, in doing so, Laruelle proposes to modify both the experience and the concept of fiction, suspending the philosophical claim 'to trace an always unstable line of demarcation between the fictional and the real, a critical line by which the latter is a degraded form of the former and, at the same time, claims to belong to it and determine it in its becoming' (2012a, 229–30). As we put Laruelle's ideas into practice, we shall see that fiction is deployed not in a representational manner, but in the construction of models for thinking that Laruelle calls 'philo-fictions' (2012a).

The crisis of individuation identified by Paganelli is not easy to overcome. Laruelle does not claim to be able to *reach* what is occluded in the decisional movement of convergence/divergence. Indeed, the grounding axiom of non-philosophy is that the real is radically immanent and foreclosed to thought (Laruelle 2012b, 45). Rather than seeking to resist this foreclosure, he approaches the problem by re-conceiving the direction of the vector of thought. His second axiomatic invention is to posit a mode of causality which moves from radical immanence towards thought, irreversibly. Thus, thought is posited as being determined by the real. The 'immanence' of the real is not to be understood in material terms, but rather as the transcendental condition for thought as such. Its foreclosure does not mean that it cannot be *described*, however; Laruelle uses various 'first names' for the real, which serve as place-holders for what is occluded. Among these first names, 'the One' [*l'Un*] is privileged, because it indicates both the indivisibility of radical immanence, and the style of thinking that would be adequate to this immanence—which Laruelle calls 'vision-in-One' (Laruelle 2013a).

The task non-philosophy sets itself is thus not to theorise empirical reality, as the latter would usually be understood, but rather to theorise the phenomenal reality *of the manifestation of thought.* Pragmatically, such a theorisation begins by first selecting one or more philosophical text(s) to be taken as 'material', and then 'preparing' them for their non-standard re-description by analysing the interplay of immanence and transcendence in them. That is, the specific Decision that structures the material is rendered apparent by tracing its own *philosophical* logic. Hence, I will begin with a close reading of Hamacher's philosophical critique of the juridical-political structure of human rights declarations. Hamacher's text provides interesting material, in the context of this discussion, because it addresses the question of how to defend the human against conceptual overdetermination and, moreover, because the analysis identifies a performative logic underlying human rights discourse that conforms to Laruelle's description of the structure of Decision. Hamacher thus engages with a similar problem to Laruelle; however, our 'preparation' will show that he does so from a *philosophical* perspective, and thus his response to the issue, which appeals to the *mise en scène* of the event of judgement (*krisis*) presented in the Platonic myth of the court of the dead, remains grounded in an event of crisis in Paganelli's sense. Taking Hamacher's text as material will allow me to show what is distinct about Laruelle's approach. Once Hamacher's text has been 'prepared' in this way, I will then move on to explore the positive practice of non-philosophy, introducing it into a non-standard matrix to be underdetermined by *performance,* where the latter is deployed as an 'art of thought' (Laruelle 2012a, 5). In this way, we will construct a 'performance-fiction' that will radicalise the performativity of *krisis* and enable us to present the human generically.

## The Performativity of Human Rights Declarations

In 1789 the French National Assembly set forth a 'solemn declaration of the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man', out of a belief that 'the ignorance, neglect, or contempt of [these] rights [...] are the sole cause of public calamities and of the corruption of governments' (Declaration of the Rights of Man 1789). These rights are proclaimed with the intention of underwriting the legislative powers and processes of the state with 'simple and incontestable principles', against which the behaviour of both individuals and institutions can be evaluated—and where necessary, corrected (Ibid.). Thus, they are proposed as a means of *defending* human beings. Similar principles are iterated in other human rights declarations, such as the US Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the 1948 United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, despite the proliferation of 'human rights' as a discursive concept since the eighteenth century, such proclamations often seem empirically ineffective, failing to protect the most vulnerable of people. Hence, Hannah Arendt suggests that the very phrase 'humans rights' might be seen as 'the evidence of hopeless idealism or fumbling feeble-minded hypocrisy' (1958, 269). Marc de Wilde argues that these empirical failures 'should be explained not only by their inadequate enforcement, but also by contradictions that are inherent in the concept [of human rights] itself', and that this contradictory logic must be confronted if such failures are to be countered (2008, 2).

Hamacher's analysis, which traces the internal contradiction of human rights to the enunciative structure of their declaration, enacts just such a confrontation. He observes that, although the discursive notion of 'human rights' emerges at a particular historical moment, the declaration that they are 'natural, unalienable, and sacred' entails a claim that these rights transcend the contingency of any particular time or place; rather, they apply 'to the human "as such" or "in truth"' (Hamacher 2006, 671). This is to say that the claim of the declaration concerns neither the empirical totality of human beings nor any individual(s) considered as exemplary, but instead 'provide[s] an explication of human essence as it presents itself in and of itself after all external attributes have been subtracted' (Ibid.). As such, the function of the declaration is not to create anything new but to render the already-existent essence of human nature accessible to reason—thereby allowing what has always, implicitly, determined humankind to be codified juridically, and so accorded the universal respect it deserves. Yet at the same time, by *manifesting* the essence of man the declaration plays an important role in *actualising* it, hence: '[t]he essence of the human and its humanity *is* itself and *consists in* this Declaration' (672).

The 'inalienability' of the rights of man is thus explained by the fact that these rights constitute his very *substance*, which is, in turn, identified with 'the onto-theo-logical-political substance of the *language* of the Declaration itself' (Ibid., emphasis added). Hamacher identifies the declaration of human rights as a foundational enunciation with a circular structure: 'Man unveils, explicates, and joins himself with himself in the declaration of his rights as a being that is, precisely, unveiling, declarative, and conclusive. These characteristics make up the juridical essence of man' (673–4). On the surface level, this circular claim could be characterised as appealing to a certain naive faith in the inalienability of the manifest: its truth is demonstrated in the revelatory qualities of the enunciation as a public act, 'carried out in universal consensus' (672). The performative function of the declaration is thus to unveil the essential rights of man and bring them, 'conjoined with their presentation, to recognition and their at least virtual realization' (674). However, as Hamacher observes, in order for the process of auto-enactment and auto-verification to succeed, the declaration 'has to enact its own grounding and must present an ontological tautology—an ontotautology—rather than a merely trivial one' (673). Thus, the performativity of the declaration is profound, functioning to establish the very Being of the human:

> All of these proclamations are essentially phenomenological and present themselves as fundamental phenomenology *in actu*: as speech acts and actualizations of concepts that do what they say and politically realize what they claim [...] They assert themselves as the performance of a grounding and install themselves—and stall—through this very assertion. (674)

The question, then, is why this ontological installation *stalls*—why these performative enunciations so often fail to protect vulnerable people in the empirical world. Hamacher argues that the problem with the auto-constituting nature of human rights declarations is that they enact a judgement about the essence of man—one which conclusively determines his humanity. Which is to say that the ethical claim made in the articulation of rights is founded upon and bound to the ontological determination of the human: in Laruelle's terms, the declaration enacts a *philosophical Decision*

which makes a conceptual claim that affects the empirical existence of the human. The performative effect of this Decision is to categorise the human as a juridical being—one whose Being is given as a '*right to have rights*' (Hamacher 2014). Such a determination excludes other possibilities for the human which are 'not susceptible to juridical thematization and cannot be perceived by categorial thinking, and [… *occludes*] all further deliberations that might be carried out or even just demanded by "human beings"' (Hamacher 2006, 674). This is to say that the empirical failures of human rights declarations are rooted in the conceptual closure they enact. Hamacher characterises this state of affairs—that humans are supposed as fundamentally juridical beings and are thus made the object of legislative judgements—as a 'scandal, which governs the movements of the process (and the movement *as* process) […] of effective politics', and thus 'amputates' man as it reduces him to an 'object of rights' (Ibid.).

The performative function of the declaration is thus to enact a reduction of the human, which restricts the latter's possibilities through the categorial logic of its mode of grounding. Moreover, Hamacher proposes that the structural logic inherent to each declaration of human rights 'establishes the paradigm for every predicative judgement […] and defines the human as the one who is essentially judging, equally and essentially judged and inescapably condemned to judge himself' (674–5). Consequently, the stakes of the structural argument Hamacher makes are cast as not only ontological but also epistemological—it is a *philosophical* problematic concerning the form of thought *as such*. As we have seen, Laruelle argues that a philosophical Decision not only determines the empirical object(s) it refers to, but at the same time positions itself as *the* proper way to grasp the world. Thus, what Hamacher points to here can be understood as the meta-dimension of the Decision constituted by the declaration of rights, the mechanism by which the enunciation legitimates itself in one and the same gesture as it ontologically determines the human. Hamacher's critical analysis of human rights declarations can thus be seen to accord with Laruelle's characterisation of philosophy as enacting an auto-grounding Decision which functions on both empirical and transcendental levels simultaneously, even if the terminology he uses is different. Hamacher reveals these declarations to have an inherent, crisis-type structure, which functions performatively to overdetermine the human.

The question this raises is how we might present human beings differently, without coming to a conclusion and hence closing off the possibilities of what a human could be. Hamacher suggests we need to find a 'nonpredicative' form of language, which could 'become an element of political or juridical deliberation without already belonging to the language of evaluation or of decision' (2014, 201). This resonates with Laruelle's proposal to re-focus thinking on a plane that is 'generic' and hence 'human', through a non-decisional pragmatics of language. As we shall see, however, Hamacher's response ultimately remains, in Laruellian terms, within the decisional circle.

## Staging Judgement: The Scene of *Krisis*

Hamacher's analysis of the auto-constituting performativity of human rights declarations implies that they enact a *mise en scène,* 'posit[ing] the scene of a court of law […] that claims to be the final arbiter of the structure of right and judgement in man' (Hamacher 2006, 675). In order to articulate

the conditions for a non-predicative language he does not reject the structure of judgement or the juridical setting *per se*, but rather proposes a reform of this legal theatre—with reference to Plato's *Gorgias* myth. The introduction of myth into the discourse entails a shift in the mode of theoretical expression, an appeal to *fiction* to figure a different paradigm for judgement. J. A. Stewart observes that the dramatic form of Plato's writings, in which speech is the primary mode of action, shapes the logic of his arguments in important ways. However, although they are less prominent in his oeuvre, Stewart argues that Plato's myths should be regarded, 'equally with the argumentative conversation, as essential to [his] philosophical style' (1960, 24). This is to say that the myths are an integral part of the theoretical exposition rather than an ornamental addition, that in them, 'the movement of the Philosophic Drama is not arrested, but is sustained, *at a crisis*, on another plane' (25, emphasis added). Thus, myth is used to speak about subjects that elude more direct theoretical presentation—rather than as allegorical illustrations of points that could be otherwise expressed. Yet, as Stewart suggests, this usage of fiction does not escape from the economy of crisis, but rather manifests it according to a different *mise en scène.*

Plato's tale, which derives from Homer, concerns the archetypical *krisis*: the judgement of souls at the end of their mortal life, which decides whether they should spend their afterlife in the Isles of the Blessed or receive punishment in Tartarus. Socrates tells how in the time of Kronos, 'living men [had] authority over the living, judging them on the day they were to die' (Plato, 1984, 312 [323b]). However, when Pluto became god of the underworld he saw that the judgements were poorly made, and he and Poseidon went to Zeus to petition him to change this. Thus, the story itself is directly concerned with the reform of judicial procedures. Hamacher remarks that the aim of the ancient reform was to 'fit [these procedures] better to the structure of both cognition and man', and hence that the 'restitution of judgement to its purity' was 'therefore also of a restitution of the juridical nature of philosophy' (Hamacher 2006, 675). This suggests that the scene of the court of the dead is related to the structure of *logos* itself.

Zeus explains the badly rendered judgements by the fact that, 'those judged are judged while still alive' (Plato 1984, 312 [325c]). This confuses the judges because wicked souls can be 'dressed up in beautiful bodies, with ancestry and wealth', and they can bring witnesses to testify on their behalf (Ibid.). Thus the phenomenal markers of identity are presented as concealing the true nature of beings. Moreover, Zeus further suggests that the judges' capacity to decide the true nature of souls is impaired by the fact that they, too, are alive and embodied: 'The sight of the souls is obstructed by the sight of the judges' eyes, the hearing of the souls is hindered by physical ears—their perception and consequently also judgement are led astray by bodies' (Hamacher 2006, 675). Zeus's reform is thus twofold: Firstly, he puts an end to the foreknowledge of death—from now on death will be unexpected, so beings will not be able to anticipate and prepare for the moment of judgement. Secondly, Zeus proclaims: 'let all of them be judged naked, for they must be judged dead; and their judge too must be naked, and dead, contemplating the soul alone by itself by means of the soul alone by itself at the very moment each person dies' (Plato 1984, 312–3 [325e]). In this way, Zeus 'institute[s] a court without veils' in which judgement arises suddenly, upon a soul that is isolated from earthly associations (Hamacher 2006, 675).

On the basis of this myth, Socrates elaborates the nature of death as 'the separation of two things, soul and body, from each other' (Plato 1984, 313 [324b]). Developing this understanding of death as separation, Hamacher proposes that '[t]he *krisis*—the decision, the judgement, the sentence—thus finds its model in death, insofar as death [...] is the archi-crisis, which severs the merely accidental and contingent from the true nature of a being' (Hamacher 2006, 276). This is to say that in order to make a true and just judgement it is necessary to peel away the external qualities—the sensory aspects of a person. Death undresses the soul of the phenomenal particularities that disfigure it, and as the living being is stripped of its contingent physicality it is revealed in its essence to a gaze, 'which is in turn naked and nonphenomenological' (Ibid.). Thus, Hamacher argues, death is not a theme that can be submitted to judgement, but rather 'the pure structure of judging, an aphenomenal and anepistemic separation' (Ibid.).

The juridical language of human rights echoes this work of logical and ontological unveiling in the declaration that these rights apply regardless of 'race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property birth or other status' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 2), similarly proclaiming the contingency of these worldly categories—in comparison with the universal and inalienable 'right to have rights' which the declaration installs as the juridical essence of the human. Yet, Hamacher suggests that the judgement of the court of the dead does not enact the same conceptual closure as the declaration of human rights because, in the absence of any phenomenal elements that could be thematised categorially, each case is judged 'only for itself, without subsuming its singularity under a general concept, a norm, an expectation, or a habit' (Hamacher 2006, 677). The profound nakedness of both judge and judged means that no general models are available to be used as an orientation, and also that no singular judgement can become a paradigm for future decisions. Consequently, Hamacher proposes that the judgement of the court of the dead:

> cannot have the character of a performative act, which presupposes the minimal consensus of a community on the conventions of speaking, for such a consensus belongs to phenomenal stock that alone is able to constitute a 'who' and from which both the judge and the judged are severed in death. (Ibid.)

This is to say that the *krisis* is anterior to declarative enunciations, and indeed to categorial language *tout court.* Moreover it is a judgement that, in its profound singularity, opens onto an open-ended universality—thereby providing the very paradigm for philosophical contemplation: bare souls are presented, in this scene, to the nonphenomenological 'gaze of *theoria*' (Hamacher 2006, 676). Hamacher thus suggests that philosophical reasoning is grounded in the scene of *krisis*, which in turn is modelled on death as the event which makes a singular but incisive cut between the essential and the merely contingent: the 'happening of discretion itself' (Ibid.). *Krisis* is thereby presented as the event of individuation in its most elemental form, the moment of convergence/divergence that we have identified with the form of the philosophical Decision. And indeed, Hamacher lends support to this idea when he argues that philosophy is *made possible* by this originary act, which he characterises as 'a judgement of *alterity*: of the separation of the one and everything else' (677).

Hamacher presents this originary event of alterity as a means of asserting the constitutive openness of language, which—anterior to the categorial closure performatively installed by human rights declarations—is grounded not in its auto-verifying hypostatisation, but rather in its auto-interruption. He suggests that conceiving language as *enacting its own stoppage* at this ontological level would lead to 'the stoppage of all judicial powers that might appeal to it, of all judicial titles that might be claimed through it, and of all "human rights" that have been or might still be declared through it' (690). Yet this auto-interrupting structure, which is grounded in an originary separation, arguably remains within the restless economy of crisis.

Laruelle suggests that deconstructive analyses like Hamacher's can 'complicate' philosophy 'in a structural or essential way', thus providing interesting material for non-standard re-description (2013a, 134). However, he argues that philosophies which take this evental form can at best figure the immanence that is their enabling condition as an *aporia* which resists conceptualisation (Laruelle, 2012c). Hamacher's appeal to the mythic setting of the court of the dead, to the unhindered vision of bare souls which is in principle beyond the reach of the living, arguably conforms to this logic. The *krisis* invoked by Hamacher—as the originary event of *discretion* and *alterity*—ultimately reinscribes the differential structure of Decision. As such, the source of non-predicative language he proposes still dominates what it theorises—even as it places it beyond the reach of living, thinking, humans—because it occludes the immanent-real through the manner of its staging. Thus, although Hamacher's analysis has taken an important step in resisting the overdetermining action of human rights declarations by uncovering the 'ontotautological' and hence decisional structure of enunciation that grounds them, he stops short of proposing an alternative to the discourse of rights. Moreover, his use of the myth of *krisis* to figure the idea of a non-predicative judgement brought about by means of a 'nonphenomenal gaze' that belongs only to the dead remains a representation, rather than an enactment; hence his deconstructive analysis does not succeed in positing an alternative performance of the 'human' that we have any means to enact.

In order to begin to shift our way of thinking, to perform the postural shift that will facilitate a change of vision—from that of mythic representation to a usage of fiction as an apparatus—I will now explore Laruelle's suggestion that extra-philosophical modes of creation may be brought into non-standard thought, and the role these materials play in underdetermining philosophy. Specifically, I want to explore how aesthetic elements are 'conjugated' with philosophy in the non-aesthetic matrix. I will then attempt to move beyond critique by enacting such a process. This will begin with an analysis of Fischer-Lichte's (2008) aesthetic theory of performance to identify its own decisional form; then I will construct a model using terms extracted from this theory, and use it to re-stage *krisis*—thus setting the conceptual content of Hamacher's analysis of human rights discourse into play according to the immanence that Laruelle proposes as thought's absolute, albeit insufficient, enabling condition.

Each effectuation of non-philosophical thinking entails the elaboration of a model that uses terms from the material that occasions it: '[a] text of non-philosophy is constructed around a word, a statement, a philosophical text' (Laruelle 2013a, 137). However, Laruelle also opens the possibilities for theoretical invention by suggesting that it is possible to introduce 'techniques of creation' into the material which come from other disciplines, 'techniques that would be pictorial, poetic, musical, architectural, informational, etc.', in order to create new models for thought that he names 'philo-fictions' (135). He uses suggestively theatrical language when outlining how non-philosophy may be conjugated with such heterogeneous techniques to 'construct non-aesthetic scenarios or duals, scenes, characters, or postures that are both conceptual and artistic and based on the formal model of a matrix' (Laruelle 2012a, 3). This notion of the 'dual' names the arrangement of the two elements within the non-aesthetic matrix, which are ultimately to be viewed 'in-One'.

Laruelle suggests that art and philosophy can be brought together in two ways, that their combination will be 'indexed on the return of one of the variables we have at our disposal', and depending on which the result will be 'either over-determination by philosophy or under-determination by art' (Laruelle 2012a, 8). That is, if art and thought are combined according to a philosophical logic, it will result in application and domination; whereas if art is the determining factor in the matrix, then the fusion will be brought into the real in a manner that is 'generic'—which is to say, it would be determined in a particular way by 'the One', and as such undifferentiated and empty of predicates. This suggests that 'art' is identified as the immanent term of the relation, as more 'real' than philosophy, and thus that an aesthetic practice such as performance can teach us something about how thought might proceed without entering into the circle of Decision.

However, it would be a mistake to interpret this as a claim that non-philosophy is simply found in the practice of art as an other-than-philosophical activity. Laruelle states: 'art alone, or in its practice, can offer no conceptual resistance to the undertakings of philosophy and assure us of a knowledge that has some rigour' (2012*a*, 8). This might seem, at a superficial level, to repeat philosophy's gesture of domination, denying arts practice the agency to articulate concepts. Yet, for Laruelle, if art is unable to offer any conceptual resistance to the undertakings of philosophy this is not because it is unthinking, but rather because it already thinks *too philosophically*. That is, just as every philosophy (including every *aesthetic theory* of art) institutes itself through a circular, auto-foundational structure, so too does the *practice* of art function within a set of presuppositions about what that art form *is* in terms of its materials and techniques—and so enacts a spontaneous philosophy of art. Hence, Laruelle suggests that 'art as a positive practice is an instrumentalized intention', which is to say that because of the way 'the artist experiments concretely with a defined model of activity', arts practice is itself grounded in a Decision (Laruelle and Ó Maoilearca 2015, 181). Implicitly or explicitly, it has the same *form* as philosophy, albeit a different materiality.

Laruelle proposes 'considering every art form in terms of principles of sufficiency, and no longer in terms of descriptive or theoretical or foundational historical perspectives' (2012*a*, 3). This is to say

that, just as philosophical materials are prepared for their non-standard re-description through an analysis of the Decisions that ground them, so too do we need to prepare *aesthetic* materials if they are to be re-deployed as a model for non-standard thinking. Thus, if 'performance' is to be brought into non-philosophy in order to help us elaborate an immanent vision of the generic human, thereby moving beyond the critique of predicating judgement offered by Hamacher to a positive enactment of the human as generic, and thus without-predicates, we first need to render apparent its own structure of sufficiency—the way performance grounds and legitimates itself.

This raises a question as to how we define what 'performance' is, and what presuppositions underwrite and instrumentalise its practice. Laruelle places the theory and practice of art, in principle, on the same level; such is the equalising presupposition underlying his approach. Hence, we might take either some extant performance practice, or a theoretical description of performance, as our 'material'. In this instance, I am going to examine an aesthetic theory of performance. This is not because I have a preference for theory over practice, but rather because this will allow me to 'conjugate' two sets of materials that are of a similar medium, and thus help me to test Laruelle's proposal of non-standard thought as a practice of *language.* This is not to say that it would not be possible (or indeed interesting) to explore the possibilities of utilising performance practice; however, I suggest that this would raise certain issues concerning the materiality of non-aesthetics that deserve to be examined at more length than there is space for here. The aesthetic theory of performance I have selected, by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), is on a certain level arbitrary—just as all philosophical Decisions are equal for Laruelle in terms of how they relate to the real, so too are all aesthetic theories, and indeed practices, equally suitable for non-standard re-description. However, I have selected Fischer-Lichte's work because her characterisation of performance as a *liminal event* implicitly relates it to the notion of *krisis*, as delineated by Hamacher, and her discussion resonates with his in interesting ways.

Fischer-Lichte appeals to the notion of *performativity* to explain the transformative effectiveness of performance, positing the experience of the event as a liminal one. Tracing the origin of the notion of performativity to the work of J. L. Austin (1975) and its development by Judith Butler (1990), she proposes a new, specifically aesthetic, understanding of the term which neither privileges language nor social constructions, but rather focuses on the performance *medium*. She asserts that it is '[t]he bodily co-presence of actors and spectators [which] enables and constitutes performance' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 32). As such, she identifies the bodily co-presence of two groups of people—actors and spectators—as necessary for a performance to occur, and posits this encounter as constitutive of performance's 'specific mediality' (38). That is, whatever visual, acoustic, linguistic, etc. elements might comprise part of the performance, it is the actor/spectator *relation* that constitutes the kernel of the performance experience. This is an ontological and hence trans-historical claim, which situates the ground of performance in its nature as an *event*, and in the same gesture specifies certain minimal conditions of 'production' and 'reception' that an event must satisfy to be considered a 'performance' (Ibid.).

The actor-spectator relation engenders an interactive confrontation, and Fischer-Lichte suggests that what is primarily created in this encounter is an experience of *liminality*, that 'aesthetic

experience concerns the experience of a threshold, a passage in itself' (2008, 199). The *mise en scène* of such a liminal event, which occurs at a specific place and time that is set apart from everyday life, bears a structural resemblance to the scene of *krisis,* in the sense that it both requires a certain detachment from the quotidian worldly setting, and that the rarified relationality that is produced in the performance encounter itself constitutes a transformative event. Indeed, just as death constitutes the archi-crisis that is the model for judgement in Hamacher's attempt to think the human without reinscribing the philosophical overdetermination instantiated by the discourse of rights, so we might conceive of the court of the dead as the archetype for liminal experience as such, including that of performance as Fischer-Lichte conceives it. Moreover, whilst the scene described by Plato clearly does not involve a *bodily* co-presence, because souls appear in the court undressed of their bodies, the relational set-up—the confrontation between two souls with differing roles—follows a similar choreography. Arguably, the consequence of stripping the souls bare of their phenomenological disguises only renders the confrontational structure of the encounter all the more essential: the singular and non-predicative nature of the judgement implies that it is not *what is decided*, but rather the experience of being brought *into relation* in this way that matters.

Yet this relational structure only underlines the decisional nature of the event *as such*: relation implies two or more terms which are given as separated, hence a scission in the radical immanence of 'the One'—which Laruelle characterises as constitutively indivisible. In Hamacher's staging of the Platonic *krisis*, as the originary event of *alterity*, a singular human soul is judged to be either a 'good one' or a 'bad one'; this judgement is proposed as indifferent to the philosophical work of predication, yet its very enactment presupposes the individuation of this soul, its isolation from everything else (including those souls that are charged with judging it)—thus *krisis* is given as the primary act of differentiation, the originary division of immanence from which thought proceeds. The *mise en scène* of performance as a liminal event whose minimal condition is presupposed as the (bodily) co-presence of two sets of people enacts a similar scission of immanence, individuating 'actors' and 'spectators' and placing them in relational arrangement which resembles that of the judging and the judged in the court of the dead. In both cases, the *mise en scène* presupposes a work of separation, thus what is presented is always-already detached from the indivisible immanence that is 'the One'.

Consequently, to conceive performance in this evental manner is to attribute it with a circular structure that is similarly 'ontotautological' as the declaration of human rights that Hamacher critiques. Fischer-Lichte characterises the form of the performative relation as a 'feedback loop', understood as 'a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process' (2008, 39). The form of the feedback loop is circular in two senses. Firstly, this loop can be understood as a communicative circulation between the actors and spectators which generates the singular atmosphere of each performance event. Secondly, and more profoundly, Fischer-Lichte posits a 'radical concept of presence' to explain the experiential effect that is produced in the liminal space of the performance, whereby 'the spectator experiences both himself and the performer as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming' (99). That is, she gives co-presence not only as the necessary *condition* for the performance event but also as its *result.* Thus,

she attributes an auto-constituting structure to performance which articulates simple presence through the conditions of production and reception that define actors and spectators as discrete groups, and in doing so constitutes the essence of 'performance'. The result is in an enhanced and rarified sense of presence. This differentiation between two experiences of presence introduces a structure of alterity into performance and defines its transformative effects in terms of a scission and doubling which produces an added value out of nothing: presence begetting a supplementary 'Presence'. It is here, in this ontotautological circle, that the presupposition of sufficiency in Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of performance—its decisional form—is to be found.

To bring performance into the non-standard matrix we need to suspend its spontaneous presuppositions, emptying the notion of its instrumental functionality and utilising it instead as the model for a thinking determined by the undifferentiated immanence of the One. That is, as I will demonstrate in a moment, we deploy a notion of performance emptied of its determining predicates as a stage on which to manifest thought, without enacting a cut in the immanence that enables it. This model, which will be put into play as a hypothesis, is the enactment of a non-standard utilisation of fiction—where the latter indicates neither allegory nor the indirect presentation of concepts on a crisis plane; but rather, the hypothetical *mise en scène* which serves as the apparatus enabling an immanent performance of thought: a *vision-in-One*.

## Performance-fiction: Radicalising *Krisis;* Re-staging the Human

Having rendered the differential structure of both the performance event and the event of *krisis* apparent, we are now ready describe this non-standard model, to conjugate 'performance' and 'philosophy' in order to produce our 'performance-fiction'. That is, having elaborated how Laruelle's non-standard philosophy works, I will now follow through on this explanation (which as yet remains a *representation*) by *enacting* the non-standard re-description of the conceptual materials I have 'prepared'. I will thus utilise Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of performance as a material support in order to construct a hypothetical framework for a thinking focused on the generic plane. This will enable me to elaborate the dimensions of non-philosophy's own *performativity,* which is ultimately neither theatrical nor linguistic. The aim of this process is to produce—or perhaps better, perform—a radicalised notion of *krisis* that will allow us to accomplish what Hamacher's deconstruction of human rights discourse could not: to stage the human-without-predicates in a way that is accessible to theorisation.

I will begin by stating a set of axioms, which are adapted from Laruelle (2012b, 45) using terms from the materials under consideration:

1) *Krisis* is radically immanent, which is to say that it is not mixed with any structure of transcendence.

2) Its causality is unilateral. That is, the immanence of *krisis* has a particular determining relation to thought which is irreversible, because *krisis* is indifferent to the images that thinking projects onto it—to predicating judgement.

3) The object of this causality is philosophy complicated by performance. This means that what *krisis* produces, when viewed according to the vision-in-One, is an experience of the conceptual material provided by Hamacher refracted through a non-standard aesthetics, which is arrived at by radicalising Fischer-Lichte's performance theory.

Recall that Laruelle uses the name of 'the One' to describe both the indivisibility of radical immanence and the style of thought adequate to it. I have now posited '*krisis*' as an alternate first name for the real, and so proceed from the supposition that *krisis* is similarly indivisible and foreclosed. As indivisible, *krisis* must be thought as an immanent unity, which is not arrived at through any process of differentiation and/or unification, but simply given. As such, it precedes even the event of discretion in the court of the dead that Hamacher proposes gives the possibility for every predicative judgement. The syntactic apparatus that allows us to describe the manifestation of the 'human' through a radicalised notion of *krisis* is what I am calling 'performance-fiction'. It has three dimensions:

First, performance-fiction is a site of *manifestation*. What is manifested, however, is not a mimetic image of the object individuated in the judgement of *krisis*, but rather the transcendental conditions for the latter—the conditions for thought as such. This shift in our view radicalises the notion of 'myth', allowing us to see all thought as mythic or fictional—not in the sense that it is a false representation, but in the sense that thinking entails a transcendence by which it detaches itself from immanence. Yet, radicalised *krisis*, which we have posited as a name for the indivisible One, is indifferent to this separation; hence if we view concepts through the performance-fiction apparatus we see that they individuate themselves only in a one-sided manner, because from the point of view of the One (if the One could indeed be said to have a 'point of view', which is not quite accurate) nothing is separable: everything is equally immanent. This is what it means for *krisis* to determine thought *unilaterally*—it provides the condition that enables thinking, but which cannot be determined in return by the concepts that emerge from it. Thus, if we stage the concept of the 'human' according to the axioms of the performance-fiction apparatus we have delineated, then we *superpose* this concept with the *krisis* that we have named as the enabling condition for its manifestation, 'conjugating' them into the arrangement of a 'dual'. This enables us to stage the conditions for thinking by looking *through* the manifest concept of the human as we might look through a lens. Accordingly, *what* performance-fiction manifests is the non-mimetic correspondence between the immanent cause of thought (radicalised *krisis*) and the non-standard concept (in this example, the human), allowing the latter to appear on the generic plane.

Accordingly, performance-fiction's second dimension is that it is a mode of *vision*. However, this vision, as 'vision-in-One', entails neither a distance between perceiving subject and perceived object, nor a separation between spectators and actors as in the performance encounter. Rather, it can be thought as an experience-(of)-vision which is transcendental, hence radically non-phenomenological. It resembles the pure gaze of *theoria* experienced by bare souls in the court of the dead in the sense that it is disembodied, but where those souls confront each other in the act of judgement which both produces and reveals their alterity, the vision-in-One refuses to enter into the originary event of individuation presupposed in this relational arrangement. The vision-

without-distance of radicalised *krisis* can be understood as an experience of the *immanent identity* of the non-phenomenological subject. This again supposes a 'dual' arrangement: performance-fiction names the *mise en scène* that allows us to stage ourselves as thinking subjects that are 'non-phenomenological', by superposing the concepts staged through the performance-fiction matrix with *krisis,* thought as the experience-(of)-vision whose force enables the advent of thought.

Thirdly, performance-fiction extracts the notion of performativity from both its linguistic and theatrical contexts, and radicalises it so that it can be deployed at this transcendental level. In contrast with Hamacher, whose understanding of the performative as a speech act—the effectiveness of which is dependent upon the consensus of a community on the conditions of speech—is essentially linguistic, Laruelle proposes a non-philosophical usage of language that is not grounded in the *logos*. He argues that such a supposition itself already requires an exit from philosophy, because '[i]t is a defining characteristic of philosophy […] to believe that all use of language is philosophical', which is to say that from a philosophical perspective, language as such is inseparable from the *logos*, and thus is 'constitutive of the Being of things' (Derrida and Laruelle 2012, 87–8). Hamacher's assertion that '[t]he judgement of the court of the dead is the event of a mere saying—of a *logos*, as Socrates stresses—which must precede everything that is said' clearly conforms to this philosophical paradigm (2006, 677). Whereas Laruelle proposes a radically performative usage of language, as radical fiction, which cannot but do what it says and say what is does (2013b). Articulating *krisis* according to this non-philosophical language re-stages its myth as the immanent advent of thought, understood to be performed prior to any event of performation—such as the sudden appearance and judgement of souls in the court of the dead. The performance-fiction apparatus thus transforms our vision of the *mise en scène* of the performance event given by Fischer-Lichte. As a transcendental apparatus for manifesting thought, performance remains a liminal experience; yet it is no longer conceived in the circular and relational form of the feedback loop. Instead, as a unilateral vector of thinking that is determined by the immanent One without departing from the latter, it can be understood as a pure 'passage in itself' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 199). This radicalised notion of performativity helps us to envision the subject of thought in the non-phenomenological terms suggested above, by viewing it not as an individual, but as a transcendental function. *Krisis* is thus performed as a generic experience-(of)-thought, and accorded with the force to determine its own immanent manifestation—that is, to enact its own *mise en scène,* but without thus establishing an onto-tautological foundation.

These descriptions, which together mutate our understanding of performance, together entail a performative enactment that radicalises *krisis*, rather than merely representing the latter as the self-interrupting ontotautological event that grounds (philosophical) thought. This epistemological approach, drawn from Laruelle's non-standard pragmatics, enables us to disentangle *krisis* as an instance of manifestation—and the force that it personifies—from its philosophically-supposed essential relation to *logos*. It proceeds not by enacting an analytic scission between *logos* and immanence, but rather by supposing the latter as already-given, as simply performed without any structure or process that would determine the manner of its performation. By supposing that thought proceeds from this immanence, and constructing a performance-fiction, a radicalised *mise en scène* of *krisis,* I have (hypothetically) accorded the subject of thought the performative force to

effectuate its own manifestation—to *stage itself*—but not the power to determine predicates that would *decide* its essence. This is how the human resists conceptual domination through the non-standard matrix: having constructed the performance-fiction apparatus using dimensions extracted from Fischer-Lichte's performative aesthetics whilst suspending the presuppositions of sufficiency that attribute performance with an evental structure, we are now able to use this matrix to re-stage conceptual materials in an immanent mode. Thus the 'human' that is declared as a juridical subject in the declarations of rights critiqued by Hamacher no longer needs to be dominated by this predicative logic—instead, this overdetermined subject can be entered into the performance-fiction matrix and 'dualysed', and so viewed according to the immanence of *krisis*, such that the authority of the predicates attached to it is suspended.

Thus supposed as a manifestation of the One, the human is given, in principle, as an instance of immanence that is non-exclusive. According to the axioms I have proposed, '*krisis*' now indicates that the One, as the necessary condition for all thought, tolerates a unilateral relation to individuated structures, including that of the thinking subject. The dimensions of the performance-fiction apparatus I have described—those of manifestation, vision and performativity—allow the thinking subject to identify with the 'human' in a non-determining mode (or indeed, to identify with the 'animal', the 'machine', etc.). This 'identity' is not a synthesis of discrete elements, but merely the manifestation of a *non-mimetic correspondence* between the experience of the subject and what I am here calling, after Laruelle, the '*generic human',* thought as an instance of the real. Thus, to re-envision *krisis* through the 'performance-fiction' apparatus is to think it as an immanent experience—the experience of thought that is radical immanence *in-person*. I suggest that adopting this non-philosophical posture is very much consonant with the aims of Hamacher's thought, although its method differs from the latter's ontological framework; moreover, I suggest that this radicalised vision of *krisis* allows us to conceptualise the human without the latter being recuperated by the circle of Decision. It offers a positive vision of a non-predicative usage of language that manifests the human on the *generic* plane—thus manifesting the human-without-predicates as a force that determines thought, rather than a being determined *by* thought.

## Conclusion

In this article I have taken seriously Laruelle's claim that his non-standard pragmatics can only be demonstrated through their enactment, and I have attempted to show the complexities of such an approach to thinking by putting it into practice. This has entailed an analysis of two sets of conceptual materials—drawn from philosophy and performance theory—and a re-description of both that has 'conjugated' them in order to perform an immanent vision of *krisis* as the advent of thought. Being a hypothesis, this practice does not deceive itself about its nature as fiction—rather than reinscribing the auto-foundational gesture of mythic representation, which sustains thought 'at the level of a crisis' (Stewart 1960, 25) and so perpetuates the decisional form of philosophy, it instead describes a theoretical mechanism through which concepts can be viewed according to the immanence that is their enabling condition. What this accomplishes is a positive theorisation of how the 'human' may be manifested as a concept-without-predicates, through a performative

usage of language that refuses to enter the ontotautological circle—the crisis-economy—that constitutes the enunciative structure of human rights declarations.

This non-standard vision has been effectuated by utilising Fisher-Lichte's aesthetics of performance as material support for the construction of a transcendental model for thinking. Thus it can be said to be a form of 'performance philosophy' inasmuch as it experiments with the idea that *performance thinks*, as Cull (2014) suggests; but this enactment of Laruelle's pragmatics has at the same time revealed certain effects this approach has for our understanding of 'performance'. Equalising performance with philosophy according to this matrical arrangement is not to affirm that spontaneous thinking occurs either in the positive practice of performance or its aesthetic theorisation, but rather to extract an immanent identity from the notion of performance-as-event, suspending its authority as an 'instrumentalized intention' (Laruelle and Ó Maoilearca 2015, 181) so that it can be redeployed in the staging of the generic human. From the point of view of performance as an aesthetic practice, the price paid for this is a rather severe kind of abstraction—what is extracted is a transcendentally reduced essence that is expressed linguistically and hence stripped of its empirical materiality: that which constitutes the specific mediality of performance in all its dimensions. The performance-fiction I have delineated can be understood as 'a philosophical artistic genre that strives to make work with pure abstract thought' (Laruelle 2012a, 6); yet, it may be the case that some performance practitioners, and indeed theorists, would not recognise the image of performance that is thus manifested in the non-standard matrix, and it is arguable that the mode of abstraction by which Laruelle extracts the immanent identity from performance risks occluding the rich variety of thinking that occurs in the positive practice of performance. Thus the enactment of Laruellian pragmatics I have performed here, this description of a performance-fiction apparatus for manifesting the human generically through the immanent experience of krisis, has also rendered apparent some of the consequences that assuming the Laruellian posture has for our understanding of performance, and the manner in which the latter is equalised with philosophy.

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### Biography

Hannah Lammin is a philosopher with a background in dance and performance practice. Her doctoral thesis, *Staging Community: A Non-Philosophical Presentation of Immanent Social Experience*, develops a theoretical framework for theorizing "community" through a re-conceptualization of theatre as a model for representation—providing a new understanding of both social identity and the performance experience. She lectures in media and cultural theory at the University of Greenwich and University of the Arts, London.

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PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

# ANARCHIC REFLECTION AND THE CRISIS OF *KRISIS*: WORKING WITH ARTAUD

**JOEL WHITE** KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

> There is also the itch to use this power [self-consciousness] for trifling, and thereafter to trifle methodically and even by concepts alone, i.e., to philosophize; and then also to grate polemically upon others with one's philosophy, i.e., to dispute, and since this does not readily happen without emotion, to squabble on behalf of one's philosophy, and finally, united in masses against one another (school against school, as contending armies) to wage open warfare; this itch, I say, or rather drive, will have to be viewed as one of the beneficent and wise arrangements of Nature, whereby she seeks to protect man from the great misfortune of decaying in the living flesh.
>
> Immanuel Kant (2002), 435

> It certainly seems wherever simplicity and order reign, there can be no drama or theatre and that true theatre, just like poetry but by other means, is born from organised anarchy, after philosophical struggle, which is the passionate aspect of these primitive unifications.
>
> Antonin Artaud (1974), 49

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Several years ago, I began reading Artaud's *Œuvres complètes* and compiling a document of all his explicit and implicit references to philosophical and literary works. Once complete, the idea was to situate Artaud as a *thinker* in his own right, rather than simply a playwright and maddened poet. I would do this by schematically connecting his aesthetic, philosophical and political projects into what Artaud called a 'formal anarchy' (Artaud 1974, 54). An oft-repeated principle of reflection led this research—*il faut tout lire d'Artaud* [one must read all of Artaud]—which became the mantra of my own practical madness. This *il faut tout lire* was not to be a demand qualified by a pre-given end: an *il faut tout lire* in order to critically understand Artaud, or an *il faut tout lire* in order to diagnose him clinically. It was an *il faut tout lire* unconditioned, as far as possible, by the *telos* of the critical or the clinical domain. The purpose, other than to reproduce my own life through research grants, was to read Artaud philosophically, without the prejudice of exegesis necessitating a strict allegiance to any party line.

However, this principle, and the philosophico-reflective means used to carry out its demand, seemed to lead to a proliferation of 'privileged enemies', a term which I borrow from Derrida's 1996 MoMA conference, where he used it in reference to Artaud:

> I thought it incumbent on me, however, to situate here, if only in a few words, *the* front, a sort of incessant war that, like antipathy itself, makes Artaud for me into a sort of privileged enemy, a painful enemy that I carry and prefer within myself, at closest proximity to all the limits against which I am thrown by the work of my life and death. (Derrida 2017, 7)

Philologically, Derrida's testimony to an incessant war reads much like Artaud's own declaration of war against Marx made during his 1936 Mexican conferences and later collected under the title *Messages révolutionnaires*: 'All creation is an act of war, a war against hunger, against nature, against sickness, against death, against life, against fate [...] There is a war between Marxism and myself, and this war rests on a distinct notion of what individual consciousness is' (Artaud 2007, 141). Placing the particularity of these two wars of resistance to one side—the one concerned with Artaud's sublimity the other with Marxist epistemological determinism—we can discern, in the invocation of their 'privileged enemies', a form of creative polemics in both Artaud and Derrida's writing. This creative polemics, which in many ways is a mode of working *with* (as opposed to working *on*) such a privileged enemy, functions to produce the necessary resistance against which the actuality of thought, or even life, can reorganise itself As Artaud writes in true Heraclitean style, 'creation' is an act of war against hunger and death: against fate. While I would not exclude Artaud and Derrida from my list of privileged enemies (I hold them both at the limit of my own life-work), they are not the adversaries that I wish to discuss in this autobiographical introduction. Instead, these adversaries are located in two different discourses that have, in their own way, taken issue with my philosophical reading of Artaud: two fated traditions with which I have found myself at war.

Within the traditions of French studies and performance studies, to recover a philosophy from Artaud's work, or even to read Artaud in relation to the history of philosophy, is regularly seen to constitute—in the words of a recent reviewer of my project—the very 'loss of *l'esprit d'Artaud*'. I was,

by sleight of hand, to be responsible for the desertion Artaud's *esprit*; philosophy was to be my dark art. Yet this charge followed the failed attempt at writing on Artaud from within a philosophy department, the tradition in which I was my formally trained. According to one of the guardians of this domain, to work on Artaud as a philosopher would not be 'philosophical' enough for a philosophy department. The borders and limits of philosophy were to be protected from the *esprit* of Artaud—the same *esprit* that was fetishised and safeguarded by those on the other side of the trench. Rejected from one tradition (philosophy), scorned by another (French studies), I felt besieged on all sides. But what did they mean, these privileged enemies of mine, by *l'esprit d'Artaud*? Why was philosophy protecting itself from Artaud, and why was Artaud being protected from philosophy?

Although these questions have never been overtly posed to either of the two camps, it does not require much insight to attempt an answer. The *esprit* of Artaud is nothing other than the unquestionable status of his 'madness'. Artaud is 'mad'. Madness is here an analytical predicate judged determinate by those in their departmental fields. To be clear, by 'madness', I do not mean Artaud's experience of psychosis or the physical and psychological suffering that he endured, in and out of different asylums, throughout his life. 'Madness,' for those that employ this term both in and outside an academic context, very rarely has much to do with actual mental distress. Instead, I use it to refer to the predicative means by which the inside of an academic tradition protects itself from the outside. With Artaud, philosophy risked opening its doors to 'madness', and 'madness' was at risk of being philosophised. As Howard Caygill so elegantly puts it, this logic of the inside and outside of the academy reveals a type of 'Artaud-immunity', whereby Artaud's work is either entirely rejected, or it is let in on the grounds that his 'madness' is acknowledged (2015, 15).

One of the more recent and widely read books on Artaud is Sylvère Lotringer's *Mad like Artaud*. Published in 2003, Lotringer interviews Jacques Latrémolière, Gaston Ferdière, two of Artaud's former psychiatrists, as well as Paule Thévenin, the editor of Artaud's *Œuvres complètes*. Lotringer's thesis suggests that those affected by Artaud's life and work are, or become, 'mad' like him. On this point, I will leave it to the words of Paule Thévenin who, when interviewed, bluntly refuses to fall for Lotringer's game:

> PT: I have never found anything enlightening in what anyone had to say about Artaud.
>
> SL: Nothing at all? Nothing that anyone has said?
>
> PT: Only exceptional people like Breton or Michel Leiris, people who were Surrealists at the same time as Artaud. They were capable of appreciating someone, of speaking about his texts. Breton supplied details that resembled a valid approach, but not the others. Jean-Louis Barrault only ever spoke nonsense.
>
> (Lotringer 2015, 200)

Nonsense, then: Lotringer, like Barrault before him, is speaking nonsense. Rather than being capable of appreciating Artaud—rather than speaking about his texts for themselves and on their own merits—Lotringer writes about his 'madness'.[1] The reason for this is arguably also why a lot

of the secondary literature on Artaud is biographical in nature.[2] In the face of working *with* Artaud, it is much easier to recount how he took peyote in Sierra Tarahumara, or to muse over why he was arrested in Ireland.[3] The logic is straightforward: to say that Artaud reasoned is mad, and to say that he is mad is reasoned. The consequences of this are that Artaud and others, such as Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Baudelaire and Nerval, become recognisable only through the maddened category of the non-category. When translated into Artaud's French, this could be called *la catégorie forcenée de la non-catégorie*: a category *forced* into the *maddened* [*forcenée*] category of the non-category. This critical strategy of the non-category is often employed in the introduction to pieces of writing on Artaud. Take, for example, Phillipe Sollers's more recent elegy to Saint Artaud:

> A poet? Yes, a great one, but this word covers little ground. A thinker? Yes, fundamentally, but no philosopher would truly know how to reckon with Artaud (and even less so an academic). A negative theologian? An understatement, since for Artaud, nothing is either ideal or abstract. A specialist of myths and shamanic rituals? His personal experience (notably in Mexico) proves it. A druggie? He never managed to finish with the opium that eased his suffering. A madman? If that reassures you. (Sollers 2011, 406)

Sollers does not explicitly judge Artaud as non-categorisable, or judge that his work 'refuses categorisation', as others have more recently (Murray 2014, 7). However, it is of little surprise that at the end of this introductory list of possible (but at the same time impossible) critical/clinical categories, the usual suspects of the non-category are then listed: 'Gérard de Nerval, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, Lauréamont, Rimbaud, Nietzsche' (Sollers 2011, 406). To argue for the impossibility of categorisation assumes that the work of others is categorisable. It places Artaud, and his 'madness', into the tragic category of the non-category. Madness, in whatever form, is therefore never actually the outside, but rather the category against which rationality secures itself, something Paul Preciado, who delves into the pharmacological intricacies of exclusion, calls an 'inclusionary exclusion' (Preciado 2013, 183). Without madness, rationality's power would collapse. Madness is rationality's frame, its autobiographical introductory remark.

Preciado's notion of the 'inclusionary exclusion', a notion that includes/excludes other categories such as 'deviants', might be read as a development of the polemic that took place between Foucault and Derrida regarding Derrida's 1963 essay 'Cogito and the History of Madness', an essay that was a reply to Foucault's 1961 book *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (2006). This polemic, which Derrida called a crisis between Master and disciple (a disciple with an 'unhappy consciousness'), can be summarised as a dispute over the distinction or separation between the *logos* and its contrary, madness/silence (Derrida 2017, 36). More specifically, the polemic concerned whether or not the Cartesian *cogito* excludes or includes madness.

With Foucault, I want to argue in this article that the category of the non-category of madness is maintained for questions of power. However, the disequilibria of power between the rational and the irrational are upheld not because the nature of experience is entirely different in each—to agree with Derrida's reading of Descartes, 'Whether I am mad or not, *Cogito*, *sum*'—but because one *mode* of experience positively defines by means of the exclusion of another (Derrida 2017, 36).

The non-category that gathers the non-categorisable into its category gathers nonetheless. It is a category produced by the pathological anxiety of the rational – the anxiety of the normopaths. Madmen, after all, must confess to being mad before they are judged harmless enough to cross the border of the non-category, back into the categorisable.

When judgment and not the judgeable undergoes criticism, as it does here, does it enter a crisis, or indeed, a *krisis* (κρίσις/*krisis* in ancient Greek means decision or judgment)? Does this constitute the critical point when judgment is no longer possible, or where the absence of the possibility of judgement constitutes judgment itself, i.e. I judge that it is impossible to judge? Both, perhaps. When the categorical nature of judgment opens itself up to the non-categorical, it becomes apparent that the capacity to judge was *always already* maintained by the outside of the judgeable. This movement toward the non-categorical is, therefore, not without its epistemological consequences. To judge anything as non-categorical paradoxically produces a list of all those things that are impossible to categorise: another category. The outside of judgment becomes folded back into the inside of judgment by the negation of the possibility to judge. A crisis in and of *krisis* reveals its scandalous underbelly. Nonetheless, the crisis of *krisis*, or the *krisis* of crisis, should not give rise to apathetic nihilism, nor should it give rise to the all too familiar obsession over the limit itself. The particular thinkers who are subsumed into this maddened category of the non-category should not merely pose 'as signposts to future work'; as Foucault writes in his 1970 inaugural speech at the Collège de France, as oracles to a new world order (Foucault 2001, 152). Perhaps it would only suffice to work a little closer with those that are gathered into this non-category, to actually work *with* Artaud, not just write *on* him, or indeed '*as* him' as Roland Barthes insists (Barthes 1995, 63, my emphasis).

To work with Artaud, to reflect with him, one needs the space in which to do it. To Esa Kirkkopelto's question from the first issue of *Performance Philosophy*, 'for what do we need performance philosophy?' (Kirkkopelto 2015), the following answer can be given: *Performance Philosophy*, both as an academic journal and as a field of study, is needed so that those that find themselves forced into a disciplinary no man's land may develop a community of their own—a common front. *Performance Philosophy* constitutes a community wherein Artaud, *qua* philosopher that performs and performer that philosophises, will not be prejudged or categorically determined. It is a space in which it is possible to work with Artaud; to argue, as this article does, that when Artaud writes of the 'function' of the Theatre of Cruelty, he is conceiving of a theatre that performs or that acts philosophically, and not as a mere analogy to philosophy.

The rest of this article explores how this 'function' operates philosophically. It argues that the 'function' of the Theatre of Cruelty (the way in which it performs) is through what I term *anarchic reflection.* This mode of reflection is defined as an unintentional and/or intentional (cruel) crisis of the judgment of Form that opens the possibility of Form's transformation. To show how the Theatre of Cruelty performs anarchic reflection, this article works with the Kantian distinction between determining and reflective judgment found in *The Critique of Judgment*. It will extend reflective judgment, *via* Artaud's work on 'anarchic destruction', 'anarchic poetry' and the energetic notion of entropy (the physical consequence of the second law of thermodynamics) into anarchic

reflection. While Kant is often read as a rational philosopher, Kant's philosophical project is one of the *critique* of pure Reason, that is, the delineation of the limits of judgment or of the crisis of *krisis of* pure Reason. Kant's third *Critique* and the elucidation of aesthetic reflective judgments, such as the judgment of the sublime, are exemplary of this—here, judgment is pushed to its critical limit. If Kant's critique of judgment is a model of how the crisis of *krisis* operates philosophically, and if we are to understand better how the Theatre of Cruelty functions as a *cruel* crisis of the *krisis* of Form, then it is necessary to read Kant with Artaud.[4]

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In the 'technique' section of the first published manifesto for the *Theatre of Cruelty* (1932), Artaud specifies that the notion of 'function' in the 'true sense of the word' should be employed to understand how the Theatre of Cruelty 'acts' (Artaud 1974, 70). The word 'function' derives from the Latin *fungor*, meaning to perform a vital task, either organically or mechanically. Both organs and components perform the task of keeping the organism or technical object alive or operational. How an organ or a component functions is, therefore, intimately related to its vital or operational task (how it 'acts'). To ask how the Theatre of Cruelty functions is, thus, to ask of its task. The transition from the *what* question of ontology to the *how* question of 'function' undermines any rigid ontological demand made of the Theatre of Cruelty.

Further into the 'technique' section, Artaud defines the task the Theatre of Cruelty as 'anarchic destruction' (Artaud 1974, 70). The task of 'anarchic destruction', he writes, is 'to organically call into question [*remettre en cause*] man, and his ideas on reality [*réalité*] and his poetic position in reality [*réalité*]' (Artaud 1974, 70). If anarchic destruction is the task of the Theatre of Cruelty, then anarchic reflection is *how* it happens (its functioning). Since 'reality' is called into question in the Theatre of Cruelty, it is crucial to elucidate what reality [*réalité*] might mean and to clarify how anarchic destruction is effectuated by anarchic reflection.

To conceptually connect anarchic destruction *qua* task and anarchic reflection *qua* function of the Theatre of Cruelty to Kant's reflective judgment, *réalité* in Artaud will be understood as the English 'actuality'. Whereas actuality and reality in English are conceptually and philosophically distinguished, the translation of Kant's *Wirklichkeit* (the actuality with which reflective judgment reflects) into French was, until more recently, translated as *réalité* (perhaps because *actualité* is more commonly understood as something akin to 'current affairs').[5] To confuse matters further, when philosophical French is translated into English, *réalité* is often calqued as 'reality', when it should arguably be translated as 'actuality'. The *Wirk* in Kant's *Wirk-lichkeit*, which etymologically shares a root with the English 'work', is the German translation of the prefix *act* in the Latin word *act-ualis.* This *act*, in turn, stems from the Ancient Greek *ergon* (ἔργον) in *energeia* (ενέργεια), which means 'to work'. *Wirk*, *act*, and *ergon* all signify the notion of that which 'acts' or is 'at work', as distinct from that which is 'truly real' or 'really true'.

Artaud is acutely aware of this philosophical problem of translation, perhaps both through his reading of Henri Bergson (who, like Gilles Deleuze after him, attempts to distinguish between the

virtual and the actual, the possible and the real) and through his use of the French language.[6] This is evident in the notes to the second manifesto of the *Theatre of Cruelty* (1933), where Artaud considers naming the Theatre of Cruelty 'a theatre of actuality [*actualité*]' due to the necessity for a theatre that 'acts' on the spectator. He stops short, however, because the expression '*le théâtre actuel*' means 'current theatre' not 'actual theatre', in the sense of a theatre which 'acts [*agit*]', is 'in action [*en action*]' or 'actualises [*actualise*]' (Artaud 1978, 83). The absence in the French language of a more philosophically developed notion of actuality can also be felt in several key sections of Artaud's work with the Theatre of Cruelty. For example, when Artaud uses the word *réel*, as he does in the first manifesto, it is either distinguished from the *virtuel* (again, the Bergsonian resonances are clear, although this *virtuel* differs from Deleuze's) or qualified with the adverb *activement* (Artaud 1978, 89–90). Again, *réalité*, *réel*, and *réaliser* do not pertain to ontological veracity but to that which is at work, or actual, in the theatre.[7] The Theatre of Cruelty is actualist, not realist. It is not true to life; it acts on life.

The reason why anarchic destruction and anarchic reflection bear a conceptual relation to Kant's reflective judgment —the reason why anarchic reflection is a modality of Kantian reflection— involves the way anarchic destruction takes place, by organically '*calling into question* actuality [*réalité*] and man's position in actuality [*réalité*]' (70). Whereas Artaud writes 'organically call in to question [*remettre en cause*]' in the published first manifesto, one year later, in the notes to the second manifesto, he changes the phrasing to 'organically reflect' (Artaud 1978, 253). Artaud's notion of *calling into question* or reflecting is a destructive modality of reflection because it organically reflects with man's position in actuality, which elsewhere Artaud suggests has become ossified. Calling into question acts to destroy because it takes what is self-evident and reconsiders its necessity, breaking with the rigidity of prejudice. This connects to Kant's reflective judgment because reflective judgments, as will be argued, are reflections on 'given representations', and their point of departure is *Wirklichkeit*, or actuality.

The 'organic' nature of this reflection was said to relate to the notion of function—how an organ or a component functions vitally for the given organism or technical object. While the relation between organs or components might be understood mechanically (*nexus effectivus—how* they work together), the end that they serve is understood teleologically (*nexus finalis*—what they work for). Anarchic reflection is a destructive reflection that teleologically calls into question man's organic position in actuality. It anarchically destroys the mechanical and teleological position of man in actuality. Anarchy that wages war on teleology. In the notes to Artaud's first manifesto, further amendments to the sentence regarding 'anarchic destruction' and the function of the Theatre of Cruelty can be found. In the editions of Colette Allendy and M. Jean-Marie Conty, Artaud uses the term 'energetic destruction' instead of 'anarchic destruction', and 'energetically calls into question the constitution of man' instead of 'organically call into question' (Artaud 1978, 315). There would appear, therefore, to be important conceptual links to be made between reflection, destruction, anarchy, energy, man's organic constitution, and actuality.

The destructive principle that binds these notions together in/as the Theatre of Cruelty is not teleological but energetic and an-archic. It is the principle that is without-principle (an-archic). At

the heart of anarchic reflection stands the principle of entropy, a principle that energetically describes the necessity and universality of nature's decay/destruction. The principle of entropy links the above notions together by reuniting the modal category of actuality (which, as mentioned above, is the English translation of *Wirklichkeit*, *actualis,* and *energeia*) and the entropic notion of energy in their shared Greek root *energeia* (ενέργεια). The principle of entropy resists the *what* question of ontology and the *why* question of teleology by instead grounding life, thought and Form on the movement from order to disorder. It extends the modality of reflection from Kantian reflective judgment to anarchic reflection. However, before moving to a fuller explication of how the principle of entropy governs anarchic reflection, it will be necessary to outline how reflective judgment functions for Kant. Finally, and once a fuller explication of the function of anarchic reflection in/as the Theatre of Cruelty has been elucidated, I will conclude by showing how the counter-purposive nature of Kant's sublime and its reflection with actuality (*energeia*) performs, similar to Artaud, a crisis of *krisis*.

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In the introductory frame above, the conception of the maddened category of the non-category opened the discussion of what occurs epistemologically when judgment is itself subject to judgment. The critical enterprise of Kant's *The Critique of Judgment* follows this path of judgment's crisis. After having secured the categorical *a priori* conditions for theoretical and practical judgments in the first two critiques, as well as the principles that serve the ends of these two forms of judgment, Kant then attempts to submit the power of judgment to its own critique. Although *The Critique of Pure Reason* claims that the secret of judgment's principle (which determines the way in which heterogeneous realms of intuitions and concepts become reunified schematically) would remain hidden in the 'depths of the human soul' (Kant 2009, 273), the third *Critique* opts to outline the entanglement of these depths. It describes how *krisis* enters crisis.

The outline of this crisis of *krisis* begins through an investigation into the difference between determining and reflective judgment, a difference marked by the possibility or impossibility of making categorical judgments about the beautiful, the sublime, and about life. Whereas determining judgments, as the name suggests, are analogical to categorical or theoretical judgments, reflective judgments *critically* explore the crisis of *krisis*—judgments that happen in the absence of the categorical certainty of the *a priori* table.

In the first introduction to the third *Critique*, Kant defines reflective judgment (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*) by distinguishing it from determining judgment (*bestimmende Urteilskraft*):

> The power of judgment can be regarded either as a mere faculty for reflecting on a given representation, in accordance with a certain principle, for the sake of a concept that is thereby made possible, or as a faculty for determining an underlying concept through a given empirical representation. In the first case it is the reflecting, in the second case the determining power of judgment. To reflect (to consider [*überlegen*]), however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one's faculty of cognition, in relation to a

> concept thereby made possible. The reflecting power of judgment is that which is also called the faculty of judging (*facultas diiudicandi*). (Kant 2000, 15)

While determination and reflection are not entirely new notions for Kant's critical system, the division of judgment into *either* determining *or* reflective is. Determining judgment, for example, could be compared with several other theoretical forms of judgment that are *subsumptive*. These are, in other words, forms of judgment that subsume the given empirical representation (a particular) under a general concept that lies in the understanding *a priori* (a universal). Determining judgment (whether empirical, mathematical or transcendental) functions by 'departing' from a concept that is logically placed prior to the intuition. As Kant argues in the first *Critique*, this form of judgment is best understood proleptically: the understanding anticipates sensory intuitions before their reception. Counter to both empiricism and rational dogmatism, Kant applies this theory of understanding to the possibility of experience itself, arguing that experience is only possible due to the synthetic *a priori* judgments that take place before the reception of representations. With determining judgment, we are, therefore, still on safe and well-trodden ground. Not only is determining judgment a subsumptive judgement that securely reunite particulars with their universals, it is also regulated by strict principles, such as the principle of non-contradiction.

If determining judgment offers refuge, then reflective judgment puts us out to sea. The process of reflective judgment does not have the security of an underlying concept in the understanding by which the intuition can be subsumed. Instead, reflective judgment reflects on either a singular representation and provokes the feeling of the beautiful or the sublime or compares several representations for the sake of an empirical concept that is 'thereby made possible' (teleological judgment). Contrary to determining judgment, reflective judgment is not proleptic, but 'artistic' or 'technical' (Kant 2000, 17). Rather than anticipating particulars through concepts *a priori*, reflection moves from given representations to an indeterminate conceptual no man's land. The lack of a corresponding universal *a priori* seems to demand that one is formulated. As Michael Budd writes, 'in reflective judgement, you are aware of something and attempt to acquire a concept under which it can be brought' (2008, 106). Kant's attempt at outlining reflective judgment appears as both the search for the conditions of possibility of judgment as well as the production of its conceptual possibility. It defines a reflective relation with the world as it actually exists (*Wirklichkeit*). Instead of a realm of legitimised possibility or the speculative realm of pure Reason (God, the immortal soul, and absolute freedom), reflective judgment proceeds from the entangled and labyrinthine nature of actuality with which it is intricately interwoven.

As is usual with Kant, reflective judgment has central to it a particular/peculiar orienting regulative principle without which conceptualisation could not take place—without which one would be 'mad' lost in the tangled mess of actuality. This orienting principle functions as the milestone for the rest of the third *Critique*. As the following passage makes clear, this orienting principle is teleological in kind:

> The reflecting power of judgment thus proceeds with given appearances, in order to bring them under empirical concepts of determinate natural things, not schematically, but technically, not as it were merely mechanically, like an instrument, but artistically, in accordance with the general but at the same time indeterminate principle of a purposive arrangement of nature in a system, as it were for the benefit of our power of judgment, in the suitability of its particular laws (about which understanding has nothing to say) for the possibility of experience as a system, without which presupposition we could not hope to find our way in a labyrinth of the multiplicity of possible empirical particular laws. Thus, the power of judgment itself makes the technique of nature into the principle of its reflection *a priori*, without however being able to explain this or determine it more precisely or having for this end an objective determining ground for the general concepts of nature (from a cognition of things in themselves), but only in order to be able to reflect in accordance with its own subjective law, in accordance with its need, but at the same time in accord with laws of nature in general. (Kant 2000, 17)

This teleological principle, the 'purposive arrangement of nature in a system', is what Kant calls the 'heautonomous' (17) principle that reflective judgment sets itself. Unlike the autonomy of the understanding, whose laws are spontaneously applied to nature, *heautonomy* sets the laws as an orientating principle for the production and judgment of the judgment of nature. In this sense, it is schematically indirect and analogical: 'The power of judgment itself makes the technique of nature into the principle of its reflection *a priori* without, however, being able to explain this or determine it more precisely or having for this end an objective determining ground for the general concepts of nature' (17). What Kant reveals is twofold: that the peculiar principle of reflective judgment is indeterminate and ungrounded in any objective reality *in concreto*, and that this principle is regulative and subjective. In other words, the possibility of judging and conceptualising nature with systematic empirical concepts rests on an *as if*. It is possible to judge nature in relation to its technical or artistic purposiveness because it is *as if* nature is purposive and artistic, something that Paul Guyer calls the 'regulative ideal of systematicity' (Guyer 1990, 17).

This teleological but indeterminate regulative principle sets the stage for the further division of reflective judgment into aesthetic and teleological judgments, aesthetic judgments being those made regarding the feeling of beauty and sublimity, and teleological judgments regarding the internal and external purpose of organised beings. Both aesthetic judgments and teleological judgments are essential for the development of this article's central concept—anarchic reflection—and for understanding how it functions in/as Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, since anarchic reflection is conceived of as an extension of Kantian sublimity *qua* a crisis of judgment.

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Before moving to an explanation of how Kantian sublimity operates, I would like to interject by quoting Artaud from one of his 1947 notebooks used to prepare for his infamous Vieux-Colombier tête-à-tête. In this notebook, Artaud refers to both Kant and Spinoza by name, praising them for having interrogated the labyrinthine nature of the cerebral (Artaud 2003, 26). Whether coincidental

to Artaud's reference to Kant or not, Artaud explicitly discusses notions of judgment (arguably scholastic), teleology (or the lack thereof), and, less explicitly, entropy. The following passage, written only pages before the reference to Kant, outlines Artaud's discussion of these interrelated terms. It is read with Kant's distinction between determining and reflective judgment in mind:

> Make things with what I blow [*venter*] and not with what I know
> because I never know anything
> to be done with this idea of the principle that things refer to
> things are inventions without purpose
> without principle without an institution
> they have no being
> there is no being that they are or that they can remain being
> to which they can ever refer
> no being so that anything could remain
> Because things are not a being, they do not have
> being in them which could force them to be this or that, like this
> or that, designate them by a personal distinction,
> what in high scholastic philosophy we would call its self-
> quality. Things do not have a quality, no quality to
> piss us off [*nous emmerder*]
>
> Things must pass away
> Everything must pass away
> Nothing can remain
> Nothing can ever remain
> but everything remains nothing
> reduces to being only nothing
> As if we have the imbecilic brazenness to want to consider it
> At an angle, the angle where it is situated, from where to judge it, from where to situate it and judge-it-through – judge-it-by [*le perjuger – Le parjuger*]. (Artaud 2003, 11)

The graphic specificity of these two segments of writing points us toward the rejection of one principle of judgment (teleology) and the propaedeutic affirmation of another (entropy).

Firstly, Artaud unequivocally rejects the idea of a principle to which things refer so that their purpose (*telos*) can become manifest to the understanding: things are 'inventions without guiding purpose, without institution'. They do not possess an internal organised structure of being that grants things a 'self-quality'. This rejection of 'purpose' and 'self-quality' appears to be a reference to the scholastic notions of quiddity or haecceity, philosophical terms that are ontological precursors to Kant's more epistemological philosophy of judgment. Though often conceived as synonymous, quiddity (literally, 'whatness') designates the essential properties that particulars share with others in their genus: for example, all triangles 'have three sides'. Quiddity acts as the principle by which judgment is made of *what* something is – as Artaud writes, a 'self-quality'.

Haecceity ('thisness'), on the other hand, defines the specific marks by which a particular thing is different to other particulars in its genus: for example, the lengths and angles of different triangles. Haecceity governs judgment regarding singularity: which triangle is this, and how is it *this* triangle? Whereas quiddity is related to theoretical subsumptive judgment (determining), haecceity is associated with the principle of individuation, the principle by which particulars individuate themselves within their genus. Haecceity is, therefore, much more concerned with the actuality of particulars. For instance, it could be argued that all chairs have the same teleological purpose and the corresponding Form that make them chairs. However, not all chairs are materially identical. They are either made from different pieces of the same material or from varied materials.

Artaud rejects both ontological and teleological quiddity and haecceity in the first segment. Of quiddity, he writes, 'things are inventions without purpose without principle [...] there is no being that they are or that they can remain being'. Of haecceity, he writes, 'things are not a being, they do not have being in them which could force them to be *this* or that, like *this* or that'; things do not have an ontological 'personal distinction'. However, whereas he rejects quiddity no matter its modality, he does not completely reject haecceity. As is more evident in the second segment of this passage (and later in the notebooks), an energetic principle by which things are formed and deformed without teleology or ontological personal distinctness (an 'I am') is affirmed by Artaud. However, by the end of the passage, Artaud discards a form of judgment that could determine *what* a thing *is*. Artaud considers any judging-through or judging-by (*perjuger* or *parjuger*) imbecilic. To put it into Kantian terms, Artaud appears to reject determinate judgment.

What follows this, however, offers something different. Artaud begins to elucidate his position concerning the judgment of things in relation to haecceity. Three affirmative statements of necessity point toward the elaboration of an entropic principle of individuation. Artaud writes: 'Things must pass away/Everything must pass away/Nothing can remain'. While all three of these statements are similar in content and partake of 'passing away', on closer inspection, they describe three different moments of deformation. The first is the inevitability that 'things' will pass away, the second is the inevitability that 'everything' will pass away, and the third is the affirmation that 'nothing can remain'. From the singular (things) to the general (everything), Artaud affirms that nothing will remain. Instead of retreating into the transcendent world of Being, Artaud transforms 'passing away' (or entropy) into the principle that governs particulars, genera, and totality alike. As will be argued, 'passing away' (deformation or entropy) acts as the principle of principles (*arche*)—that which directs anarchic reflection.

It is important to note that Rudolf Clausius, one of the founders of thermodynamics, introduced the concept of entropy via the Greek word for transformation, *en* (ἐν) and *trope* (τροπή) (Clausius, 1867). The idea of entropy as the principle of transformation should, therefore, be held in mind in what follows. Further, while the definitions of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics are still open to clarifications, in my development of the notion of entropy I will accept Clausius's summary of the first two laws: (1) '*The energy of the universe is constant*' and (2) '*The entropy of the universe tends to a maximum*' (Clausius 1856, 98). The best way to grasp the actual consequences of these two laws is to think in terms of their mechanical or organic application. For instance, the

internal energy chain in a steam engine transforms chemical energy into workable kinetic energy via thermal energy. However, the conversion to workable kinetic energy via thermal energy constitutes wasted energy in relation to the required work of the pistons. In other words, because the energy source in the universe cannot be added to (first law), and energy is wasted through multiple thermal to kinetic energy transfers, and nothing can spontaneously heat itself (second law), if the source is not replenished the system will tend to maximum entropy and cease to function. Moreover, what must also be taken into consideration is how the wasted thermal energy in the conversion chain does damage to the material structure of the system itself—making it less efficient to convert energy. Entropy describes the observable irreversibility both of natural and technical systems, the passing away, deformation, and death of 'things', as well as the universe's own inevitable heat death, where 'every-thing' has passed away and 'no-thing remains'.

Whereas at the heart of Kant's reflective judgment lies the regulative assumption that nature functions *as if* purposive (teleological), the principle at the heart of Artaud's mode of reflection is entropic. Rather than permitting the taxonomical specification of nature, anarchic reflection takes as its point of departure the principle that at the heart of any reflection with actual things stands their inevitable decay. All reflection must, then, start with entropy as its self-regulating principle. The energetic system (be it organic or technical) that maintains the Form of things is also the condition of their inevitable destruction. To use an organic example, while oxygen and nutrients are necessary for mammalian life, their conversion to workable energy produces by-products that age and inevitably kill the same organism. Reflection with the actuality of life must, therefore, start from the standpoint of how life and death are bound to the same energetic system.

I have sought to show that while Artaud rejects Kant's determining judgment or scholastic judgments of quiddity, he does not reject judgment or the principle of haecceity in and of themselves. In fact, further into the notebooks, Artaud affirms a form of judgment that takes 'nutritive actuality [*réalité nutritive*]' as its point of departure. Artaud writes:

> Me who does not believe in the spirit,
> Or infinity
> Or eternity
> Who wants that things are judged from the immediate
> and intrinsic angle of nutritive actuality [*réalité nutritive*] [...]
> [...] and never have I watched the future,
> but the immediate and present nothingness,
> my present body...
> [...] let us build ourselves, annihilate and create in present nothingness.
> (Artaud 2003, 40– 1)

Not only is judgment present in this passage, but it is an explicitly reflective, immediate and intrinsic judgment that describes how the function of anarchic reflection operates philosophically. Similar to the sequence of Kantian reflective judgment, anarchic reflection proceeds from 'nutritive actuality' to conceptual or ontological indeterminacy and concludes in creative conceptual formation: 'let us build ourselves, annihilate and create in present nothingness'. 'Present

nothingness', then, is the nutritive actuality of life that decomposes because it lives and lives because it decomposes. It is the presence of death in life and life in death. Anarchic reflective judgments on 'things' are judgments made concerning how particular things resist, but at the same time partake in, their own destruction. We build ourselves and create ourselves, but only insofar as this takes place within nutritive actuality. We build and create, but we also break and exhaust. Artaud's earlier affirmations that things must 'pass away' can be brought alongside 'present nothingness' and 'nutritive actuality' to produce a principle of haecceity that is likewise entropic: this is *this* and not *that* because its particular resistance to entropy individuates it so. The creative fight against the inevitably of decay bears its marks on individuality.

The entropic principle of reflection states that the energetic system that maintains the Form of things is also the condition of their inevitable destruction. Entropy likewise governs the task of the Theatre of Cruelty, since anarchic reflection's function is to energetically call into question/reflect with man's constitution (Form) in actuality (*energeia*). If, as Artaud states, the Theatre of Cruelty's task is to effectuate anarchic or energetic destruction, then it must manipulate the energetic system that maintains and destroys this constitution (Form). In a revealing passage from Artaud's 1936 *Messages révolutionnaires,* written two years prior to the publication of *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud argues that to manipulate Formal energetic systems, energy's dynamism (thermodynamics) must be 'harnessed':

> I wonder what would happen to the materialist conception [idée] when science, in its most recent development, teaches us that there is no matter, that all life is energy, and that matter, in its multiple forms, is nothing other than an expression of this energy.
>
> Atoms are examined so that matter might be understood, but under the scrutiny of science each atom disappears and transforms into a particular version of the dynamism of energy. Human thought is also an energy which adopts forms. What then prevents us from viewing this energy through its particular form, and harnessing this intense source of energy? (Artaud 2007, 147)

If materialism becomes substantialised, as Artaud argues here, it becomes distorted into a philosophy of quiddity, where matter replaces abstract and conceptual 'whatness'. Whenever matter is abstracted in this way, it is conceived as the principle of things and no longer subject to deformation and decay. In contrast, what could be called actual-materialism, nutritive-materialism, or just actualism (based on Artaud's 'nutritive actuality', Kant's *Wirklickheit* and Aristotle's *energeia*) argues that life, matter, Form and thought should all be viewed and judged with respect to 'energy's dynamism'. From this angle, matter is only an expression of the 'atoms' that make it appear substantial, which, in turn, are only expressions of the energy that binds them together. Analogously, Form and thoughts that appear stable or substantial enough to determine what things are, are only expressions of stabilised energetic systems. Once the manipulation of Formal energetic systems is 'harnessed', Form's stabilisation and dissipation, or de-formation, become possible. The Theatre of Cruelty's task is to effectuate anarchic/energetic destruction of Form by manipulating its system of maintenance.

Artaud names the system that maintains and stabilises Form's meaning, in the face of entropy, 'conformism':

> Far from accusing the crowds, or the public, we must blame the formal screen that we place between ourselves and the crowd; this form of new idolatry, the idolatry of fixed masterpieces, which is just one aspect of bourgeois conformism.
>
> This conformism which makes us confuse the sublime, ideas, and things with the forms they have taken throughout time and in our minds—our snobbish, precious and aesthetic mentality—the public no longer understands. (Artaud 1974, 57)

The notion of 'bourgeois conformism' has two mutual significations here. The first of these is relatively commonplace, defining the alignment of behaviours, beliefs and attitudes to particular social norms. This type of conformism sustains the second, more philosophical, sense, which refers to the holding together of Forms. This aligns with the aforementioned definition of anarchic reflection: an 'energetic system that maintains Form'. In *Messages révolutionnaires*, Artaud also writes that 'human thought is […] energy which adopts forms' (Artaud 2007, 147). The task of conformism as the energetic system that holds Form together is to resist the entropy of Form. If Form and thought are to be understood energetically and in relation to the principle of entropy, then, like all energetic systems, specific measures are crucial for the continual cultivation, maintenance or conformism of this system. If the energy source is compromised, if the parts are reconfigured, or if it consumes and grows too quickly, then the system can reach a critical point and collapse. The task of the Theatre of Cruelty is to stimulate anarchic reflection, to produce a crisis in the system—anarchic destruction—so that Form can reach this critical point, collapse or be transformed. In other words, anarchic destruction is an energetic destruction of conformism. In the following paragraph from *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud summarises this process:

> We must admit to ourselves that the purposiveness of an object, in its meaning and in the way that its natural form is used, is an affair of convention. […] It is understood that a beautiful woman has a harmonious voice; however, if we were to have heard, for as long the world has been the world, all the beautiful women calling and greeting us with the sound of a trumpet or a trombone, we would have eternally associated the idea of a trumpet with the idea of a beautiful woman, and part of our internal vision of the world would have been radically *transformed*. We grasp through this that poetry is anarchic in as far as it reconfigures all of the relations between object and object and between form and their significations. It is anarchic in so far as its appearance is the consequence of a disorder that brings us closer to chaos. (Artaud 1974, 30)

The first half of this passage describes conformity or 'convention', arguing that the predicate 'harmonious voice' is, by convention alone, analytic of 'beautiful woman'. Only 'conformity' maintains the seemingly stable in this judgment. When conformity is anarchically/energetically destroyed, possibilities are opened for the relation between subjects and predicates and between 'form and their significations' to be 'radically transformed'. As Artaud states elsewhere, 'deformation is the principle of invention' (Artaud 1980, 253), and as seen in the previous passage, creative reconfiguration of these relations is anarchic poetry. The example that Artaud gives is the

reconfiguration (of relations between subject and object and Form and its signification) of the harmonic woman, to the Form of woman with a trumpet for a mouth. The trumpet-mouthed woman is the anarchic poem. Anarchic poetry, therefore, takes place as the result of an energetic destruction of Form's conformism—a crisis of *krisis*—where it is no longer possible to judge determinately.

To be concise, the Theatre of Cruelty functions as anarchic reflection, which produces anarchic destruction (the energetic destruction of Form's conformism) which, in turn, generates the conditions by which anarchic poetry can take place. As I have argued, the principle that governs this process is entropy. Following the way in which Artaud describes anarchic reflection in his notebooks, it can be argued that anarchic reflection is the overarching process within which both anarchic destruction and anarchic poetry occur. Anarchic reflection effectuates both the energetic deformation of conformism and the subsequent formation of new configurations. The medium of this reflective movement is nutritive actuality (the actuality of the conforming, deforming and reforming of Form). All new configurations are, however, also subject to energetic deformation: nutritive actuality feeds itself of itself. In the Theatre of Cruelty, all Forms are dead stars reformed, entropic *Ouroboroi*.

At the end of the above passage from *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud defines what he means by 'anarchic'. He writes that anarchic poetry is 'anarchic in so far as its appearance is the consequence of a disorder that brings us closer to chaos' (30). I argue that 'disorder' is synonymous with the entropic principle that governs anarchic reflection, and 'chaos' with the unmetered actuality of the conforming, deforming and reforming of Form. When the system of conformity is brought closer to the actuality of chaos, the crisis of *krisis*, or of judgment in general, ensues. Determinate predication is sacrificed to disorder as anarchic reflection reflects the chaos of actuality. As the beauty of harmony becomes the sublimity of chaos, the conformity of a woman's melodious voice is sacrificed to the chaotic blow of a trumpet.

The final part of this article compares the function of anarchic reflection to Kant's writings on the judgment of the feeling of the sublime from the third Critique. This involves exploring the counter-purposive nature of Kant's sublime and comparing it to the principle of entropy. Finally, I will describe how the sublime is conceived by Kant as a reflection with actuality (*Wirklicheit*), in a way that differs to judgments of beauty. I hope to show, in doing this, why Artaud's anarchic reflection is conceived of as an extension of Kantian sublimity qua a crisis of *krisis*.

*

In the third *Critique*, Kant explains that the judgment of the feeling of the sublime (in both its mathematical and dynamic forms) partakes of aesthetic judgment, and aesthetic judgment partakes of reflective judgment. Contrary, then, to determining judgments, the movement of reflection, as detailed above, moves from the entangled nature of nutritive actuality to conceptual indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that thereby makes the formation and transformation of empirical concepts attainable. The feeling of the sublime mirrors this movement of reflection. As

Malcom Bowles writes, 'The non-determinative synthesis of the sublime is not decided upon, it is provoked' (2000, 10). For Bowles, the sublime is provoked by 'matter' (10). However, as Artaud argues, matter is only the expression of the energy that holds it together. Instead of matter, then, I argue that the sublime is provoked by actuality, an actuality that is entropic. Whereas the 'self-sufficient beauty of nature' (Kant 2000, 129) operates in pure judgments of taste (the beautiful), and simultaneously excites our understanding and imagination into a pleasurable and harmonious play of purposiveness without purpose, the sublime moves from an actuality that is wild, devastating and contrapurposive:

> there is so little that leads to particular objective principles and forms of nature corresponding to these that it is mostly rather in its chaos or in its wildest and most unruly disorder and devastation, if only it allows a glimpse of magnitude and might, that it excites the ideas of the sublime. (Kant 2000, 129–30)

The chaotic and unruly disorder at the heart of the sublime radically distinguishes it from the judgment of the feeling of beauty, which, although indeterminate, is a reflective judgment on the pleasure that harmonious Form excites between the imagination and the understanding. In the mathematical sublime, this great chaotic disorder, too large for imagination's representational capacity, 'awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us' (Kant 2000, 134). In other words, the idea of the sublime is mathematically excited when Reason, 'a faculty of the mind which surpasses every standard of sense' (138), is excited by the imagination's inability to capture actuality's disorderly contrapurposiveness. Like the mathematical sublime, the dynamic sublime excites the power of Reason when, from a position of safe distance, actuality's mighty disorderliness excites both powerlessness in the face of actuality and security in the capacity to judge Reason as independent of nature. While there is, therefore, a difference between the mathematical and dynamic sublime in Kant, both reflect (though from different reflexive proximities) on the chaotic, disorderly and contrapurposive quality of actuality; moreover, both reflect because of an inherent incapacity. Writing more explicitly about the difference between the feeling of beauty and sublimity, Kant argues how contrapurposiveness in Form is the most intrinsic quality distinguishing the two aesthetic judgments:

> The most important and intrinsic difference between the sublime and the beautiful, however, is this: that if, as is appropriate, we here consider first only the sublime in objects of nature (that in art is, after all, always restricted to the conditions of agreement with nature), natural beauty (the self-sufficient kind) carries with it a purposiveness in its form, through which the object seems as if it were to be predetermined for our power of judgment, and thus constitutes an object of satisfaction in itself, whereas that which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that. (Kant 2000, 129)

For Kant, 'Beauty', therefore, carries with it a purposiveness in Form whereby the 'object' that is deemed beautiful appears as though it is predetermined for the factuality of the understanding.

In contrast, the sublime has a 'contrapurposive' principle at the centre of its reflective judgment that is 'unsuitable' for both sensible presentation and conceptual understanding. As Bowles continues to write of the sublime, 'It is forced out of us through the collapse of the understanding' (10).

This devastating, disorderly and chaotic non-teleological principle is comparable, perhaps even equivalent, to the principle of entropy. It commits violence to the unifying power of the imagination, opening up an agonising window onto the chaos of actuality that pushes the possibility of judgment to the very edge of what is criticisable. Moreover, the sublime is felt 'only by means of a momentary inhibition followed by a stronger outpouring of the vital force.' Life, therefore, accompanies the sublime at the edge of the crisis of *krisis* (Kant 2000, 111). Where there is devastation and disorder, life follows. The sublime reunites us with the entropic principle that states that life is not some harmonious Form purposively and mechanically designed for our delight, but the consequence of death.

While Artaud only refers to the sublime a handful of times in the *Theatre and its Double*, the accompanying notes and manuscripts used to produce the book suggest that anarchic destruction and anarchic poetry, hence anarchic reflection, are closely linked to the feeling of the sublime. For example, in 1936 Artaud writes in his notes for the preface, 'Beneath all this, poetry remains a diffuse idea of the sublime, only discernible under an overwhelming aspect. There is something sublime in certain natural catastrophes; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, cracks in the sea bed, excessive numbers of collisions, planes crashing in flames, railway disasters' (Artaud 1974, 159). Taking into consideration the difference between the Kantian mathematical and dynamic sublime, the intentional staging of anarchic poetry that effectuates a crisis of *krisis* (a crisis that is both painful and pleasurable, both destructive and poetic, both fatal and vital) defines the Theatre of Cruelty as cruel. As Artaud writes:

> Above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness, for the latter gives practising any act in life a blood red tinge, its cruel overtones, since it is understood that being alive always means the death of someone else. (Artaud 1974, 78)

The 'overwhelming' and 'catastrophic' aspect of anarchic poetry, but more importantly, the intentional or conscious staging of it, is that which is cruel in the Theatre of Cruelty. To energetically break the Form of conformism, the pain of the contrapurposive nature of deformation must be invoked. Rather than being at a safe distance from the catastrophe of Form, in the Theatre of Cruelty, the contrapurposive quality of actuality's disorder surrounds and overwhelms all those that participate in it, provoking a crisis of *krisis*. In the Theatre of Cruelty, you do not watch the plane crash, you are *in* the plane crash. Rather than pure nihilistic destruction, it must be understood that life is only possible because of the actual 'death of someone else.' In the Theatre of Cruelty, life's possibility is bound to death's actuality and the possibility of death to actual life.

the theatre of cruelty
what is original but
night murdering all its stars in an act of entropy the universe
could avoid after all it made itself. a fact of theatrical magic. this
is some squabble between the stagemanager and the stars. we
made you the Stars say *enough*! explosion expansion old age
death you go too far for spectacle and then it goes dark
this is a holocaust of nondisposable things

as such. what they all say. and then it goes dark

(Mor, 2015)

## Notes

[1] Thévenin, in her 1969 *Tel quel* article, 'Entendre/Voir/Lire', accuses Deleuze of the same inconsiderateness as Lotringer, writing that 'Deleuze falls into the major trap of identifying Artaud as a schizophrenic' (37).

[2] For example, Stephan Barber (1993), Florence de Mèredieu (2006) and David Shafer (2016).

[3] Unsurprisingly, the latest translation in English concerns this episode of Artaud's life (Artaud 2018).

[4] While Kélina Gotman (2015) has written on Artaud and judgment, there is little analysis of the Kantian connection to Artaud. Howard Caygill's presentation (2013) 'The Folly of Speculation' is the only piece of work that compares Kant and Artaud. However, this comparison does not discuss judgment, sublimity or cruelty in any detail.

[5] The work presented here on actuality and *réalité* is indebted to Nathaniel Wooding.

[6] While Artaud quotes Bergson (Artaud 1980), it is difficult to determine which texts he has read. I suspect *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* and *Mind-Energy.*

[7] This is not far from Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca's immanent theatre, *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance* (2012)

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# THE ESSAY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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## Introduction

In the 16th century, Michel de Montaigne developed the essay (Montaigne and Screech 1993). It was—and still is—a literary genre characterized by the abrogation of judging, the questioning of authority, the overlaps between fact and fiction, a mixing of styles and a heavy use of quotations. In an age marked by upheaval, Montaigne tried through writing to get a grip on his superfluous time. 'To essay' does not only mean 'to assay' and 'to weigh' but also 'to challenge', 'to test' and 'to attempt'. Montaigne challenged religious, social and political problems in his essays and contested the fixed ideas of his time. The structure of the essay allowed Montaigne to take a critical stance towards his thoughts and actions. 'Am I critical enough towards my own critical thoughts?', this question was a thread throughout Montaigne's years of study and writing. In the following centuries, many authors followed Montaigne's example and brought the essay to the level of an established literary genre. One can trace a consistency in the moments where the genre of the essay gains popularity. The genre of the essay—starting from the turbulent 16$^{th}$ century with Montaigne—flourishes in circumstances of change and insecurity. The generic identity of the essay has always allowed experiment and creativity to writers, philosophers and critics to challenge the *doxas* of their time. Therefore you can postulate that the essay is not only a symptom of a crisis, but also the product of a crisis.

Considering the subject matter of this thematic issue of *Performance Philosophy—'Crisis/Krisis'*—I want to survey in the first section of this contribution *why* the genre and form of the essay flourishes in times of crisis. By 'a society in crisis' I understand a society searching for itself on a

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representational, ideological, philosophical and existential level, a situation that often results in political and social upheaval. Another crucial element that constitutes the breeding ground of the essay is an inability of the conventional artistic and expressive outlets of that time to cope for that particular time. As I will address later in this text, in Montaigne's case it was the inability of the traditional scholastic system that prohibited him from expressing his concerns, thoughts and doubts about what was happening around him.

For this article, I subscribe to the editors' statement that 'the word *crisis* mutated to a rather banal term, generally understood as "breaking-point", but the underlying web of connections remains the same. While on the surface, "crisis" names a state of panic, a situation to be overcome en route to a better state or health' (Performance Philosophy 2017). With the help of the ideas on the essay by Montaigne, Theodor W. Adorno and György Lukács, I want to open up new possibilities that can help to revaluate the notion of *krisis*, the act of judging as foregrounded by the editorial team of this *Performance Philosophy* issue. As the issue of *Crisis/Krisis* addresses, despite the denotation of 'rupture in the smooth workings of the everyday, the word *crisis* still carries within it the critical principle of judgement in the increasingly complex, globalized world' (ibid.). I believe that the self-reflexive, open and the polemic characteristics of the essay helps to reassess the importance of judgement in our complex society.

Exploring the critical features of the essay in times of crisis, one has to start with Montaigne. Thanks to his *Essais,* a new way of writing and thinking entered the French literary tradition. But although the essay became an established literary genre, a theory *on* and *of* the essay was lacking. We had to wait until the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century for a convincing theorization of the essay. In this context, the work of Lukács and Adorno on the essay cannot be ignored. The exploration of Montaigne's, Lukács's and Adorno's ideas on the essay will help to understand the second section of this text, where I elaborate on the extension of the written essay to film and the performing arts.

Under the influence of Lukács's and Adorno's ideas, the critical qualities of the written essay did not remain unnoticed by other artistic disciplines. Experimental film and documentary makers borrowed strategies and methods from the written essay and adapted them to their artistic practices. The translation of the written essay to experimental film was termed the 'essay film', a genuine concept within film studies today.

Today we observe a similar trend within performance practices in the field of performing arts.[1] Especially, within the current field of contemporary documentary theatre, the essay is rising to prominence. The nature and the purpose of the essay inspired artists with a strong documentary approach in their artistic practice. The interest in the essay coincides in my view with a 'new documentary turn' in performing arts (Forsyth and Megson 2009; Martin 2013; Irmer 2006). It is a tendency where 'more complex and hybrid forms of representation' emerge and pose problems about 'the status of the image', 'the relation with the world beyond the imagination of artists' and 'continuously provoke debates concerning the production, representation and status of knowledge, truth and reality' (Le Roy and Vanderbeeken 2016). This recent tendency differs from the common sense understanding of the documentary. Traditionally, the documentary is

concerned with the arrangement of facts to produce an objective view of a situation. Over the years, this conception of the documentary that displays an objective representation of a certain event is undermined and is well described in the work of Bill Nichols (2010) and Stella Bruzzi (2000). They see the documentary as a perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation. By taking into account this relation, the performative dimension of the documentary rises to the surface, challenges the notion of objective reality and articulates notions of authorship, construction or ideology. Nichols and Bruzzi generated their analyses from documentary films but many of their ideas trickled into theatre and performance studies. So regardless of the field—film or theatre—the documentary today is more than ever concerned with the representations of the real, its modes of production and the control of flow of images. Contemporary theatre makers with a documentary approach have the ambition to intervene in the world in order to reengage and reinvent the way reality is represented.

And here enters the essay again. In my doctoral research, I engage the form, discourse and legacy of the essay to create an additional framework to observe and analyse these kinds of documentary theatrical and performative practices. Many of the artistic strategies and structures employed by artists bears resemblance with the written and cinematic essay. By deriving ideas from the work on the essay in literary and film studies, I explore and trace how the essay appears within theatre and performance. After the second section of this contribution, which is a brief introduction to the genealogy of the essay's translation into film and theatre, I will focus in the third section of this article on *Mining Stories* (2015), a documentary performance by Belgian theatre makers Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere. The duo investigated in their performance the role of memory, emotion, narrativity, power structures and economics in the traumatic aftermath of a mining accident in Brazil. I hope that my exploration of *Mining Stories* not only will unveil the essayistic nature of that performance but will also help to bring us back to that other central notion of this thematic issue: *krisis*. In the fourth and final section I state, and I hope my analysis of *Mining Stories* supports that claim, that theatre and performance today can install a renewed interface between *crisis* and *krisis*, a new mode of thinking that can help 'to escape the perpetual anxiety of austerity, fear, and conservative thought that so routinely follows crisis' (Performance Philosophy 2017).

## The essay, a perpetually changing genre in a perpetually changing world

Montaigne developed his new literary genre in the middle of the tumultuous 16th century. It was an age marked by upheaval, as Europe got rid of the dogmatic metaphysical ideas of medieval times. Astonished and anxious at the same time, Montaigne continuously observed his perpetual changing world. Through writing, he wanted to challenge the fixed ideas of his time and learn about his own thoughts and actions. The thread, when one observes the history of the essay, is that the genre reveals itself in moments of fundamental existential crisis. In the case of Montaigne, it was a malfunctioning France governed by the royal court and the Catholic Church that made him resort to the family estate in order to question the hegemonic structures of his time and, most importantly, to analyse his own thoughts and actions within these dominant structures. The interplay between fact and fiction and the usage of quoting enabled Montaigne to interrogate the

status of authority of key thinkers that influenced his time. Juxtaposing specific quotations of Greek thinkers or deliberately changing the author's name, Montaigne problematized values and ideas people in his time took for granted. By embedding quotation as an artistic strategy, Montaigne introduced a dialogical relation that tried to connect and encounter his age with that of the author's. This dialogical dimension is articulated by the clear presence of an 'I', Montaigne as the essay's writer. By explicitly marking his own position, Montaigne invites the reader to join him in the journey he makes in his essays. Montaigne started his essay writing as a 'therapeutic practice' wherein he wanted to 'reflect on his own thinking, not in order to understand the world around him, but to comprehend his own position in this world' (Roose 2017, 72). But at the same time, these reflective and meandering writings indicated for Montaigne how 'limited his critical thinking was' when it came up against the fundamental changes and paradigm shifts of his time (101). Montaigne's continuous act of essaying became 'a reflection of and on the changing self in the changing world' (Good 1988, 23).

As Claire De Obaldia pointed out, the *Essais* are a typical product of the Renaissance: a society in transition from a collective tradition to the focus on individuality and originality. The essay marked at that time the philosophical and ideological shift from 'the reign of the universal to the particular' (1995, 65). De Obaldia is not surprised by Montaigne's scepticism and critical attitude towards his time, caught in two eras. It was a time of 'deep epistemological anxiety', a time when 'allegiance to the past is progressively overtaken by acute reflections' regarding the problem of originality and authorship (ibid.). So Montaigne's new style of writing was not only a reaction to a society in political and religious crisis; it was also a reaction against the traditional forms of literature and the classical methods of learning and epistemology. The essay became a literary vehicle where knowledge was based on experience and not on the orthodoxy of common opinions. Montaigne's concern with the foundations and criteria of truth, the conditions of meaning and the question of representation resulted in a literary form where the writer was allowed 'to freely think outside the constraints of established authority and traditional rhetorical forms' (Hall 1989, 78).

Montaigne's therapeutic project influenced a number of future writers and philosophers. The *Essais* were the precursors of the modern essay but differ with what the essay *is* and *wants to be* in modern times. 'Whereas Montaigne wrote with one eye on the world and the other on himself', Lane Kauffmann recaps, 'the modern essayist works with one eye on the object of study while the other nervously reviews the methods by which he is authorized to know or to interpret' (1988, 69). Montaigne's *un*methodological methods encouraged future writers and philosophers to pose questions about the foundations of knowledge and truth without premises and prejudices. What Montaigne conveyed were not solutions but criticism as such. Within turbulent times, this act of essaying transforms the mind to 'the site of the imagination', a space that allows 'theory's virtual potential to sight and re-cite what it has already seen' (Kritzman 2009, 2–3).

Montaigne's exploration of human subjectivity influenced 18$^{th}$-century England, a society in an industrial and democratic transition where the essay became a medium to reconfigure the individual. In the coffeehouse culture, the essay becomes a vehicle that 'dramatically troubled subjectivity and representation' by sharing it in the public sphere (Corrigan 2011,19). Essay writing

became a tool to shape 'a dialogue between a self and a visible world' (18). The new bourgeois culture that started to have influence was very hospitable to the essay. Combined with the empirical and individualistic qualities of English culture, 18th-century England was the ideal breeding ground to stabilize an own essay tradition (Good 1988, 135).

In the 19th century, the praxis of essayistic writing spreads itself out among philosophy, autobiographical writing, art criticism and social report. Following the example of Montaigne, the 19th-century essay 'tends to refine the moral and political voice of the essay' (Corrigan 2011, 18). In her observation, De Obaldia recognizes in the period of early German Romanticism the same breeding ground as in Montaigne's days. Just as in the Renaissance, it was a time marked by periods of generic transitions, political disintegration and reconfiguration of the discursive system that then lead to a reshuffling and a displacement of generic boundaries (1995, 39). From the Romantic perspective, the essay helped them to manage to cope with the transitory period between two 'Golden ages or utopias' (ibid.). To De Obaldia, the parallels with the Renaissance and Romanticism displays that the essay 'is the typical response to a world which has become problematic' (ibid.). She continues:

> It is the typical expression of a lack of cultural unity, where man's faculties are exercised in isolation from one another. For the negativity of modern times which the essay embodies is characterized by a split between the 'I' and the world, between subject and object, between particular and universal, between art and philosophy, when all relationships are destroyed and reflected upon. (ibid)

Within such a context of negative conjunctures, the essay functions as a mediator between oppositions. Because of its mediating form, the essay takes a hybrid and marginal position between philosophy and art and is eager to overcome the shortcomings of the traditional modes of knowledge.

By the beginning of the 20th century, we see that the essay is far away from the Montaignian essay, which introduced the modern essay but remained a literary vehicle to explore human subjectivity. Under the impulse of Lukács and especially Adorno, the form of the essay becomes 'the critical form *par excellence* for the critique of ideology' (Adorno [1958] 1984, 166). This shift explains why the essay takes a more prominent place within literary criticism and philosophy. Lukács's ideas on the essay are related to the crisis of Modernist literature and drama. They express his fascination for the rise of the Modernist ideas in painting and music and were rooted in the vitalist tendency of that time. Max Bense, on the other hand, thought that, after the catastrophes of World War II, the essay was a crucial instrument to revaluate critical thought. He stated that:

> Due the critical situation as a whole, due to the crisis in which mind and existence strive, the essay has become a characteristic of our literary era. The essay serves the crisis and its conquest by provoking the mind of experiment, to configure things differently, but it is not simply an accent, a mere expression of the crisis. ([1947] 2017, 59)

The reassessment of self-reflexivity, the fragmentary, the polemic, the subjective experience and discontinuity of the German essay was what attracted Adorno to the form. With its position between science, philosophy and art, the essay in Germany resisted the reductionist reflexes towards Totality and Truth. Adorno's resistance against Totality and Truth coincided with the arguments he made with Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). They argue there that the scientification of the human experience, the rationalization of society and man's alienation does not emancipate but reduces man to a cog in a machine. One only matters insofar as he works with and in a functionalistic capitalist society. The essays of Simmel, the young Lukács, Kassner and Benjamin were, for Adorno, the paragon of how the speculative dimension of the essay could provide 'a unique combination of empirical knowledge and aesthetic form' (Good 1988,152), because the essay is not a work of art in the full sense, but 'a kind of hybrid of art and science, an aesthetic treatment of material that could otherwise be studied scientifically or systematically' (ibid.).

These features brought Adorno to the conclusion that 'instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done' (ibid.). Herein resonates what Georg Lukács pointed out decades before Adorno:

> [...] the essay always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past; hence it is part of the nature of the essay that it does not create new things from an empty nothingness but only orders those which were once alive. (Lukács [1910] 2010, 26)

What Lukács and Adorno have in common is a mutual aversion towards 'the ideals of purity and cleanliness' dictated by the rigorous scientific disciplines of their time that, 'bear the marks of a repressive order' (Adorno [1958] 1984, 156). By defending the essay and endorsing its qualities, they try to contest the restrictions and traditions of the academic. They oppose the omnipotence of Reason. In its resistance to Totality, Adorno notes that the essay's 'totality is that of non-totality; one that even as form does not assert the thesis of the identity of thought and thing, the thesis which in its own content the essay reject' (165). Philosophy and criticism are in Adorno's view jammed in their own dogmatic attitude towards their solidified concepts and definitions. 'Philosophy has completed the fullest critique of definition from the most diverse perspectives', summarizes Adorno (159). The essay as form offers a medium to inject scepticism towards the dogmas of traditional science and philosophy. By revaluating the changing and the ephemeral, employing experience as preferred reflected form and suspending the traditional concept of method the essay resists what Adorno experiences as 'the philosophy of Absolute knowledge':

> Just as such learning remains exposed to error, so does the essay as form; it must pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience by the lack of security, a lack which the norm of established thought fears like death. It is not so much that the essay ignores indisputable certainty, as that it abrogates the ideal. The essay becomes true in its progress, which drives it beyond itself, and not in a hoarding obsession with fundamentals. (161)

The obsession for Absolute knowledge that is attacked by Adorno applies to a similar obsession with Truth. Opposed to the notion of 'truth as a network of causes and effects, the essay insists that a matter be considered, from the very first, in its whole complexity; it counteracts that hardened primitiveness that always allies itself with reason's current form' (162). To break this tradition, Adorno suggests that, 'for whoever criticizes must necessarily experiment; he must create conditions under which an object is newly seen' (166). Adorno's call to create new conditions recalls to Montaigne's venture. The latter had the same sense of urgency to create within the field of literature a new type or mode of literature that enabled him to question those issues he wanted to be addressed but the existing literary tools were inadequate to do so. By allowing association, ambiguity of words and neglecting the logical synthesis, the essay makes the auditor an accessory in its process of truth making. Or as Adorno describes this process:

> In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context; it erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay's glance every intellectual artefact must transform itself into a force field. (161)

This force field where separated elements encounter each other, becomes the field of critical thought: 'through the confrontation of texts with their own emphatic concept, with the truth that each text intends even in spite of itself, it shatters the claim of culture and moves it to remember its untruth' (168). Adorno's plea for the discursive form of the essay could be seen as arbitrary or as a hybrid lacking a convincing and independent tradition. The essay's vague openness of feeling and mood could be perceived as naïve. After all, how does the entanglement of elements, as interwoven as a carpet, enables us to judge?

And this question brings us back to the notion of *krisis*. In our age, where many of the crises we face are not one-dimensional but exist within a complex web of elements and interests that are predominantly transnational, geopolitical and in constant flux, how can we judge? The ways mainstream media report and represent these crises preserve the simplifications of reality and encumber nuanced debates and dialogues about how to cope with certain crises we face today. Today, swift judging and the inability to question and challenge one's own convictions and beliefs replace *Krisis*-as-judgment, 'the rigorous mental activity of judgement through which verdicts' are made (Performance Philosophy 2017). So how can the essay serve to reassess this notion of *krisis*-as-judgment?

Referring to what Adorno stated earlier, when the essay creates its own rules, guidelines and conditions, how can we judge? 'Who gives him the right to judge', ripostes Lukács ([1910] 2010, 26). To Lukács, the essay is a mere precursor of a judgement. Just like an artwork, the essay faces life with the gesture of an artwork. But it only remains a gesture, an attitude. The essay inhabits that which judges and that which is judged. Thus Lukács concludes that 'the essay is a judgment, but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict but the process of judging' (34). Judgments may result but in the essay there are no prejudices or prejudgments. Conclusions may arise, but they are not foregone conclusions, they remain provisional and speculative.

In order to avoid the danger of acting 'as if it held the philosopher's stone in hand', the essay in Adorno's conceptualization lacks a standpoint towards the concepts, experiences and theories it touches and absorbs ([1958] 1984, 166). Only by not taking a clear stance towards its subject, the essay can 'polarize the opaque, to unbind the power latent in it' and construct 'the interwovenness of concepts in such a way that they can be imagined as themselves interwoven in the object' (170). By avoiding reductionist's reflexes, the essay displays the complexity of things *as* complexity. In my opinion, this kind of approach, the understanding of complexity *as* complexity displayed by the form of the essay, enables us to touch different perspectives and share different opinions but in an open and speculative way, without the constant pressure of having a clear opinion or judgment. The venture of the essayist through his subject matter, installs, as addressed here by Lukács, the essay's most significant characteristics when we talk about judging: the sharing of the process of judging. Or to put it in the frame of this context: the sharing of the act of judging, *krisis*.

## The actuality of the essay: from the essay film to the essayistic in contemporary performing arts

Against this historical background, since the writings of Montaigne, Lukács and Adorno, the essay in the 20th century became a form, a medium and an object for theoretical and philosophical reflections. Although Adorno is most frequently cited when discussing the theorization of the essay, it is the work of his colleague Walter Benjamin that fuelled much of Adorno's thought. Adorno was responsible for the theorization of the essay—one that has had a significant influence—but it was Benjamin who had a serious impact on the 20th century practitioners of the audio-visual form of the written essay (Alter 2007, 48). The essay's flexible, open and transgressive characteristics does not only promote an innovative approach towards its literary tools, it also endorses a translation to artistic disciplines such as film, video and installation art (54–55). Or as I try to explore in my research: into theatre and performance.

Influenced by the criticism of the 20th century, but also the writings of Benjamin, many experimental film and documentary makers discovered the essay and its possibilities to derive from the literary genre what could serve them in their artistic praxis. Cinema's resort to the essay was seen as an attempt to encapsulate the 'sublimely paradoxical wish to communicate directly with the spectator, to bypass the obvious constraints of an apparatus' (Rascaroli 2009, 191). Thanks to technological improvements, the camera became just like a pen: 'increasingly flexible, portable and responsive to human thought' (Rascaroli 2017, 4). The translation of the written essay to experimental cinema and documentary film was termed as the 'essay film'. But it took more than Benjamin's writings, experimental freedom and new forms of production and distribution to pave the way for the proliferation of essay films. As Timothy Corrigan indicates, the essay film addresses a crisis in both representation and the definition of cinema in all of its aspects within the power-war environment: social, economic, cultural, ideological and institutional (2011, 7). Cinematic essays emerge when Europe was a landscape of ruin. The economic and political crisis after World War II, the stories of the Holocaust, the failure of the promise of totalising systems and the Modern

project in general galvanized a social, existential and representational crisis that amplified the essayistic imperative (63). 'The power of the essay' herein, argues Corrigan, is its 'representational agency that emphasizes its ephemerality rather than permanency' (66).

The genealogy of the essay film begins in the first half of the 20th century when avant-garde cinema and documentary film intersected. But it is documentary maker Hans Richter who introduced the term 'essay film' in 1940 to describe a new type of intellectual but also emotional cinema that employed more expressive means into documentary film. Richter describes the rise of the essay in film as 'an attempt to make the invisible world of imagination, thoughts and ideas visible' (Richter [1940] 2017, 91). The transgressive qualities of the essay film as new cinematographic form managed to merge intellect and emotion, subjectivity and objectivity within the documentary genre. Because filmmakers were no longer bound to the traditional parameters and rules of documentary making, the essay film gave 'free reign to the imagination, with all its artistic potentiality'. Because filmmakers were released from chronological sequencing or representational depiction of phenomena, the term 'essay' was chosen to signify 'a composition that is in between categories and as such is transgressive, digressive, playful, contradictory, and political' (Alter 2003, 7–8).

In a few decades, this tendency towards the essay resulted in a vivid and rapidly evolving genre. Essay film became a genre that 'articulates the formal and the aesthetic with the historical and the political' (Alter 1996, 166). Because of these intersections, film critic Paul Arthur noted that the essay film mirrors how human experience and thinking occurs and evolves. 'The essay offers a range of politically charged visions uniquely able to blend abstract ideas with concrete realities' (2003, 58). By the essay's crucial questioning of authority and its process-oriented emphasis, the essay film begins to address the complex relationship between words and images in order to undermine the traditional signification of these elements. It is not surprising to film theoretician Michael Renov that, given societies growing complexity, the essay has received renewed critical attention since the 1990s. He observes that the pedigreed essayistic characteristics of the essay such as 'hybridity, non-identity, contingency, indeterminacy and the reflective' more then ever resonate with 'the prevailing theoretical paradigms and with our social life' (2017, 173).

Even today, this feature of the essay—being the symptom and the product of a crisis at the same time—is still present. Hence, we have to understand the essay's political function 'not as therapy or healing the wounds produced by the upheavals of the day, but as crisis diagnosis enabling and encouraging future social and cultural transformation' (Alter 2007, 51). In our times governed by a neoliberal hegemony and confronted with mass migration, growing inequality and ecological disasters, the traditional and convincing social narratives are out-dated. As Laura Rascaroli observes, the essay 'invites different forms of expression, and different dimensions and ways of engagement with the real—ways that are more contingent, marginal, autobiographical, even private' (2009, 190). These essayistic engagements denaturalize events and representations of the accepted ways of viewing and understanding the world. Therefore, recapitulates Alter, the essay is more than a mere product of critical thinking and writing. The interest in the essay, its evolution

and transition towards other artistic disciplines indicate that 'essayism is not just a mode of producing—it is a method of reading, viewing and interpreting' (Alter 2018, 16).

In the following section, I trace how the critical qualities of the essay are present in the performance *Mining Stories* and thereby move from essay film to the essay in theatre. The performance is an example of what I described in the introduction as a 'new documentary turn' within the performing arts field. In their own manner, Huysmans and Dereere continuously try to question, abrogate and postpone the process of judging in *Mining Stories*. They intend to survey the mental apparatus that navigates the process of judging by deconstructing our dominant mode of thinking. I hope that their essayistic approach to the subject matter illustrates how the form of the essay in performance could help us to revaluate the notion of *krisis*-as-judgment.

## Tracing the essay in *Mining Stories* by Hannes Dereere and Silke Huysmans

On the 5th of November 2015, a dam containing toxic waste built by mining company Samarco collapsed in Minas Gerais, a mountainous region in Brazil. A flood of toxic waste thundered down the hills. Within minutes, houses and small villages were completely destroyed. The official investigation of the Brazilian authorities showed that Samarco was responsible for the economic, ecologic and human disaster. The company was aware of the decay of the dam but never took the necessary safety measures to assure the security of the region and its inhabitants. Samarco got away clean because their economic activities provide a steady income for the thousands of poor households in the region. In return, the mining company compensated the people who had lost family members and property, but never compensated the ecological damage that it caused due to their negligence. Apart from the human damage, the region is caught up in an environmental crisis that will have an impact on the rivers and small creeks for years.

15 February 2016. After three months, Samarco re-started their economic activities. Business as usual. The people of Minas Gerais tried to turn the page but the emotional traumas, the ecological disaster, and the sad stories remained. What was stunning, and even shocking, was Samarco's publicity campaign launched that very same day entitled, '*We have to look at this event from different perspectives*'. By setting up a big media campaign and manipulating politicians, Samarco tried to control the public debate about the catastrophe. Doing this, Samarco imposed their version of the events and installed a dominant narrative wherein everybody had a responsibility in the disaster.

As a reaction, Belgian theatre makers Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere took Samarco's call to heart, went to Brazil and *listened* to the different perspectives on the disaster. They spent months in the affected region and collected hours of field recordings containing the testimonies of people who lost friends and families, local politicians and the Samarco management. Apart from listening to those who were directly affected by the disaster, the duo also encountered ecological activists, economists and specialists in trauma recovery. Talking to these 'outsiders' enabled the artists to create a meta-perspective to survey what kind of underlying mechanisms cause these kind of events and how those affected by environmental disasters cope in the aftermath.

*Image 1: Loop Station, from* Mining Stories *(2015) by Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere. Photograph by William van der Voort*

It was not Dereere's and Huysmans's aim to give a voice to the victims of the disaster. Their approach endeavoured to treat each story and testimony as equal, in order to avoid crafting another master-narrative that would overshadow the multiple perspectives on the event. The performance *Mining Stories* became an instrument to interrogate Samarco's dominant narrative—everybody is partly responsible—imposed by the firm's publicity campaign launched in the aftermath of the disaster and to explore the mechanisms that caused the disaster. For Dereere and Huysmans, the stories of pain, despair and anxiety for what the future will bring were the starting point to go beyond the events in Minas Gerais and address the precarious economical and ecological situations that we find all over the world.

Based on my observations on how the artists set to work with their documentation and the translation into the performance, I term *Mining Stories* 'essayistic', according to its artistic strategies and the purpose of the theatre makers. A first feature that brings me to this conclusion is the position of the author/performer on stage. The performer is an enunciating subject that stresses the authorial presence in order to question and problematize the veracity of the subject matter, the notion of authorship and subjectivity in general. In *Mining Stories*, Huysmans steps on stage, assisted by a loop station that she uses to start playing audio samples of the recorded conversations (Image 1). The words of the interviewees are projected on wooden panels flanking the sole performer. We hear an economist, a specialist in traumas, a neuropsychologist, an ecological activist and a jurist. Five different voices commenting on issues that have no direct relation to the disaster. They talk about how the process of remembering and recollecting memories works, about economic growth and the significance of storytelling. This 'methodically unmethodical' character of the essay is a key element in the theatrical essay of Huysmans and Dereere (Verschaffel 1995, 11).

By starting the performance by creating a distance towards the catastrophe, the artists try to go beyond the mere anecdotes and stress the complex web of human emotions, political interests, ethical questions and social issues that are interwoven with disastrous events such as in Minas Gerais. In their attempt not to stage and represent a mere collection of testimony of the victims, the performance addresses and questions fundamental economic mechanisms, political hegemonies and problematic power relations that are at the basis of such ecological catastrophes. The disastrous event itself is, in fact, never discussed during the performance. The stories we hear are about the post-event: feelings that popped up afterwards, the traumas that came to light, the sneaky procedures that were started by the government and the mining company in order to forget everything that happened as soon as possible. By reciting these different perspectives and blending abstract ideas with concrete realities in a non-linear way, *Mining Stories* avoids the danger of a linear and simplified narrativization of the disaster. The performer's actions and gestures on stage while using the looping station are a crucial element the attempt to avoid the pitfall.

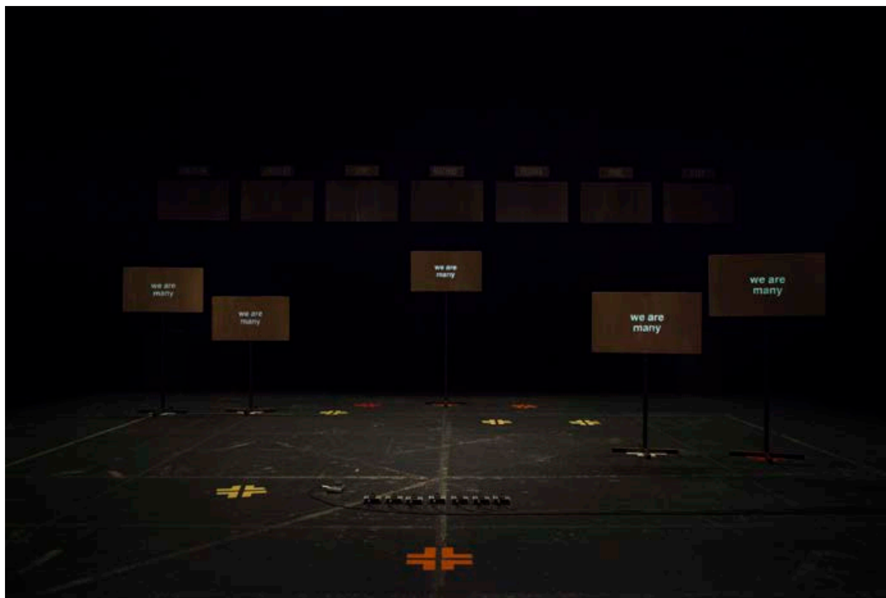


*Image 2: Many Voices, from* Mining Stories *(2015) by Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere.*
*Photograph by Tom Callemin*

As a DJ, Huysmans finds a way through the conversations, opinions and statements. The audience observes how she makes her own associations. Performing live on stage, she is at once 'a critic and a metahistorian, whose engagement with an object is a reflection on the gap—be it cognitive, temporal, cultural, experiential—that distances him or her from that object' and a reflection on how theatre may help to negotiate such a gap (Rascaroli 2017, 189). But the biographical element of the performer of *Mining Stories* challenges this critical position. Huysmans was born in the affected region and spent the first seven years of her life in Mariana, one of the villages that was washed away in 2015. The performer's dual position—as being from, and thus emotionally attached to, that area but also a critical and distanced spectator—articulates 'the question [of] where the essayist should be positioned in relation to the story be told […], because querying the narrating stance and its ethos (its proximity to/distance from the story) is part of the essay's self-

evaluative process' (152). By making Huysman's subjective position explicit, the essayistic approach implemented in *Mining Stories* problematizes the dominant narrative of the events imposed by Samarco 'through the disintegration of narrative agency, the exploration of the margins of narrative temporality as history and the questioning of the teleological knowledge that has conventionally sustained and shaped narrative' (Corrigan 2016, 16).

In this theatrical essay, the explicit mental conversation between performer and the spectators triggers a dialogical relationship that becomes what Laura Rascaroli described as an 'act of constant interpellation'. Within this process you as a spectator are 'called upon to engage in a dialogical relationship with the enunciator, hence to become active, intellectually and emotionally, and to interact' with what is performed (2009, 35). The mix of the stories by Huysmans in order to create certain associations is an open invitation to the spectators to join Huysmans in the process of montage and associations. It is challenging for the audience to cope with the poetic interplay of voices. *Mining Stories*, as a theatrical essay, is written by pressing the pedals of the looping station. By implementing this essayistic strategy via contemporary technology, the spectator is tempted to make his own associations, just like Huysmans does as the performer. This invitation to take a more active role should prevent the spectator from becoming overwhelmed and paralyzed by the opinions and statements heard throughout the performance. The essay invites their readers and spectators to relate to what is (re)presented. Including readers and spectators in 'a true conversation', allows them 'to follow thorough mental processes of contradiction and digression', breaks 'the neutral contract of spectatorship' and forces them 'to acknowledge a conversation, along with its responsibilities' (Lopate 1996, 19). Just like in other essays, the spectator in *Mining Stories* becomes 'an explicit partner in the communicative negotiation; he is overtly asked to enter into dialogue; and to contribute to the creation of a constitutively open and unstable textual meaning' (Rascaroli 2009, 189). The use of quotation and collage and the mixing and matching styles reinforces the dialogical dimension. By juxtaposing facts, quotes and styles *Mining Stories* results in a 'heterogeneous collection of shreds and memories in search of a place where a bashful subject can appear' (Verschaffel 1995, 11).

The implicit invitation towards the audience to join Huysmans in the journey through the stories and events of Minas Gerais is an invitation to join in a quest where our thoughts and actions are being explored and scrutinized. The flood of information makes it impossible to digest and analyse everything that could enable an outsider to judge the situation in terms of responsibility or causality. On the contrary, their essayistic approach leaves space for failure and doubt and offers a possibility for stories of the performance to resonate with the stories of the spectators. *Mining Stories* displays that, once having heard the complexity of the subject matter, it is impossible to judge objectively without being reductive or deficient. As a spectator, being confronted with the stories and the complex web of causes and (shared) responsibilities that are part of what happened in Minas Gerais can be overwhelming. But at the same time, you are invited to, as Huysmans does, 'reclaim an active subjectivity as a kind of editor seeking a face, where to edit means to investigate or to open events with an opinion, thought, or idea' (Corrigan 2011, 171). Thinking through the events of Minas Gerais, *Mining Stories* implicitly demonstrates a form or a place of agency. It is a subtle invitation to the individual spectator to copy and paste, to question and to work a way

through the complexity. The outcome of the concatenation of stories is an appeal to relate, individually and collectively, to similar situations in the world. The format of the essay is a genre *par excellence* that could make people aware of their shared responsibilities and the power they have to react. This focus on agency expresses the aim and desire of the essay to construct 'a speaking "I" who is inquisitive, pensive, searching and self-searching, engaged and self-reflexive. It is an "I" who wishes to address and engage within a shared space of embodied subjectivity' (Rascaroli 2009, 191).

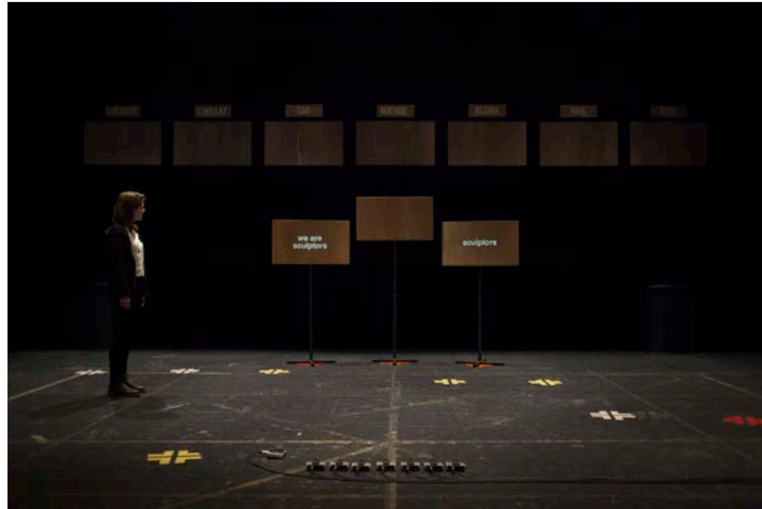


*Image 3: Speaking 'I', from* Mining Stories *(2015) by Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere.*
*Photograph by Tom Callemin*

Already since Montaigne introduced the essay, the essayistic practice operates as 'an investigation into the truth and ethics of social events and behaviour' and as 'an editorial intervention in the news of everyday history' (Corrigan 2011, 154). In *Mining Stories* this editorial dimension is articulated in order to 'unveil and analyse not only the realities and facts that are documented but also the subjective agencies of those realities and facts' (155). Within their essayistic approach, Dereere and Huysmans articulate 'the necessary play of consciously and decisively mobile subjectivities within those reports, reports not only about facts, realities, people, and places discovered and revealed but also about the possibility of agency itself within a state of current affairs that is no longer transparent nor easily accessible' (ibid.). Herein distinguishes the essay itself from the genre of the documentary, whereas the latter claims to 'present unambiguous truth and a relationship to history that is not arbitrary, the essay allows for contradictions and play' (Alter 2007, 52).

## With a little help from the essay: from crisis to *Krisis*

In the last paragraph of *The Essay as Form*, Adorno wonders what the significance is of the essay for his time: 'the relevance of the essay is that of anachronism. The hour is more unfavourable to it than ever' ([1958] 1984, 170). Adorno's statement denounces the essay's unfortunate position, 'crushed between an organized science, in which everyone presumes to control everyone and

everything else' and philosophy (ibid.). When we take his claim to our current times, we may conclude that criticism in general is under pressure. In an age governed and dictated by anxiety, austerity and conservative thought the urge and desire to revaluate and inject the critical qualities of the essay are—at least according to my observations—more pertinent and urgent than ever. Since Montaigne, the essay—in its written or cinematic form—has always fulfilled a pioneering role in generating new engagements with the real, to recite Rascaroli. The further evolution of the written essay and its translation into the essay film demonstrates that the essay continues to be an inspirational form and medium to encounter.

Our 'current standstill' is not only a social, economic, ecological, political, philosophical or ideological crisis. Following Corrigan's earlier analysis, we are (still) finding ourselves above all in a representational crisis. Although our globalized world is getting more complex, and our social, economic, ecological and political problems are entwined, we won't be able to dismantle or overcome this complexity in the near future. The crisis we are facing today is not because of complexity itself but because of our inability to cope with complexity. Anxiety, fear and uncertainty are not problematic. These are genuine human emotions in a society that is rapidly changing on a demographic, social, ethnic, religious and economic level. Our human apparatus that should help us to deal with these transformations is in crisis as well. The complexity of our times and the human emotions in reaction to this complexity is being influenced and exploited by mass media, malicious politicians and corporate interests.

Just as Montaigne, and many after him, tried in their times of crisis, I believe that the essay can operate as an vehicle to break the hegemonic structure that precludes us from dealing with our complex world. With the example of *Mining Stories* I have tried to pronounce that the essay—in a theatrical and performative form—can prevent us from passing swift judgements. Instead, the performance suspends the verdict and offers a mental space for a process of judging in order to reclaim the notion of *krisis*, the act-of-judging. With *Mining Stories*, Dereere and Huysmans pronounces the importance of taking into account conflictual opinions, the complexity of our times and the restrictions of our own judgment. In the approach of the subject matter addressed by *Mining Stories* we don't find answers to overcome or to prevent these kinds of situations. In its modesty, the essay only offers ways *to cope with* complexity, *not to overcome* complexity. Within the essay's modesty lies the key for the essay to be the form *par excellence* to deal with the complexity of our transitory society and to resist the dominant mode of thinking. Characteristic of the latter is the superficial and callous way of judging encouraged and exhilarated by social media. This mode of thinking brought us to a situation that is ruled by oppositions, hostility towards different opinions and the obstinate defence of one's own individual beliefs.

The reason why I think the essay offers a welcome alternative to this dominant mode of thinking—one that does not make our relation to complexity easier—is because the essay offers neither a new Truth nor a Totality. In its mediating form and seen from its Adornian 'childlike freedom', the essay suggests the conception of alternatives with what is already available. Adorno's metaphor expresses the essay's careful and modest attempt to browse through what is seemingly lost, forgotten, secured or achieved. Or as Timothy Corrigan uttered: 'the essay does not create new

forms of subjectivity, realism, or narratives: it rethinks existing ones as dialogue of ideas' (Corrigan 2010, 219). The childlike element is incorporated in the improvident and almost naïve way of exploring a subject. The essay is not aspiring for impressive truth claims. It rather wants to discover new ideas by sharing a process of thinking. By abrogating the obligation and pressure to conclude a text with a vigorous analysis, a convincing statement or a strong opinion, the essay allows a freedom and openness that is vital for the occurrence of critical thought. Based on my own observations and understandings, today the philosophy of the essay is experienced as a relief because of its attention and care for how ideas and discourses germinate and grow. especially because of the incorporation of thoughts on how these ideas and discourses can be challenged, troubled or even fail. It is a welcome alternative for the superficial thinking and the swift judging luxuriating in times dictated by mainstream media. In contrast to the latter, the essay takes time to explore the complexity of a subject matter, to be carried away trough divergent opinions and to be admitted to stay in a state of uncertainty. And this speculative motion can lead to a judgment, to a new discovery but it can also end up in failure or disappointment.

## Notes

[1] Given the topic of this thematic issue of *Performance Philosophy*, I would like to focus on the breeding ground of the essay instead of the genealogy of the essay and its translation in theatre and performance today. For more details and background information, I would like to refer to a text that recently appeared in *Performance Research* (Delbecke 2018). The *Performance Research* text was written as preparation for my PhD proposal. It was a first attempt to share my ideas preliminary to my doctoral research. Building on the legacy of the literary essay and its cinematic offspring, I wanted to construct a modest framework to observe how the essay appears in contemporary performing arts. What are the intersections between the essay in performing arts and its literary and cinematic predecessors? Rather than developing a theory of 'essay theatre', it is my aim in my doctoral research to trace and detect how the strategies of the essay are adopted. The context wherein the essay germinates, grows and is expressed is a crucial element to address in the genealogy of the essay.

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# CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE INESCAPABLE PRESENT

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Global climate change is a crisis on many levels. In this article, I am interested in climate change as a crisis of temporality, affecting our experience of time in two ways. The first is that climate change spans time and tense in ways that make it difficult to conceptualize. For example, climate change raises questions about how our past actions have led us to this moment in time. It also demands that in our present we consider initiatives necessary to decelerate climate change's consequences, but the potential outcomes of climate change and these interventions point to a future of uncertainty. Complicating this idea, climate change as a human and cultural experience follows no past precedent, and the predictions surrounding it often paint a picture of an unimaginable future. The second way time is interwoven with climate change is that it encounters us at a moment when time often feels scarce. Sociologist Judy Wajcman, referring to the works of David Harvey and Nigel Thrift, describes, "Time-space compression is a constant theme in mainstream sociological accounts of post-modern society." She adds that despite the increase of automation and technology, we still have a "time poverty and the paucity of leisure" (Wacjman 2008, 59–60). These two time-centric ideas collide in our assessment of climate change, which suggests a phenomenological quandary: we are confronted with an experience humans have never faced, and we remain slow to respond to it with an urgency climate scientists advocate.

This article explores climate change and its relationship to time by assessing how theatre has portrayed this phenomenological tension. In *Theatre and Phenomenology*, Daniel Johnston describes phenomenology as a movement "aimed at uncovering the nature of our consciousness of the world," and is an "inquiry into how we apprehend" things by understanding that how something appears relates to the way something is (Johnston 2017, 29–30). In this article, I interrogate how both climate change and time appear as phenomena to our consciousness,

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recognizing that human consciousness often struggles to mutually reconcile these two phenomena in this specific relationship. Given the immensity of these two phenomena, I explore climate change and time by noting how these two phenomena coalesce within the confines of the stage, extrapolating what that may tell us about our cultural response toward climate change.

This article has three parts. In the first, I introduce climate change and identify some of the difficulties in understanding it as a crisis. I then suggest some of the limitations and possibilities of using phenomenology to look at climate change on stage. In the second, I utilize Husserlian phenomenology and a theory of presentism to illustrate the problem of apprehending the phenomenon of climate change at a moment when we are culturally conditioned to think primarily about the present. I connect these ideas to the structure and content in Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner, and Jack Thorne's play *Greenland* (2011). Finally, I analyze Heideggerian phenomenology and feelings of angst in relation to the awareness that our existence and future is finite, underlining how the crisis of climate change heightens this angst by presenting a high-stakes crisis we do not want to confront. These views are reflected in Stephen Emmott's 2012 hybrid science presentation/theatrical event staged at the Royal Court Theatre, *Ten Billion*. In conclusion, I argue that theatre presents the crisis of climate uniquely due to its phenomenological particularities, which include how it utilizes time, and its correlation to an ephemeral and inescapable present.

## Contextualizing Climate Change On and Off Stage

In her book *This Changes Everything* Naomi Klein writes, "Faced with a crisis that threatens our survival as a species," we continue to do the "very thing that caused the crisis" (2014, 2). Klein is referring to the continued rampant use of fossil fuels and our dependence on oil and coal. She adds that our unwillingness to dispense with fossil fuels despite their damaging effects on the environment is symbolic of the "cognitive dissonance" that defines our era (3). In this article I contend that part of this cognitive dissonance has to do with the inability of our consciousness to reconcile the intricate relationship between climate change and time. Another key factor, however, is the conceptual expansiveness and elusiveness of climate change. In utilizing the term for this article, I cite historian of science Erik Conway, who differentiates that the term "climate change," unlike "global warming," considers the long-term transformation of our planet and encompasses changes beyond destructive rising temperatures. This includes important shifts in "precipitation patterns and sea level," which will likely have a "greater impact" for life on earth (Conway 2008). As an object of study, climate change is explored in ecology, sociology, geopolitics, epidemiology, geology, and zoology—to name a few concerned disciplines. Climate change's span across these different areas of research demonstrates how understanding it is multifaceted and complex. Moreover, it is a crisis continually reassessed due to its accelerating speed of change. Bill McKibben articulates that "Time might be the toughest part of the equation" in evaluating climate change because it has multiple "feedback loops" (2009, 33). For example, carbon dioxide leads to ice caps melting, and when Arctic ice and permafrost melts and thaws, even more methane gas is released, which in turn is a "more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide" (ibid.). Recent news reports

indicate that polar ice melting is happening even faster than earlier predicted, because “the more [glaciers] melt, the more they drive further melting” (Gabbatiss 2018).

Undoubtedly, climate change defies simplicity in comprehension. Andrew Hoffman’s research on social responses to climate change exemplifies how people are often unfamiliar, confused, and dismissive about it. He provides an example of the misperceptions by the public: “scientists tried to explain that the issue over climate change is about global temperature increases, not regional weather deviations, and that one weather event does not prove or disprove the science” (2015, 2). Ursula Heise describes a similar problem in her work about species extinction in relation to climate change, writing that the science is often “extremely complex, indeterminate, or unknown” (2016, 13). This is not to posit an anti-scientific approach or to give justification to scientific ignorance about the topic, but instead underlines important issues regarding it: given its size and scope, how do our minds conceive climate change and how do we in turn culturally respond. Climate change is not simply a scientific crisis; it is also a pertinent crisis for individuals and for our culture that requires recognition and action. Phenomenology offers a different approach than science toward climate change by helping contextualize these issues, particularly as an approach to explain how our experience of temporality in relation to climate change plays a major part in our response to it.

Before analyzing *Greenland* and *Ten Billion*, it is important to acknowledge an inherent anthropocentrism in this approach. Mark Fortier defines phenomenology in a way that aligns with my objective here: “Phenomenology is not concerned with the world as it exists in itself but with how the world appears (as phenomena) to the humans who encounter it” (2002, 38). In examining how climate change and time appear to *our* consciousness, it is worth mentioning that my phenomenological analysis of these two plays centers on human experience. Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May in *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (2012) aptly explain that the arts “have traditionally been conceived as the activity that most divides humans from ‘nature’,” and that theatre often puts the “emphasis on human conflict in the context of human institutions” (1). These two plays and my analysis follows suit, despite the fact that there is significant work done by theatre and performance scholars that recognizes the larger ecological impact of climate change, and even includes ideas like animal consciousness. Una Chaudhuri, for example, contends that as ecological thought and awareness of animal consciousness have evolved, the binary between human and animal is breaking down. She describes how interspecies performance and animal acts challenge the “epistemological morass to which we humans have exiled the other animals” (2014, 9). Climate change is already greatly affecting the forms of life and places that are most vulnerable, and this includes many animal species. Elizabeth Kolbert’s *The Sixth Extinction* offers a dire warning, claiming that “one third of all reef-building corals, a third of all freshwater mollusks, a third of sharks and rays, a quarter of all mammals, a fifth of all reptiles, and a sixth of all birds are headed toward oblivion” (2014, 17–18). When we do care about other animals and climate change, Heise confirms that stories “gain sociocultural traction to the extent that they become part of the stories that human communities tell about themselves” (2016, 5). We tend to view animals as metaphors (such as the polar bear, which Chaudhuri and Heise have written about) and only see their existence as relevant in relation to human life.

My analysis does little to reconcile this narrative and cultural treatment of other species, and phenomenologically, only considers human consciousness. Considering the framework of this article, it is somewhat unavoidable. If we do not think we have time to respond to climate change on our own behalf, why should we anticipate an urgent response to save other species? Inherent in my evaluation of how we perceive, experience, and finally act toward the temporality of climate change is the fact that there are many gaps in our rationalizations about this crisis. This is also reflective in the gaps of stories we tell about climate change. The struggle to put climate change on stage is evident in the lack of play titles that exist, described by Julie Hudson in "'If You Want to Be Green Hold Your Breath': Climate Change in Theatre." Assessing that the climate change debate is "made for the stage," because it has a ripe combination of ethical dilemma, narrative tension, and special effects, she observes that it is "conspicuous by its absence on the stage" until recently (2012, 260). Amitav Ghosh similarly argues that the stories we tell in the arts and humanities are critical to our understanding of climate change. He writes, "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination," but adds that "if the urgency of a subject were indeed a criterion of its seriousness […] it should surely follow that this would be the principal preoccupation of writers the world over—and this, I think is very far from being the case" (2016, 9, 8). Put simply, we have not done enough in fighting climate change or in telling the story of climate change in a way that can help transform individual and cultural mindsets. The topic of climate change is difficult to stage and also hard to conceptualize given its temporal and geospatial span. Nonetheless, *Greenland* and *Ten Billion* show that it is possible through two unique approaches. The two plays illustrate the phenomenological significance of time in relationship to the climate change crisis and also that theatre offers a rare space to make these elusive temporal aspects of climate change more apprehensible to audiences.

## Husserlian Phenomenology and *Greenland*

Phenomenologists like Husserl and Heidegger provide a dynamic piece to this phenomenological puzzle by positing that time experienced *is* time known: or more reductively, experience is knowledge. Johnston adds that phenomenology "seeks to grasp the modes of experience or 'givenness' of the world," and that it "demands rigorous attention to 'the things themselves' (the object as it is actually experienced)" (2017, 29). This is a reason why temporality is such an appropriate object of consideration for phenomenology: time is a nonmaterial thing that can be challenging to understand apart from the experiential, and time simultaneously shapes what it is we experience. This was evident to the early phenomenologists like Husserl. In his book *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time,* Husserl evaluates the flow of time-consciousness, explaining that most phenomena inhabit a temporal moment. He describes that such phenomena are then given shape within our consciousness through mental processes like perception and memory.

To illustrate how perceiving a phenomenon is often a temporal experience, Husserl refers to the duration of perception when one listens to a melody (1991, 28) (and I would argue that one's apprehension during a theatre performance is analogous). The way our consciousness works,

Husserl contends, is that we have temporal apprehensions of a tone that when played lasts a duration that "endures and fades away." In truth, Husserl affirmed that he did not "hear" the melody, but rather a "single present tone," while the tones that have faded remain part of his retention in the flow of consciousness. Each note is part of an ephemeral now, which once played, stays in his consciousness as his mind connects the notes: the flow of consciousness corresponds with the flow of the melody. That is until he is conscious of what Husserl considered a "continuity of phases as 'immediately past,'" which signals that the melody is over. He clarifies: "After the melody has died away, we no longer have it perceived as present, but we do still have it in consciousness. It is not a present melody but one just past" (34–38). This past melody then remembered becomes a re-represented past, never a past relived exactly in memory. Our memory thus remembers an ephemeral performance or temporal experience differently than its actuality. James Mensch adds that Husserl believed we "anticipate on the basis of past experience," providing the example that if we continually experience A then B, then the "occurrence of A leads by association to the thought of the accompanying B" (2010, 215). This also has important consequences for climate change, because much of what Husserl describes clarifies why climate change—with its many threads of phenomena and projected, unknown affects—make it difficult to anticipate what is next. For example, in terms of weather patterns and climate norms, A may no longer lead to B.

To fully grasp the implications of Husserlian phenomenology, climate change, and theatre, I also need to explain briefly how presentism ties into this phenomenological examination. Presentism is a weighted term that can convey multiple meanings in philosophy. Craig Bourne evaluates the view known as "ersatzer presentism" in "A Theory of Presentism." This version of presentism allows claims that it is not that "only one time exists, but that only one time has a concrete realization" (2006, 11): that is, the present. In this presentism, there is still room for a time series, such as something occurring "'earlier than' without being committed to the existence of real, or rather, concretely realised *relata*, something anathema to presentism" (ibid.). Ersatzer presentism, Bourne argues, avoids the strict demarcations of the past, present, and future without dispelling the fact that events still happen in different moments of time that can be viewed in relation to each other. Philosopher D.H. Mellor makes a similar argument in his books *Real Time* and *Real Time II*, expressing that *dates* are fixed, but *tenses* are not, given that tenses change, i.e. what is in the future will soon be present and then be past (1998, 22). Mellor contends that there are "inescapable objective truths about what is past, present, and future, even though nothing really is past, present, or future in itself," continuing that "tense is not an aspect of reality" but it is "an inescapable mode of perceiving, thinking and speaking about reality" (Mellor 1981, 6). That time appears tensed is arguably a phenomenological way of looking at time, because it appears to us that time functions this way and we utilize this belief in our language and perceptions.

Ersatzer presentism "treats the past and the future as ontologically on a par, in the sense that it denies that there are any concrete truthmakers located there" (Bourne 2006, 12). And what about the future? Bourne differentiates past and future through a branching of time, wherein the past has a one-one relation to the present and the future has a one-many relation to the present, i.e. it branches off from the present to many possible futures that could be, even though only one of

those branched futures will actually be realized (14–18). Bourne states that this allows us to agree with the platitude that the past is fixed and the future is open (12). Considering presentism through our scope of experience, we "know" the/our past is set, but because the future is experienced as open, branching in many possible directions, we have a hard time knowing what it will entail or become. We are grounded in the present, as Husserl suggests, because that is how we experience the world through our consciousness. Bourne's and Mellor's arguments corroborate that while we often utilize tense in speaking about the past and future, they are not consistent realities of time but instead are helpful to explain time.

Confronted with the uncertainty of the future, and particularly in the face (and fear) of climate change, our consciousness attempts to treat the future as if it will be like the past—narrow, conclusive. Husserlian explanations of our consciousness and how our anticipations are created from experience of the past support this. Based on our past experience and knowledge, we create a picture of our present reality and anticipate what it is we will experience ahead. Unfortunately, climate change does not appear to play by these tidy rules, because what we have known about our climate, our existence within it, and how to survive may have to alter radically. Kolbert writes a similar thought about mass extinction in relation to climate change: "past performance is no guarantee of future results" (2014, 268). The past will not show us how to adapt to the new world before us. We find safety in tense demarcations when challenged by a visualization of a future we do not want to encounter. Thinking further about Husserlian phenomenology and presentism, our consciousness receives information about climate change in the form of statistics and prognostications from media sources. Yet, simultaneously, we are enveloped in a presentist culture that inundates each of us with other stimuli. We cannot cleanly sort out the "notes" of the climate change "melody" from all the other "notes" we receive, and we then have difficulty in consciously creating a composite "flowing picture" of climate change. We hear about melting Arctic glaciers, upticks of natural disasters, and the vast array of consequences attributable to climate change in a digital/24-hour news cycle, but what does that all mean for us in this present moment that is also barreling down on us?

This presentist sentiment is articulated near the end of the play *Greenland*, written by Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner, and Jack Thorne, when the character Sarah states:

> It's not like I don't ever watch the news. I see the fires. The floods. But two minutes later it's all about the recession. Or some—election [...] They say we're all going to die. Then there's an ad break full of happy songs and adverts for airlines. (2011, 89)

Sarah's words echo the common feeling of being overwhelmed by climate change. She questions what to believe or focus on when everything happens quickly, and when she is simultaneously inundated with other information about things that may also need her immediate (in)attention. Such reactions toward the time-pressing demands of climate change appear throughout *Greenland*. In its use of time, the play offers an assortment of scenes set in the present, with several characters struggling with some aspect of climate change. The panoply of scenes and characters creates an intriguing picture of how the scope of climate change and its effects are far-reaching

and diverse. The playwrights crafted a play with several storylines set in different spaces and times with little indication of when a scene may shift, often introduce new characters, and leave ambiguous endings to many of the storylines. These choices symbolize the boundlessness of climate change that ultimately affects everyone on stage (and in the audience too). Scene two begins with the stage directions: "*The company try and respond to a series of climate-based quiz questions. They don't know the answers*. *Music and a large amount of plastic falls from above. The company scatter it about the space*" (4). This moment conjures a phenomenological demonstration of disarray. There seems to be something about the phenomenon of climate change that elicits such an experiential response of not knowing solutions or answers, which results in chaos.

The disjointed and frenzied feel of the play continues. Over the course of the play a young woman, Lisa, becomes a passionate new crusader in the environmental fight by joining radical protestors. In her first scene, Lisa is with her mother Paula at the grocery store. Having read books such as *Climate Wars*, she has come to the grocery store to protest the use of plastic packaging, the global transportation of food, and the waste of produce and meats that should not be sold off-season. In relation to the argument I am developing here, Lisa offers a critique of presentist cultural norms. But this is undermined by the other characters: Paula retorts, "Yes but we recycle" (6), and Lisa's father later responds that the books she reads are creating "a campaign of fear," and that global warming has happened time and again through "geological time" (16). Thinking about this response with a Husserlian view of experience, we can see why similar arguments continue to find saliency amongst deniers; according to those make such arguments, because there have been weather shifts before, current weather problems do not signify that the climate is irreversibly changing. The character Phoebe works for the Department of Energy and falls in love with Ray, a climate scientist. Ray concedes that he expects "the sixth mass extinction of life on the planet […] Half the species gone by the end of the century," but despite this evidence, admits, "I want a future. I want a family. A family one day" (51). Ray has the impulse to have a family despite knowing he is part of a species that may go extinct, and that it is not a logical want because of what he knows about the realities of climate change. Nevertheless, he has a desire to remain present-focused and build a life like those before him; in the past a person did not have to consider experiences like mass extinction due to environmental instability.

Later in the play, Alamir and Seydou, members of the Mali ministry of the environment, directly address the audience in a rupture of the fourth wall as the play shifts to the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference. Such moments disrupt not only the space of the stage reality but also its temporal boundaries; are we to believe that they are in Copenhagen during 2009 as they say they are, or do we understand they are speaking as actors/characters in a play within the temporal space of fiction? Or both? Or neither? As the two characters describe the devastating impact Mali has already experienced due to climate change, Seydou asks the audience if they even know the capital of Mali, and Alamir replies, "that lady almost had her hand up" (49). Seydou and Alamir acknowledge that the crisis of climate change is hitting certain geographic areas hardest now, and the present experience of climate change is not comparable everywhere. For example, as one geographic area of the world experiences droughts and wildfires, another area may experience high levels of rainfall and flooding. Moreover, given the economic and governmental discrepancies

across the globe, how climate change impacts each region is presently catastrophic for one area and not yet severe in another. This moment between Alamir and Seydou also closes the phenomenological gap of time and space, fiction and truth, for the audience watching the play. Bert O. States describes the "representational mode" of theatre as always containing the potential for such moments of phenomenological self-reflection, when theatre can say, "'Why should we pretend this is an illusion. We are in this together'" (1985, 181). This is such a moment in the play when the "we" expands beyond the characters and includes the audience in recognizing climate change's real and current global impact. This moment also highlights the inescapable present of the theatre, as the actors/characters interacting with the audience push back against the safe fiction the stage can provide. In this break from illusion, the play cuts through a theatrical flow of performance boundaries, and thus our consciousness, by halting the mechanics of cognitive detachment that may otherwise permit one to think that what is on stage is only artifice.

*Greenland* shows a representation of presentism that can be understood in philosophical terms. Throughout the play, characters either try to downplay the effects of climate change as other business in their present life consumes them, or they come to the distressing realization that it has never been like this before. These two responses seem to paralyze any institutional or widespread progressive action against climate change, which the international climate conference portrayed in the play exposes. Media theorist Douglas Rushkoff writes about similar cultural attitudes in *Present Shock,* assessing that the "twenty-first [century] can be defined by presentism" (2013, 3). Thinking the present is all that is real or matters is not only an academic or theoretical way of thinking about climate change, but it is also a mindset encouraged by many operations in our current cultures' structures. Ruskhoff describes many attributes of a presentist culture, where we live in a "distracted present"—one in which meaningless pop culture events can hold our attention while those forces "immediately before us are ignored" (4). Climate change is a fitting example of one of those things immediately before us that we nonetheless ignore as our present is shaped by "time-space compression," to recall Wacjman's description I cited at the beginning of this article. Rushkoff explicates that the constant stream of news and information via social media and the Internet at all times of the day makes it nearly impossible to think ahead about something like climate change and its endless complications.

In this way, even as we are cautioned by climate change scientists that we are not doing enough in the present, we are distracted from taking action by our preoccupation with that very "present." In *Theatre and Time*, David Wiles describes how the "ever increasing speed of trains, jet aircraft and digital telecommunications [...] means that capitalism puts a premium on ephemerality, and if the present is volatile and subject to instant change, there can be no point in engaging with the past or in long-term planning for the future" (2014, 60). Our present distresses us because we fear the crisis of climate change; yet our present also drowns us in the information and busyness that shapes this cultural zeitgeist. Understanding these phenomena, it perhaps is not all that surprising that climate change solutions and strategizing that requires more time, more effort, and more money are not easily finding traction. This non-response is on full display in *Greenland*, evident when Seydou and Alamir are ignored at the climate conference.

In the *New York Times*, Matt Wolf describes *Greenland*'s set as a "gaping bleak, black hole in which anything is possible, given the impossible mess we are making of life on Earth" (2011). The set appears to be a phenomenological representation of climate change in the play; *Greenland* confronts the anxiety that we, spatially and temporally, will cease to be, dissolving into the darkness. What better image than a black hole of a set to represent this idea? The final stage image of the play is the entire cast on stage, and the stage directions describe that while one character calls out another's name, "*The snow consumes everyone*" (Buffini et. al 2011, 95). This symbolic moment conveys a sense that we will all ultimately be consumed by nature. The stage space becomes one where time is irrelevant and we return to nothing. It represents an experience of climate change's consequences that grasps the severity of this crisis.

*Greenland* illustrates the merging of space and time in both its theatrical deployment of multiple storylines and set design. Doing so, it highlights how space and time are being redefined by climate change. Sociologist Barbara Adam comparably evaluates how in our modern life, "Time has been compressed to its limit […] No-where and now-here have become interchangeable" (2004, 146). As time is compressed to the point of collapse of meaning in our culture, she makes clear that it feels like "there is no before and after, no cause and effect" (ibid.). Presentism can produce such outlooks. This sentiment also encapsulates the time haziness of climate change, which the overall structure of *Greenland* also depicted with its tangled storylines, reappearing and disappearing characters, its breaking and resumption of the fourth wall, and its blend of minimalism and high theatricality that gives it a feeling of no-where and now-here. It is hard to anticipate what comes next within the play, perhaps replicating our world outside the theatre doors. The play confronts the limitations of our Husserlian consciousness, showing us that our perceptions of the past will not give us much of a guide for the future. This is even truer in a culture that is distorted by presentism. As a theatrical intervention on climate change, *Greenland* was not without its critics.[1] However, as a phenomenological depiction of climate change, it captures a temporal confusion by exhibiting how we are grounded in the present, that the past provides no direction how to solve this crisis, and the unknowable future looms ahead like a black hole.

## Heideggerian phenomenology and *Ten Billion*

What may lie ahead can evoke feelings of dread and fear. Our consciousness struggles to make sense of the potential consequences of climate change, which are discordant with the way we want to imagine our future. Despite our desire to think that now is all that matters, we are still temporal beings, and aware that time continues to move forward. Heidegger's thoughts on time and phenomenology are relevant to this assessment. His ideas are helpful in revealing how our being is inseparable from how we experience the world, and that as beings we are temporal, constructed of an individual past, present, and future that shape how we view life. Time in this regard is ontologically relevant. As temporal beings there are instants of time where we are aware of our temporality, given our existence is "finite, limited" and it "inevitably, must meet its ultimate end" (P. Hoffman 2006, 232). For Heidegger, this awareness of finitude is not a fleeting moment of realization, but instead an ongoing and lived experience. Heidegger, similarly to Husserl,

considered how our past shapes our present. However, Heidegger believed that our past also shapes our identity and our future, and that in facing our future's inevitable ending, we confront our past again. Our sense of the past is therefore created in our experience with the knowledge we have a future, and this awareness of the future informs our present (just as our past does, albeit for different reasons). Johnston writes of Heidegger's ideas:

> Not only are human beings inextricably linked to the world in which they live but they are also thrown between possibility (the way things might be) and actuality (the way things are) […] The meaning of Being, including human existence, is only sensible in so far as being is always within time—the fact that life begins at birth and ends at death gives meaning to what happens in between. (2017, 31)

Consequently, our past, present, and future are created with the knowledge we have of a *limited* future. This not only affects our perception of our personal timeline but also shapes our view that we are a "determinate self, a self endowed with a particular life history" (P. Hoffman 2006, 232). Heidegger writes that "death is ontologically constituted by mineness and existence," and that it is "not an event, but a phenomenon to be understood existentially" (Heidegger 2006, 223).

Heidegger's words articulate the surreal realization that at some point, as temporal beings, we simply will not be. In his view, this is so peculiar because death's actuality is unlike any other experience we have in being, thus creating certain "*Angst*" (232). Heidegger even suggests, arguably, that this Angst does not stem from fear of one's death, per se, but arrives as an "attunement of the Da-sein, the disclosedness of the fact the Da-sein exists as thrown into being-*toward*-its-end" (232–233). Johnston further explains that most of the time "humans are caught up in their everyday concern with practical engagements with the world," but there still exists an "anxiousness toward existence" that we try to settle, and specifically in regard to our ending/death (Johnston 2017, 42). In facing climate change, we are confronted with a considerable number of predictions about the end of existence for many species and potentially catastrophic losses of human life (Kolbert 2004). This phenomenological experience of considering a future comprised of widespread plights—which includes more natural disasters, more diseases due to warmer temperatures, and political instability exacerbated by fighting over limited resources—challenges our sense of existence in the present. It is nearly incomprehensible to imagine this future when our collective past has never told this story. The angst we may feel about our own death and end is heightened under the future threats of climate change, which pushes against the idea that even our existence as a species is a given. Climate change can evoke a dreadful angst of the future and our end. This feeling shadows our present and paralyzes us in its magnitude.

The angst of this reality is on full display in the play *Ten Billion*. Directed by Katie Mitchell at the Royal Court Theatre and "performed" by computational neuroscientist Stephen Emmott, the play is essentially Emmott conveying his ideas on the problem of overpopulation and climate change. The collaborative production stemmed from struggles Mitchell had in creating a play about climate change until the realization: "just put the science onstage as is" (Trueman 2014). Therefore, she put a scientist on stage to lecture. The website for the Royal Court cites names in correlation with the production, including their theatrical roles, but Emmott's name is listed without a designation. He

is not noted as "actor," "performer," or "scientist." Emmott describes the process of the performance:

> It is like nothing else I have ever done before and has involved a great deal of revision. My first scripts were too formal. It was as if I was writing for a journal. I have had to find a more naturalistic voice. I am not learning lines, however, just a set of points that I want to make as the show progresses. Katie will then introduce the kind of tempo that the show needs. I want to change people's ideas about the impact we are having on the planet. (McKie 2012)

Emmott performs the role of educator as he guides the audience through multiple causes and effects of climate change. The play quickly progresses into a litany of data he shares regarding the rapid increase of our earth's population. Michael Billington described Emmott's performance/lecture as using "an array of statistics to reinforce his argument" about the dire effects of our population surging toward ten billion people, especially as it does so under the umbrella of climate change (Billington 2012). He also adds, "Some will argue this is a lecture, not theatre. But the distinction seems nonsensical," indicating that while the performance occurs in a theatre space, it challenges the definitional boundaries of what is designated as a play. In the play, Emmott asserts that by 1930 we had hit two billion people and by 1960, three billion. Emmott adds that as the population number swells, our need for water, food, land, transportation, and energy match these rising numbers, and in turn, "we are now accelerating the rate at which we're changing our climate" (Emmott 2013, 44). He thoroughly presents how we as a people, our environment, and world have progressed in the past two centuries, and then he assesses where we are currently because of these supposed advances. This defining shift from the past into the present allows Emmott to portray how our actions across time are entangled in the crisis of climate change.

Emmott's arguments cover many angles: our meat consumption, the amount of water used to make chocolate, our use of oil and gas—where he explicates he is "not worried about running out [...] I'm worried that we're going to continue to use them"—the amount of cars we continue to make and scrap, how much we will fly this year, and how much we are transporting various manufactured goods across the globe (86). Identifying these cultural habits that have been established over decades, he then turns to the climate, evaluating how quickly climate change is accelerating because of these behaviors. Shifting to the future, he estimates what the world will look like in 2050, how many people will live in cities (70%), and that our food production may encounter unmanageable conditions with soil degradation and desertification of agricultural lands. Further, he warns of the potential for pathogens that devastate crops in an ever-changing climate to which we have not adapted, and increased water shortages that will make it hard to water said crops (135). Emmott suggests the potential solutions of green energy and geo-engineering are not only problematic but too late to implement effectively. Emmott paints a broad, ominous landscape, which also makes note of celebrities and their halfhearted eco-measures and incompetent and indifferent politicians. He concludes the performance with little hope to offer. Billington describes: "He is quiet, humane and deeply concerned and when he says, at the end, 'I think we're fucked' you have to believe him" (Billington 2012).

Despite mixed reviews of the play, Emmott's stage play importantly highlights the crisis of climate change that has evolved through time and the unique challenge it poses for our phenomenological apprehension. Part of the play's phenomenological achievement, I argue, is Emmott's unwillingness to relent and its phenomenological collapse of the real and unreal. Billington described the production: "This is one of the most disturbing evenings I have ever spent in the theatre" (2012), because the play awakens a feeling of unease through the Heideggerian anxiety/angst it rouses. Other critics voiced similar thoughts. This response to the play is aided by the resistance to fiction that the performance establishes through its form as a lecture. Writing about the body of the actor in a play, Stanton Garner described such a mix of the corporeal and fictional: "Jointly claimed by actor and character, the body on stage is also implicated in the real and the imaginary that underlie the twinness of dramatic fiction" (2004, 44). Yet, in *Ten Billion*, Emmott immediately states that he is not an actor but a scientist, making the information that Emmott shares that much more haunting. There is no fictive present to hide behind in our audience presence/present. We do not get to dismiss him as only a character. In this space that is so often filled with the make-believe and imaginary fictions of created worlds, there are now facts and information about our reality. We do not get to do what Rushkoff describes, and inhabit a distracted present of "nowness." Emmott unrelentingly paints this temporal arc of climate change while audiences are held captive by a truth about our existence. In this branch of the future that Emmott describes, there is no respite.

The play is not an attempt to acquaint us with climate change or feel an empathetic response. Emmott's thesis is that we are losing the fight against climate change, and he had no desire, and ultimately Mitchell did not either, to sugarcoat this reality. Emmott instead wants to command our attention. Considering a Husserlian phenomenological experience of this play, the audience's consciousness is provided a clear composite picture during this hour spent in the theatre: we have no precedent in our past for this crisis but it is also not a problem we can ignore. That is not an experience we often are given in the theatre or when informed about climate change elsewhere. Through a Heideggerian lens, the play sharply critiques our presentist attitudes and mindsets, reminding us that our continued existence is not guaranteed—eliciting a response toward climate change that conjures Heideggerian angst. As a presentation of time and climate change, Emmott informs us how our past decisions have led us here and points out the ways we personally and collectively continue to make eco-damaging choices, favoring a presentist-rewarding culture of consumerism. We may not want to hear about the future Emmott describes and what that means for our Being, beyond rescue though it may be. We can also no longer afford to ignore his warning.

## A Present We Can No Longer Escape

The two plays I discuss in this paper are British works, staged at prestigious theatres in London. As a US American concerned about climate change, the theatrical response has been quieter in my own country. Under the current political administration, the very words "climate change" have become taboo, and its mention has been removed from countless online resources by the Environmental Protection Agency (Friedman 2017). It is an act of cognitive dissonance and gross

irresponsibility, rooted in a belief that if we no longer read about it or address this crisis, maybe it can be an experience we can avoid altogether. Andrew Hoffman describes that climate change itself will not likely force people to be "increasingly open to the reality of climate change" until catastrophes continue to affect the economic market "and costs begin to rise for both business and the consumer" (A. Hoffman 2015, 86). The costs are already rising, evident by the increase of severe natural disasters and record-breaking season temperatures that are creating a multitude of consequential and expensive problems.

Balancing both a Husserlian understanding about how past experience creates future anticipations, and a Heideggerian sense of time that is connected to the angst regarding our finite existence, it is obvious why the concept of climate change does not sit well with us. Climate change spans time and inhabits all regions of the Earth, though its effects are experienced unequally. It does so while challenging the very possibility of our existence at a moment where the present can already feel incessantly busy, and our lives are spread thin by other demanding political, economic, and social causes. What makes climate change problematic for our consciousness to perceive as a phenomenon is that we as a species cannot recall an experience like it. Even though there is scientific consensus about human activity contributing to climate change, there is still reluctance to accept this reality in entirety. We do not want to see past our present horizon into this future, which appears almost apocalyptic in description. In light of Heidegger, death is something we struggle to comprehend on an individual scale (the strangeness of realizing we will cease to be), so of course we struggle processing it on such an epic scale. How can we in our consciousness fathom something like that?

In the theatre, where our immediate attention is demanded, and where there is a living connection and co-presence between the spectator and the character onstage, there is still hope. Maybe in watching a play, audiences can empathize with and/or think about the climate scientist, the young protestor, or the government politician, all of whom may struggle to do what is most effective to help reverse the effects of climate change. Theatre is perhaps one of the last vestiges that can break the time-numbing hum of presentism and busyness that dominates so many other experiences by demanding our time with its own conventions. Rayner (2006, 21) writes, "Conditioned to the conventions of time, we ignore the daily coercions we submit to"—but in the dark of the theatre, with many of those coercions put on pause, we are offered the rarest of gifts: time to witness. In our perception of the phenomena on stage and the phenomena of climate change and time, we get a chance for the flow of our consciousness to parallel the "melody" of the play performed in a present experience that asks for our time and our focus. We are not allowed to also multitask and check our emails, posts, or texts, or at least not encouraged to. Johnston argues a similar point, writing, "Most of the time, we don't even notice time," but in contrast theatre is so "deeply imbued with time and history, it lends itself as an obvious vehicle for conscious investigation of these phenomenological aspects of existence" (2017, 159–160). Time and climate change can find a rare and compelling life on the stage as an audience phenomenologically encounters both in ways that most experiences outside the theatre doors do not, and cannot, mirror. Where else can the crisis of climate change be enclosed by space and time, quickened and slowed down with the skill of pacing, and attached to a shared presence/present of performer and

audience? Within the distinctive phenomenological sphere of the theatre, I assert we should hold hope that theatrical representations can help reshape our consciousness, and thus our conscience by the stories it tells and the people it reaches. For this is no longer a crisis we can temporally or experientially escape.

## Notes

[1] Michael Billington (2011) for the *Guardian* gave *Greenland* three out of five stars. He described it possessing "intersecting narratives," and stated that the play "while well staged, lacks focus." He also wrote that the play "stabs the conscience without offering a perceptible point of view." Paul Taylor (2011) for the *Independent* called Greenland one of "conceptual compositeness," and "an intellectual extravaganza" that was "brilliantly directed [...] stunningly well designed." Taylor complimented the play for being "undeniably stimulating," but nevertheless concluded, "I couldn't give a damn about any of the multiply-authored characters," because the play lacked "felt life."

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## Biography

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PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

# THEATRE AT THE IMPASSE: POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND BLITZ THEATRE GROUP'S *LATE NIGHT*

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## I. Introduction: The Theatre of the Impasse

To speak of impasse is to speak of something other than crisis. Where crisis finds no decision, there we discover the impasse. This is important because a crisis, whatever else it may be, can only be realised as a 'crisis' once it is answered by the decision that it has called forth. Reinhart Koselleck once wrote that 'crisis', from its earliest roots in the ancient Greek language, 'aimed at a definitive, irrevocable decision' (2002, 237). Decision consists in a singular accomplishment: the assertion of 'man's' mastery over the world, over his own destiny, by means of his political mastery over himself. This cannot be true of the impasse. For in the first place, impasse is that which renders every decision inoperative. One cannot 'decide' on the impasse, as one might decide on the 'state of exception'. Carl Schmitt's well-rehearsed aphorism—the very essence of his political theology—states: 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception' ([1922] 2005, 5). But impasse and exception are wholly incompatible, however proximate they may appear to be, insofar as the latter belongs to the power of the sovereign to decide; while the former testifies to the nullity of every decision—and thus to sovereignty's incapacitation. Impasse is not only Hamlet's indecision; it is Lear's 'poor, bare, forked animal' (Act II Scene IV; 1982, 848). To encounter the impasse is to accede to that which undoes the dyadic structure of crisis-decision that belongs to the voluntarism of both the sovereign exception and its justification in political theology. 'We are at an impasse' is the plaintive cry of the

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helpless, not the rallying call of the strong. Impasse in the strictest sense is 'impassable.' What it demands is impassivity not sovereignty. It can be suffered or endured or withstood, if one is resilient enough. It cannot be transcended.

The same dilemma can be found in the theatre in its post-dramatic form. Where theatre traditionally presented a world that was in crisis, contemporary theatre—or at least much of it since Beckett—has sought out the limits of its own possibility, by reaching into the impasses of its capacity to represent a world as such. It is worth recalling in passing, since it has some bearing on what comes next, Hans-Thies Lehmann's criticism of Ionesco's theatre of the absurd, as a theatre that still 'remained a world representation' (2006, 54). But it is not the fact that contemporary theatre no longer seeks to represent a world that makes it a theatre of the impasse. What makes it a theatre of the impasse is that it has lost faith in the power of decision. Where once decision belonged equally to both politics and theatre, through which a crisis in either the dramatic world or the world of states and princes, consuls and diplomats, would lead to a final resolution of the conflict on the stage (or on the world stage), now crisis, for the theatre, designates an unassignable place and time that fails to coincide with the arrival of the sovereign.

One might also think the theatre of the impasse as embarking on the 'wayless' path of *aporia*—where it inhabits a space of irresolvable contradiction—providing insight into that which is essentially incompleatable. A theatre that makes manifest *aporia*, in other words—seeking neither its resolution, nor (in more explicitly dialectical terms) its reconciliation—is a theatre that is quite unlike the theatre of crisis that tarries with the *aporetic*—with the difficult, with the unsurpassable—but only with the aim of overcoming and thereby excluding or banishing it. The theatre of the impasse not only confronts *aporia*, it dwells within its uncomfortable entanglements—only in this way does it become both a source of—and thereby invitation to—critical thought. Adorno identified it, not with the theatre of Brecht, but with Beckett's universe of clowns and antiheroes—a theatre that is 'as crepuscularly grey as after sunset and the end of the world' ([1970] 2002, 81). Here it is worth bearing in mind Adorno's definition of negative dialectics that 'will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope' ([1966] 2004, 406). If I may borrow from Gillian Rose (1992) her inspired expression—this is a theatre of the 'haunting impasse'—an impasse that is not 'welcomed', since to welcome it would 'transfigure *aporia* into *euporia*' (73)—into riches, abundance, and wealth. The theatre of the impasse, it will be argued, gives up theatre's riches, in order to embrace its poverty of means, its insufficiency, and its inadequacy. This essay aims to unfold this impoverished theatre, while excavating the aporetic site in which it is located as being one of the impasse. I approach this problematic of the theatre of the impasse in two ways. In the first half of the essay, through a theoretical engagement with political and theological understandings of crisis, and the proposal that impasse undoes the discourse of 'crisis'—specifically insofar as it enacts what I shall term the 'teleological suspension of decision.' In the second part, I pursue this idea in relation to a contemporary example of the theatre of the impasse—Blitz Theatre Group's production *Late Night*, performed at the Barbican theatre in London in 2016. I argue that while this theatre stages the crisis of the European polity, what it reveals is something else: that it should be understood, in allegorical terms, as a theatre that reveals the limits of human sociality as being fundamental to the experience of impasse.

## Theatre, Crisis, and Politics of the Impasse

To confront impasse in terms of that which is, strictly-speaking, impassable, is to grasp the concept of crisis in stark contradistinction to the way it is theorised by political philosophy. Richard T. Peterson (1996) provides the following definition of impasse that afflicts the realm of the political:

> "Impasse" here means an incapacity not only to find political solutions to outstanding difficulties but also to find terms in which to articulate those difficulties in a concrete and illuminating way. [...] The idea of an impasse implies not simply the existence of difficulty or unresolved problems, nor does it have exclusively to do with persisting injustices and oppressions. Rather, use of this idea implies that specific issues count as symptoms or expressions of problems with the framework in which social action takes place, and so with the ability of society to maintain itself as a stable process. Impasse is reflected in society's repeated failure to resolve problems that represent threats to its constitutive institutions. (22)

This definition is far from being inadequate. And yet it changes little in the structure of the concept of impasse that would persuade anyone who cared to look that it has been sufficiently distinguished from the notion of crisis, which it is seen to compel. Impasse designates the failure of the political system to remedy that which threatens the functioning of its institutions: the contradictions to which they give rise and the various gridlocks by which political, economic, or social crises are provoked. When we have reached 'an impasse', when all talks and all hopes of resolution to our difficulties have faded or been abandoned or have broken down, then we are in the midst of full-blown crisis.[1]

As far as political theory is concerned, impasse is to be conceived in terms of a relational dysfunction, operating between two discursive polarities. On the one hand, it appears as the contradiction that engenders a systemic crisis: impasse signifies a profound loss of legitimacy at the administrative level of rational social organisation, and a failure of the norms that motivate its agents' choices;[2] on the other hand, it provides a name for the repeated frustration, evidenced at a conceptual level—at the imaginative level of thought and at the level of existing political discourse—of the solutions that would allow the crisis to be brokered into an accord. Impasse occurs when there is a dearth of 'good ideas'—those 'solvents of impasse', in the words of Yanis Varoufakis (2017). To say this is a standard intuition of crisis discourse is simply to say that the impasses of thought and structural contradiction constitute its two basic presuppositions; they provide the coagulants of crisis. For Christopher Pierson (2011), impasse is understood as 'both an acute crisis in the political institutions of the advanced capitalist world [and as] a crisis of confidence in the capacity of conventional tools of political analysis to diagnose, let alone offer remedies for, this political malaise' (30). Bill Martin (1996) states that the 'present impasse of politics' is nothing other than our 'present inability to think the polis' under the conditions of contemporary capitalism (3). Meanwhile, Peterson advocates a structural analysis of the 'inadequacies of liberal knowledge-politics' that would specifically target the impasses of

contemporary liberalism. 'Liberalism today,' he writes—he is writing during the 1990s, but his assessment nonetheless remains extremely relevant—'is marked by a combination of institutional triumph and political exhaustion'. Its triumph lies in the global extent of its hegemony; its political exhaustion appears in the form of the various contradictions and political emergencies to which it gives rise but for which it has no answer. These are, he describes, *inter alia*: the democratic deficit, the 'degeneration' of political discourse, the 'flattening' out of the public sphere, the contradiction of productivity and economic growth, as well as the ecological consequences of over-consumption as they are now becoming manifested through the effects of global climate change (Peterson 1996, 29–30). Quite understandably, each of these analyses starts from the perspective of political crisis in order to identify a structural impasse—the contradictions and incongruities of the underlying system—to which critical thought must apply itself in all its creative vitality and with all its resourcefulness in order to diligently root out the causes of the malaise. Thus, impasse belongs to the discursive form of a diagnostics of crisis: of its reasons, ongoing effects, and far-reaching consequences—and ultimately to its prognosis and eventual (or so it is imagined) overcoming. An impasse is something to be 'broken' by an act of political will—by decision. In this way, impasse serves the analytic of crisis, in the same way that the symptom, with its modes of description, tracing the progressive course of a pathology, serves the analytic of disease. From this much can be learned about the nature of the political failings of a system, but little of the nature of impasse as such.

In the theatre of the impasse, it is the reverse that is true. If crisis discloses impasse, it is the impasse itself, rather than crisis, that emerges as the heterological terrain inhabited by the theatre. How, first, should one describe the scene, landscape, or *topos* of the 'impasse'? Lauren Berlant has offered a quite distinct way of addressing the problem of impasse in her book *Cruel Optimism*. There, for Berlant, impasse is characterised by an affective experience of extreme precarity. It is a 'formal term for encountering the duration of the present, and a specific term for tracking the circulation of precariousness through diverse locales and bodies' (Berlant 2011, 199). Having arrived at an impasse, one finds oneself lost in a 'cul-de-sac'—a term for which, as Berlant reminds her reader, impasse was invented as a substitute or synonym. Impasse is a 'middle without boundaries, edges, a shape…': it is experienced in 'transitions and transactions'—but where nothing has 'traction' (200). What is peculiar to its specific spatio-temporality is its 'decompositional' structure; its formlessness: 'one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the same place' (199). In the impasse, one experiences everything differently to the productive logic of the norm: time, space, historicity. One is constantly mobile, yet always immobile: one comes from nowhere and one goes nowhere; in a state of permanent passage, one has always departed, yet without hope of ever arriving at a secure destination. Locked in the present without meaningful access to the future or the past, to be in the impasse is to occupy a 'stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic' (4). This is the terrain of the impasse, and it is upon this strange, forsaken, and inexplicable no-man's land, into which we seem to have stumbled, as if blindly, unknowingly, or perhaps carelessly, that the aesthetic configurations of the theatre of the impasse are built.

Facing conditions of irresistible breakdown, expelled from the matrices of given knowledges and whatever certainties they formerly provided for the world—its sense of solidity, stability, and direction—cast, in other words, into the wilderness of unknowing, and held captive there by an obstinate fascination for the phantasmagoria of disaster, for catastrophism, the orientation of the theatre of the impasse is set not by the illuminating lights of 'crisis-decision' but by the *experience* of impasse as such: by an experience of the profoundly disorientating effect that comes with being ship-wrecked. What it produces might be seen as being akin to George Bataille's description of the fabrications of those ancient Gnosticisms that so fascinated him: it stages 'strangely abased cosmologies' ([1930] 1996, 46). The theatre of the impasse thus invents, through unexpected and startling allegorical visions—as we shall see in detail later—an esoteric knowledge of the crisis-infected world. Let me say—understanding this to be nothing more than a guiding, conditional, and entirely speculative description at this point—that what the theatre of the impasse discloses will be the *experience* of an 'englobing' sense of immanence, of the loss of the redemptive powers of transcendence, and of entrapment *within* an immanent world. To experience the theatre of the impasse, in other words, is to be led along the path toward an *immanent* understanding of 'crisis', in which the world of the impasse—and thus the 'world' as such—is experienced *as* crisis.

At the impasse, the world *is* crisis: it removes the certainty of the ground upon which decision gains a foothold. This is because impasse is nothing other than the destabilisation of the very hierarchies of truth and knowledge that decision wishes to restore – as if the world could be returned to splendid order and to the way it once was through the magical power of wishful thinking alone. But to experience impasse is to experience the powerlessness behind every transcendent claim, and thus the radical annulment of the force of decision; it is to render unenforceable the traditional ways in which political and exorbitant power justifies its reign over the 'world'. Impasse abrogates: it invalidates the authority and rights of the sovereign just as it erodes the legitimacy of institutions and governments. It testifies to the dissolution of the norms upon which social hierarchies are constructed; it speaks only of diminishment, of deterioration, of irrecoverable losses sustained by the human community, of apoplexy and prostration. Viewed in cosmological terms, which is to say, in terms of the world thought through the prism of 'theology', what impasse reveals is precisely nothing – the nullity of the world: nothing 'returns' in the impasse except nullity itself, and repeatedly so. There is simply no way out of the impasse; impasse is only surrender and defeat and perpetual sacrifice. In the impasse one appeals to the Gods only to hear that they themselves have been reduced to silence by it. This is why impasse-gnosis represents knowledge of the de facto 'closure' of every voluntarism, of all hopes for a return of the sovereign, or the saviour, for above all what is consummated by the impasse is nothing other than the 'teleological suspension' of every political decision—the suspension of every decisionistic end that would deliver the world to its salvation. Impasse reveals a world without rhyme or reason—taking this in the most literal sense to mean that the world of the impasse is an irregular, arrhythmical, and 'out of joint' world.

It is in relation to this teleological suspension of decision that the theatre of the impasse must be understood as a theatre that exists wholly in opposition to the traditional theatre of crisis (that is, any theatre that seeks to reconcile reality and its representation) with its pretension of representing a world order to a community whose ethical being and ontological coherence it seeks

to reaffirm through the resolution of the crisis it stages for their benefit. In the first place, the theatre of the impasse can no longer be seen to redeem the world by transposing its effects, through the resolution of the decision-crisis structure, onto an audience conceived as a congregation, political assembly, or ethical community. To the extent that the theatre of the impasse cannot constitute a community it cannot be a theatre that claims to represent 'the world' on behalf of that community. It can—at best—only reveal the poverty of every community, the poverty within which every community subsists in relation to its world (and where the term 'world' here does not designate the security of foundation, but the paucity and barrenness of the terrain upon which any community must be built). Jean-Luc Nancy has provided a designation for the essential impoverishment of every community, by naming it the 'inoperative community'. It is a community founded not on the plenitude of communitarian being, but on a principle of radical incompletion. Community emerges as a 'sharing' that is a 'workless and inoperative activity' rather than something that expresses itself through an act of veneration. The inoperative community dispels the phantasms of a presumed *Gemeinschaft* that springs from the 'delirium of an incarnated communion' (Nancy 1991, 35). Theatre of the impasse, for the same reason, can offer no communion, no spiritual association, no pastoral direction, and no redemption. What it reveals is rather 'an originary or ontological "sociality"' (28)—a community exposed, Nancy writes, by its very finitude to an 'areality that above all extroverts it in its very being'. The theatre of the impasse evokes our 'being-in-common'. And thus its audience, like the community of the impasse itself, is comprised of fragile, unshielded, vulnerable creatures—exposed in needful and precarious ways to one another; what it does not invoke is a 'common being' (29) in which a community might fully substantiate itself through the assertion of an exclusive togetherness (as is found, for instance, in the affirmation of the myths of natality and intrinsic identity that provide the preassigned characteristics of a people or a nation).

The notion of sharing, which Nancy insists upon, deserves some attention. To split, to apportion, to partake—inevitably, the problem of 'sharing', and thus of affirming that which we hold in common, leads the theatre of the impasse to make the following concession: that the problem of the world—of a world-in-common—cannot be so easily dispensed with by the theatre. If I may express this thought through a proposition or, better still, 'hypothesis' that I would then like, in the second section of this essay, to examine in relation to a specific example: the theatre of the impasse—that is, the theatre that understands itself explicitly as confronting the impasses of the world-representative function of the theatre, and of the world's representational 'crisis'—must be located at the impasse of a world that no longer has faith in the powers of transcendence. What this hypothesis says is that even as the theatre rejects the idea that it stands in a metaphorical relation to the world, which it 'represents'—and which, through its representations, it transfigures—nevertheless it re-establishes itself in a metonymic and contiguous relation to the world of which it becomes a representative part. In this sense, it becomes possible to speak of the broken discourse of the theatre of the impasse as a fragment, a fractured element, shard, or splinter, one that belongs both to the world's own broken discourse and refracts it, as do the remnants, vestiges, and ruins of history. What this brings to mind is Walter Benjamin's account of allegory as 'an object of knowledge nesting in the thought-out constructions of rubble' ([1925] 2008a, 183). In allegory, 'things bear the seal of the all-too-earthly. Never do they transform

themselves from within. Thus their illumination by the limelight of apotheosis' (182).[3] It is in virtue of the following contiguity, then—theatre's impasse *and* that of the impasse of the world—that a certain contemporary theatre proclaims an 'allegorical' orientation to the world (for which it acts as a partial 'stand in').[4] Here the contiguous 'and' does not express a brute juxtaposition any more than it signals a simple conjunction; it signals an aesthetic operation—what Nancy calls an *exposition* (1991, 29). What this would seem to suggest is that the theatre of the impasse reveals, through an exposition of its own impoverishment, the poverty of the world itself and for the simple reason that it is itself the synecdoche 'of the world'.

We might summarise this state of the theatre, bound no longer to the transcendence of decision but by the realisation of the immanence of the world in which it is absorbed and inescapably ensnared, by returning momentarily to Schmitt and the problem of political theology. For theatre to acknowledge the impasse, it must suspend every lingering hope, residing in the hearts of its auditors, that the stage might provide, in theatrical form, any service to a project founded, however covertly, on a 'political theology'; the idea that the concepts of the modern state are merely 'secularized theological concepts' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 36). More specifically, it must hold in suspension any thought that—as with God's creation of the world 'ex nihilo'—sovereign decision 'emanates from nothingness' (32)[5] (on which basis, for Schmitt, it required no legitimation from any pre-existing norm or authority). It must hold to nothingness as such: that nothing really is simply 'nothing', and thus to the truth that nothing 'emanates' from nothing. It is this insight alone that confers upon the theatre the power to suspend the presumptuous claims of decision, while at the same time enabling it to reveal the true nature of the impasse. Insofar as the theatre of the impasse emerges at the point of a teleological suspension of decision, there can be no 'miracle' performed there in which either the world will be redeemed or in which sovereignty would be permitted to lay claim, once again, to its ancient prerogatives and rights, let alone hope to regain its lost transcendence. The theatre of the impasse, like the insecure and contingent community it convokes, is held entirely captive by the condition of immanence that presides over its world.

When Benjamin—reflecting on the German Baroque and the *Trauerspiel*, partly in response to Schmitt's theory of sovereignty—observed: 'bad dreams come from the spleen, but prophetic dreams are also the prerogative of the melancholic'—he might well have been anticipating the theatre of the impasse since these morbid and gloomy, sometimes visionary and ecstatic dreams, as he went on to write, 'are to be seen arising from the geomantic slumber in the temple of creation, and not as sublime or even sacred inspiration. For all the wisdom of the melancholic is subject to the nether world; it is secured in the life of creaturely things, and it has nothing of the voice of revelation. Everything saturnine points down into the depths of the earth [...]' (Benjamin [1928] 1985, 152). Not even the sovereign can escape the immanence of the 'state of creation', which led Benjamin to an incisive observation—that the theological privileges afforded by Schmitt to the sovereign were ultimately unwarrantable: 'enthroned over subject and state, [the sovereign's] status is confined to the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature' (85).

I would like to approach this melancholic—or, perhaps it would be better to say, 'saturnine' theatre, more directly through an example, turning at this point in the argument to a performance by Athens-based Blitz Theatre Group called *Late Night* in order to examine the claim that the theatre of the impasse is a theatre without miracles, and whose condition of emergence is the suspension of the political theology of the stage.

## II. A Theatre Without Miracles

It is 17 June 2016 at the Barbican's London International Festival of Theatre. *Late Night* has 'come late' to the UK, having toured continental Europe since 2012, although it is no less prescient for its belated appearance, being staged just two weeks before the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. 'In those days…'—a phrase that is recurrent throughout the performance—our optimism was as pronounced as the 'Remain' badges we wore; for looking around, there was no-one in the auditorium who did not wear one on their clothing. 'In those days' our optimism was, nevertheless, belied by an unobtrusive though nonetheless palpable undercurrent of apprehension at what that vote portended—something that, on retrospect, has made *Late Night* all the more poignant, auguring—as it did—a community of mourning. This is what we encountered, as we entered the theatre: six performers are seated at the back of the stage, which has the look of a sad and dilapidated dance hall. One of them—a woman—busies herself with unravelling the bandage that is wrapped around her leg; carefully peeling it off, layer by layer. Another leans forward in his chair, his hands covering his eyes. The other four sit motionless, waiting, observing the audience, though their faces—as impervious to scrutiny as are masks—betray not the slightest sign of interest in us. We observe them in return; we too wait. Only when something appears to startle one of the performers into leaping from his chair—his brief upward glance suggests something has fallen from the ceiling—does the 'performance' then begin. A waltz starts to play and the performers, now having paired up, begin to glide around the stage in a choreographed formation that has echoes—to my mind at least—of the old Max Ophüls film, *La Ronde*, based on Arthur Schnitzel's play of the same name. It is this image of the waltz that provides the performance with its central motif. Only when the dancers break into fleeting poses—employing a kind of theatrical feint—is the movement momentarily suspended, then the dance resumed; it leaves us with the impression that we are not watching people but marionettes. This rather graceful automatism is suddenly interrupted when one of the dancers stumbles, falling clumsily to the floor. Her partner seems unconcerned and makes no move to assist her, but instead begins to applaud—although it is difficult to say whether he does so sardonically—impudently, or as someone who claps so as to show approval at a feat of great virtuosity that has just been executed before astounded eyes. (He wears a look of astonishment, or perhaps it is blank stupefaction, as a fixed expression throughout the entire performance). Another breaks from the dance to take up a position by a microphone at the front of the stage—he says: 'Yiorgos is applauding Sophia who has fallen. He is thinking of Paris, which was destroyed last November. He is thinking of Orly airport, the snow that was falling, and a woman on the edge of the pier…'. The dance continues, now to the staccato rhythms of a tango; meanwhile one of the women takes her position by the microphone: 'Christos is drinking water', she says, 'He cannot remember how he

ended up here. He is thinking of the sirens in the night… the roar of aircraft over Antwerp… and the hours spent awaiting her in front of the building covered with signs. In those days, the traffic lights blinked all alone in the empty streets'.

In this way, what we learn, as the performance progresses, is told through elliptical fragments of speech; and the unsettled narrative that begins to emerge is one of Europe, viewed—and not for the first time—at the 'end of history'. But this is not the end of history as the fabled Owl of Minerva would see it—that owl with which a vainglorious Hegel once identified himself, that spreads its wings only with the arrival of dusk to 'paint its grey in grey' in order to proclaim the retrospective wisdom of philosophy, as realised through the civic structures and institutions of the European *polis*. This is the vision of a Europe that is painted instead in the grey stains caused by the dust and the rubble that is strewn around the fringes of the stage. It is painted in the grey of the debris that suddenly plummets from the ceiling to the floor, like an abruptly cascading shroud, a tumbling shower of masonry and fine concrete powder, that nevertheless startles no-one on the stage since, clearly used to it, they are impassivity personified. This is a vision of Europe caught up in the grey of an interminable war, of a fight against an unknown enemy, of the drudgery of a struggle that occurs elsewhere and everywhere, and which has thoroughly exhausted the security of that once privileged 'safe European home'. It is the grey painted by the permanent state of exception: it is the exception without exception, where there is neither the prospect of defeat; nor the faintest hope for a final victory. This is a Europe in which an army—the European army—is on the march; where various fronts are threatened with collapse—Morocco, Syria, perhaps Poland. In Warsaw, for example, we are told of a great fire that has broken out; while in Greece, hundreds of people have been seen lying down before the Cathedral in Thessaloniki, although it is difficult to say whether they are dead or merely sunbathing. We hear that on the London Underground, trains ferry the wounded to and fro. We discover that the major cities of Europe are either under a permanent state of siege, or ruined, or razed; where people sleep in warehouses, airports, and derelict malls, and where the corpses of escaped zoo animals litter the Boulevards—rotting where they have fallen. In this Europe, the avenues of its once great and proud Capitals are now barricaded, its streets and doorways populated not by shoppers but by assault troops. What we are presented with, in short—and if I may say, to summarise the scenography and dramaturgical setting of *Late Night*—is not just a world in the throes of a major crisis but the world of the impasse as such; of impasse without pass: 'We were hoping', a woman observes at one point, 'that someone, who believed in something would appear… and would save the world. We were certain that he would. This man never came'.

That said, for all its depictions of political and social ruin and devastated lives, there is nothing 'tragic' about *Late Night*. For all the suffering it implies, tragic pathos is entirely lacking in this theatre, despite its portrayal of a world that has been uprooted, and its peoples made homeless. But what plausible reasons could there be for eschewing tragedy today in the theatre? It could be said—especially if one wants to counter my reading of *Late Night* by responding with 'realistic' criticisms—that a play performed before a predominantly 'well-off' and 'metropolitan' audience, at one of London's premier performing arts venues, could hardly possess any profound insight into the nature of contemporary tragic experience. To take into account, or so the objection would go,

the 'materiality of the performance and performers', which is to say, the privileged position from which they speak, would be to cast justifiable aspersions on *Late Night* for its self-evident failings (or at least the self-evident failings of my proposed reading of the production).[6] At the very least it would point to the failure of this kind of theatre to explicitly confront the grim realities of the crises that afflict Europe today. Its abstraction from reality mirrors the abstraction of philosophical concepts. The claims of either to say anything of relevance are belied by the apparent fact that by their very privilege they are inured to the face of actual horror—the horror that exists outside the theatre, and beyond the imaginings of its middle-class audience; horrors captured, for instance, in the grisly images of drowned migrants, whose bodies wash up on the shorelines of Southern Europe. Confronted with real abject human misery, it would surely be tasteless to proclaim *Late Night* 'tragic'. It could also be said: what use is the concept of impasse, when real crises demand real-world solutions? In this sense to decide between the respective merits of a theatre of crisis and one of impasse is surely to ask what each can actually do? Where one might help forge a path out of the difficulty, the other assuages only the indulgent or indifferent: those who are more than happy to proclaim that 'nothing can be done!' But what can theatre actually *do*? What forms of attestation connect it in meaningful ways to the world of which it is a part? These questions, it seems to me, are unavoidable if theatre is to retain its relevance, even if they cannot be answered without risk of foundering or falling to accusations of illegitimacy and dilettantism. If there is nothing that theatre 'can do', that does not mean that it should thereby do nothing. So, let me use these critical objections in order to sharpen my reading of *Late Night* in terms of the problem of impasse: if *Late Night* impresses it is because of what it risks, which is nothing but itself; and it does so precisely by accepting—without asking thereby to be forgiven—its own inadequacy. The theatre of the impasse acknowledges that theatre is an inadequate medium, where inadequacy is to be understood in the sense of its inadequation with reality: its representations fail to be 'true' to the real—this inadequacy belongs both to theatre's *aporetic* nature, but is also the source of its dialectical power: whether explicitly or implicitly, the theatre of the impasse is a theatre that occupies its own *aporetic* space without seeking to suture it into a false totality. It is an inadequate and insufficient theatre, offering neither the consolation of distraction from a tragic world, nor answers to it. To accuse it, is to accuse the world—that is the risk it must necessarily take if it is to function in the way I think it must: as allegory.

No doubt *Late Night*'s embrace of dystopian imagery—rather like that of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*—is designed to confound the idea of the tragic in favour of the disparagements of the absurd; and its vision of a disintegrating Europe is to be understood as a kind of presentiment of the near future, or at least of a possible near future, invoked as a means to critique the present. As a description—insofar as one can say that it *describes* the *near* future in its *possibility*—one can also say that it assumes an allegorical form, establishing, as all allegory does, an uncomfortable and ambiguous temporal proximity to its present: to our own present, and to our own condition, which it embodies through the transformation of rubble into the allegorical symbols of ruin. It speaks to the historicity of our present, of Europe caught, yet again, at the cross-roads of history; it identifies Europe precisely at a time of political impasse. But it is not simply the fact that the performance responds to the current impasse, or that it thematises the profound uncertainty that now haunts the European, indeed 'Western', project that is of interest. Rather, it is how it does so that matters—

which is to say, precisely in showing impasse as such, and in the two mutually implicated ways that I have suggested define the dramaturgy of the theatre of the impasse: first, and specifically, as a discourse on theatre's inherent poverty—as a mode of theatrical *allegoresis*, in which the allegorical function offers, so to speak, a reading of theatre 'reading' itself; second, as an allegorical discourse on the poverty of the European *polis*, where, importantly, the meaning of poverty is to be understood in and through the problem of sociality—of *our* sociality—as revealed by impasse.[7]

In other words, as much an exposition of the prolixity of the theatre, as it is a cautionary communiqué, warning of the increasing dogmatisation, polarisation, and fragmentation of the European polity, *Late Night* draws attention both to what Benjamin called 'the banal equipment' of the theatre—the 'chorus, interlude, and dumbshow' ([1928] 1985, 235)—at the same time as it effectively deploys that same apparatus in all its banality to invoke our own weakening historicity. There is one point in the performance that exemplifies this autoreferentiality—an interlude that is no doubt designed to invite comparison with the work of Forced Entertainment—where the dance has been paused and the performers attempt to entertain one another in a bizarre pantomime of competing levels of performative failure and incompetence (with hopelessly botched magic tricks and fumbling or unremarkable acrobatics). The stage becomes the locus for the failed aspirations of the theatre as such, which—shorn of its illusions—is revealed as a place of hyperbolic speech and ludic, if also frankly ludicrous, gestures. What this simultaneity of exposition produces—exposition of the theatre, expositing the European crisis—is a theatre that adheres entirely to the world from which it sprang and that it brings into view, as terminal decline. Everything present on stage is at once symbol and mere prop—and testifies to the undecidable conflict between them, in which the former ceaselessly struggles to subjugate the latter's unyielding idiocy and vacuity. Through the collapsing of the opposition of what is both immediately present and what is symbolically presented through the mechanism of the stage, nothing escapes this theatre's commitment to self-immolating acts. And yet, what is sacrificed of the miraculous illusions of the stage, in one sense, is procured, nonetheless in another, by means of a real material advance for the theatre: if what is surrendered here is the symbolic content that produces an elevated performance that ennobles the stage in transcending theatre's otherwise hopeless simulations, *Late Night* nevertheless embraces theatre's inefficacies so as to produce a theatre capable of allegorical or—as Benjamin expresses it somewhat numinously—'creaturely' construction. The image of the waltzing figures is to be grasped precisely, I think, in this way, as an *allegorical* image and these dancers as allegorical *figures*.

The effect of allegory, as Benjamin saw it, at least, is nothing other than what he described, in rather striking terms, as the 'vaporisation' of 'theological essences' (ibid). Even as it expresses an 'unremitting expectation of a miracle' so it consists in the heaping up of 'fragments'. On the one hand, allegories are 'in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things'—'unstoppable decline', a 'picturesque field of rubble';[8] on the other hand, the allegorical gaze—as Benjamin observes in reference to Baudelaire's claim that 'Everything becomes an allegory for me'—is the 'gaze of the alienated man' as it 'falls on the city' (Benjamin [1935] 2008b, 104). According to this perspective, the work of allegory is not to produce those transcendent symbols associated with the political theology of the stage but instead—insofar as it responds to a symbolic system in

crisis—to put on display fragile exemplars. The exemplar's fragility consists in the fact that it transcends nothing: it *is* the thing it represents—recalling here the dialectical 'conflict' residing at the heart of allegory, where profane and contingent objects are invested with elevated or lofty meanings, which they can only, at best, tenuously or conditionally sustain (Benjamin [1925] 2008c, 175). [9] Thus in allegorical exemplification the material and contingent singularity of the representative is preserved; in all its stubbornness, thingliness, and incommensurability it refuses complete dissolution through the transfiguring operations of metaphorical and symbolic substitution. What allegory performs is a quite distinct kind of operation: no longer functionally representational, it would be better to call it 'dysfunctionally' *presentational*. And it is this presentational (dys)function of the exemplar—hovering unceremoniously between image and thing; between the image in its corporeality and corporeal bodies—that can be addressed by returning to the question of the specific meaning of the allegorical image as found in *Late Night*—an image, I would now like to examine, insofar as it points in the direction of that secret 'knowledge'—so difficult to discern—that lies beyond the immediate trauma of the impasse. What is betrayed in that image—what stirs or is awakened there—is a suppressed longing, if not quite a *be*longing; the kindling of a yearning for a union with the other, however unfulfilled it might be, and thus for a reconfiguring of a community 'in crisis'. The utopian tendency, let us say, of the theatre of the impasse is contained—not in any appeal to decision—but in a rather more furtive manner: it is concealed in this presentational operation. I will call this (adapting a phrase borrowed from Jacques Rancière [2009]) an 'operation of communalisation' (34). Such an operation of communalisation can best be understood by reading the specific allegorical content of *Late Night's* dance in light of Nancy's notion of originary sociality for which it becomes a kind of image.

How, given this operation of communalisation, are we to understand this notion of originary sociality in the context of the allegorical content of *Late Night*? In the first place, it is important to recall what was established earlier regarding the problem of what Nancy has called the 'inoperative community'. There is, Nancy insists, 'no communion of singularities in a totality superior to them and immanent to their common being' (1991, 28). There is only a 'singular mode of appearing' through which singularities co-appear in and through their communicating with one another (what he calls 'compearing')—the choreographic configuration of dancers, would be one instance of this co-appearance, revealed through the physical communication of the dancer's bodies. For Nancy, the concept of communication does not rest on a pre-established 'social bond'; nor is it determined by an instrumental concept of rational communicative acts. It defines the opening up of originary sociality as our very being-in-the world: it is already there, visible and tangible, in the (con)figurations of choreographed bodies.[10]

That said, the waltz—itself a kind of allegorical ruin—might well be viewed more problematically for its nostalgic reference to the faded cultural prestige of Europe; but an alternative understanding, here, would be to view it through the popular form of *social dance* and thereby in relation to the 'dance of sociality'. This is not to deny that a sense of nostalgia haunts *Late Night*, but rather to indicate its complexity. Nostalgia allows escape from the present into a past age that is relived in the dimension of pure fantasy but at the cost of it becoming the symbol of present decline. Nostalgia *symbolises* the crisis engendered by a real loss of futurity, and is one of the

characteristics of the inertia of the impasse. And in *Late Night* it is this nostalgic mode of impasse that is constantly transformed by the automatism of the performers into gestures of futile and traumatic repetition. But there is also more to the image of waltzing dancers than a critical use of nostalgia, and that is the 'dance of sociality' which I would like to further pursue, in order to disclose its allegorical function—to return to Nancy: communication subsists, prior to discourse, as the bare fact of our ownmost finitude but equally it defines that circumscription of existence by the conscious work of sharing—in other words, of community, insofar as we are predisposed by our finitude to be with one another 'socially' and 'politically' (Nancy 1991, 40). It 'is there' in our being laid bare, each before the other. Nancy expresses this point in the following way: 'This exposure, or this exposing-sharing gives rise, from the outset, to a mutual interpellation of singularities prior to any address in language' (29). A little later, Nancy relates this problem of originary sociality to that of the self-exposure of lovers, who are exposed both to one-another but also to something outside of themselves—to the political community as such—before which they come to stand as its precarious exemplars. They stand both for and before it; 'their singularities share and split them or share and split each other, in the instant of their coupling' (38).

It is here, in short, in this play of splitting and sharing, that one can begin to understand the meaning of the allegorical image of the dancers, of those figures caught up in the circular dance, displayed through a choreographic operation of coupling and uncoupling, which is also an image of the play of lovers—exemplifying the extreme limits of sociality. If love takes on the allegorical form of an exposition of sociality, it is because it exposes, writes Nancy, 'the unworking and therefore the incessant *incompletion* of community. It exposes community *at its limit*' (38). I mention this in closing for two reasons. First, because *Late Night*—aside from its reports of political violence and its description of the permanent exception—is also, above all, an elegy to the inoperative community. It is composed out of poetic fragments derived from love's own broken discourse, insofar as love constitutes the limit condition of our fundamental sociality—something that is revealed through the stories of failed rendezvous, momentary trysts, and last encounters. The elegiac refrain of lovers, 'It was the last time I saw you'—that intolerable allocution—is repeated on several occasions toward the end of the performance.[11] Here love is both exposure and exposition, demanding visibility: its need to reveal itself to the world, to attest to its devotions, to disclose its ecstasies, as much as lament its sufferings, sorrows, and anguishes. It is exposure to an insuperable loss: the loved one is lost forever, never to be embraced again. But love is also exposition of that exposure—precisely, a theatre of *allegorisis*: the presentation of the transcendence that breaks open the subject's enclosure in immanence, even as they are destined to return to it in the bitter form of recriminations, and through the paradox of radical forsakenness that only lovers can endure—to endure that which is unremittingly unendurable. In love the subject finds itself 'exposed to the crossing […] and this is nothing other than finitude' (Nancy 1991, 98). Indeed, love, says Nancy, 'offers finitude in its truth; it is finitude's dazzling presentation' (99). For the subject in love encounters the truth of love not in the plenitude of total possession, as mystical communion with God, or in the profession of a shameless patriotic sentiment, but through embracing love's calamitous reversals and setbacks: when the heart is torn, broken, shattered—then love as 'limit', as the evanescent exposure of our very being to one another, as our compearing, 'happens' (104). The exposition of love's crushing exposure of the heart belongs to

the broken discourse of love. It is woven into the citational matrix of *Late Night*, at the very outset, when the spoken narrative blends almost imperceptibly with the lyrics of an old French Chanson to which the performers dance:

> At the tower of Notre Dame. There where you gave me your love. There, where you made me love you. That's where I'm still waiting for you. This is what Maria is thinking of. She is now dancing with Fidel. But time… time… time that destroys everything took you away from me, my lost love. And I am left alone and in love… there, where you gave me your love. At the tower of Notre Dame. But time, time, time that destroys everything… took you away from me. At the tower of Notre Dame. From here, I can see the whole city. At the tower of Notre Dame. It is from here that I will jump. For you.

What this fractured and wounded discourse indicates, leads to my second and final point: that the lovers themselves exemplify the encounter with the limit, an encounter with the impasse, which resides at the heart of the immanence of community—they are its allegorical representatives: 'Lovers touch each other,' writes Nancy, 'unlike fellow citizens […] This banal and fairly ridiculous truth means that touching—immanence not attained but close, as though promised […]—is the limit' (39). Is impasse not precisely the name of the limit that can be broached but never breached? Through the touch of lovers, immanence is both revealed and at that very moment forever 'deferred'. What escapes the touch of lovers is the possibility of the total convergence with the other, the immersion of two in one: a confabulated and fabulous union that each must nevertheless believe in with all their ardour—this confabulation constitutes the very mode of being of 'being' in love. But a lover's touch is a touch that never quite touches; it is a touch that is frustrated by the failure of transcendence to span the divide it seeks to traverse. And it is also, precisely, this insuperable division to which lovers are abandoned that makes touch what it is: a communication whose final consummation is promised but never realised; touch suffers a fatal diremption at the very moment it is enjoyed. In love, one is touched by grief in the most extreme way. Love's futility bears witness, nonetheless, to this operation of communalisation: through the abject failure of lovers to achieve their desired consummation through the medium of the body with its skin, flesh, organs, bones, and tissue, and through the correlative failure of the community to discover itself as itself in the state of its pure immanence to self as a 'political body', as unpolluted self-presence. It is this fatality of touch that produces the lament of those lovers who, finally, in their despair, abandon all hope of joy and instead seek unity in death, through the narcissistic fantasy of suicide—as if the unbearable promise of love can only be redeemed through the annihilation of the body that is the bearer of an accursed singularity. But here, too, we should understand death as another name for the catastrophe of the impasse.

In this way the lover presents us with an image of the limit of sharing; the lover is the exemplar of the impossibility of accomplished totality inscribed at the heart of originary sociality, and the dance of lovers, the play of compearing bodies caught up in an unending 'La Ronde', a testament to the inviolable fact of our being ceaselessly exposed to one another. It is this constant exposure, finally, that is revealed through *Late Night* as the secretive and 'gnostic' truth of the allegorical theatre of the impasse.

## III. Afterward: On Impasse and Political Theology

I have argued for a concept of 'suspension' with respect to the idea of a political theology of the stage. This 'Kierkegaardian' formulation should be understood as being quite distinct to what has also been termed, notably by the German theologian, Erik Peterson, the 'theological closure' of the possibility of any political theology whatsoever. I would like to touch on what is at stake in this distinction, even if only briefly, in a few closing remarks. At the end of his life, Carl Schmitt returned to the problem of his political theology, written in 1922, in a tract that sought to answer Peterson's objections to it. Peterson had argued that it was *theologically* impossible for Christians to consider a 'political theology' on the grounds that it contradicted the Trinitarian dogma. I will not go into the nuances of that dispute here, except to summarise Peterson's basic position by saying that from a theological perspective no human reality—political or otherwise—can be considered as the mundane realisation of God's will. This conceptual distinction was already operative in St. Augustine's writings, where the city of God is seen to be irreconcilable with the Roman state: thus the thesis of 'two kingdoms' emerges as an inviolable theological barrier that prevents the very possibility of a political theology—hence its absolute 'closure'. The contradictions in Peterson's thesis are forensically dissected by Schmitt, and in one of the most abrasively critical passages, he asks:

> How should a theology, which explicitly separates itself from politics, be able to put an end, theologically, either [to] political authority or a political claim? If *the theological* and *the political* are two substantially separate spheres—*toto caelo* [completely] different—then a *political* question can only be dealt with *politically*. The theologian can reasonable declare the closure of issues of political significance only by establishing himself as a political voice which makes political claims. Whenever he gives a theological answer to a political question, either he simply ignores the world and the sphere of the political or he attempts to reserve the right to impact directly or indirectly in the sphere of the political. (Schmitt [1970] 2017, 113)

To argue for the closure of political theology on theological grounds is either to render theology meaningless for 'this' world, or it is to covertly reassert the very thing that is to be denied. On such a basis, one must accept that political theology, and along with it, the possibility of a decision that claims transcendental justification for itself, cannot be dissolved by conceptual means alone. It is in relation to this problematic that I have suggested the idea of a 'teleological suspension' of decision, as the distinguishing feature of the theatre of the impasse. I have argued that impasse renders decision materially 'undecidable': it is neither possible nor impossible, but rather 'nullified' by the crisis engendered with the world's collapse into immanence (the state of impasse). A quite different dispute with Schmitt emerges here—one alluded to throughout this chapter and which I would now like to explicitly name: I have in mind, of course, the Schmitt-Benjamin controversy, which was articulated around Benjamin's distinction of the *Trauerspiel* from tragedy proper; and, more specifically, and to the point, was made explicit in their respective readings of Hamlet. Where

for Schmitt, Hamlet opens up a 'horizon' in which the 'source of the deepest tragedy [is] historical reality' ([1956] 2009, 52)—Hamlet is thus a cipher for the tragedy of James I and Mary Stuart—and thereby acts as a kind of supplement to actual political sovereignty; in Benjamin, Hamlet's melancholy and indecision testifies to a different historical reality: the incapacitation of political representation and the end of religious authority over the world at the dawn of secular modernity. It is in the latter's reading of Hamlet that impasse is first identified as possessing a peculiar meaning for the theatre; and it is a meaning that takes on renewed urgency at a time when dangerous political absolutes, once again, are seen as the answer to the despair of disenchanted populations. Political disenchantment is the great danger of the impasse—what comes with it, as Schmitt's own life and historical circumstance reveals, is a corrupting and perilous passion for the charismatic leader.

## Notes

[1] In a full-blown crisis, one looks for political leadership—in this sense, although crisis and impasse are in many senses isomorphic, crisis is always understood from the transcendent perspective, at the centre of which is the question: "who can decide?"

[2] This kind of analysis was developed in great detail by Jürgen Habermas in *Legitimation Crisis*—for instance: 'Because the problem of world complexity has assumed the leading position, the problem of rational organization of society in conjunction with formation of motives through norms that admit of truth has lost its object' (1976, 133.)

[3] For Benjamin, the Baroque period—and in particular the *Trauerspiel* of the period—bears witness to a profound sense of melancholy, a spiritual loss, malaise, or affective emptiness, in which worldly actions no longer find justification in a providential or divine schema.

[4] The phrase 'contemporary theatre' no doubt invites questions of historicisation: what theatre, when, and so on. This is an interesting, perhaps crucial question, for further work. Here I will restrict myself to the following observation: the theatre of the impasse, as I have described it, is not limited to 'postdramatic' aesthetic forms, although the latter has clear affinities with the former. Equally, theatres of the impasse must be thought in relation to the specific historical conjunctures in which they appear—as I argue here—Benjamin's identification of Baroque *Trauerspiel*, might serve as an example of an historical theatre of the impasse, and a theatre that is obviously quite distinct to that of our 'postdramatic' stage.

[5] Schmitt writes: 'The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology' ([1922] 2005, 32).

[6] One can hardly assume that the context of Greek theatre, in the years following the debt crisis, with loss of state subsidy and increasing precariatisation of the workforce under conditions of extreme austerity, is in any sense equivalent to that of the context of the Barbican theatre or its audiences.

[7] The problem of poverty might be thought in the following sense: that the European polity is impoverished due to its manifest failure to deal with real, interlocking, and ongoing crises: the refugee and migration crises, the most prominent perhaps, but also the failings of social democracy, and its political consequences; the rise of the populist right, which threatens to break that polity apart by returning it to the old redoubts of nationalist entrenchment and a politics based on fear and resentment; or the failure to deal with the immense economic and social inequalities created by the marketization of the European project over the past 30 years via the European Union, rendered starkly visible through austerity policies. In this sense, it would be presumptuous, not to say vulgar, to claim that the theatre of the impasse, or any theatre for that matter, was able to 'reveal' that which is clearly made visible on a daily basis through the stark and barbaric facts that constitute ongoing reality. This does not mean

that theatre must ignore those facts however. And as I am attempting to suggest here, what I have called the theatre of the impasse uses the representational poverty of theatre—the inadequacy of its means—to 'stand in' for the poverty of the world, without attempting to 'redeem' it or reconcile its contradictions. Here, Adorno's description of Beckett—written against the 'committed' art championed by Sartre—will be of help. Adorno writes: 'Beckett's ecce homo is what has become of human beings. They look mutely out from his sentences as though with eyes whose tears have dried up. The spell they cast and under which they stand is broken by being reflected in them. The minimal promise of happiness which they contain, which refuses to be traded for consolation, was to be had only at the price of a thoroughgoing articulation, to the point of worldlessness' ([1962] 1992, 90). It is this sense of 'worldlessness', contained in Adorno's locution, that poverty must be understood as a metonymic showing of that which our representations lead us to overlook on a 'daily' basis: that the 'failure' of the European polity to address the crises that assail the European idea might be understood precisely as a crisis of sociality—a crisis of sociality that reveals, not simply that which limits sociality, but in doing so the limits by which it is constituted. At this 'limit', I argue, the theatre of the impasse can 'reveal' the poverty of the European project in this more fundamental and constitutive sense, and in doing so provide insight into the forms of sociality that constitute the community of the impasse, a community that has reached its limit, and that consequently gives expression to that profound sense of 'spiritual' exhaustion to which it must nevertheless adapt itself.

[8] Karl Borinski quoted in Benjamin ([1925] 2008a), 180.

[9] Benjamin also writes: 'In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is fragment, rune. Its symbolic beauty evaporates when the light of divine erudition falls upon it. The falsely lustrous appearance [*Schein*] of totality is extinguished. For the eidos is extinguished, the simile perishes, the cosmos within it is desiccated' ([1925] 2008b, 177).

[10] It is also implied in the fact that the choreography in the performance employs only social dance forms.

[11] In *A Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes observes: 'Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved's absence; actually a preposterous situation; the other is absent as referent, present as allocutory. This singular distortion generates a kind of insupportable present; I am wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocution: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you). Whereupon I know what the present, that difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety' ([1977] 1983, 15).

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# LOVE IN THE TIME OF CRISIS: EXAMINING THE SUBJECT OF LOVE IN THE SOUTHBANK'S *FESTIVAL OF LOVE* (2016)

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I began to think about the subject of love a couple of years ago, in the summer of 2016. Each morning as I cycled over Waterloo Bridge, London, on the way to one of my various precarious employments, I would puff my way up the curved incline at the south end of the bridge. To the left, and towering above myself on the bicycle stood a gigantic banner on the wall of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, part of the Southbank Centre complex. One word: 'Love'. It was unavoidable—yet quite equivocal: at once a command—'Love!'; an ideal proclamation 'Love'; a question—'are you able to "Love"?'; an invitation—'Love…'; or a scoff and violent rejection—'Love'. Am I among the loved? No matter the mode of address, it called on the individual subject to, and of, love. My mode of subjection to this 'Love' depended, for sure, on the various forces, energies and affects driving me forward on any given morning.

Of course, there was, it turned out, more to this 'Love' than one single banner on the wall of the Southbank Centre. The banner was part of the larger *Festival of Love* (2016). And in the discussion to come, it is this festival that I interrogate. I do so in order to explore love: how love is understood, conceptualised, practised and, more often than not, taken for granted in its ubiquity in the social sphere. Through engaging with the festival, I challenge love understood as a universal ideal or ahistorical concept. By drawing on Foucault's theories of governmentality, I suggest an understanding of love as a regime: a governmentalised love, with particular loving subjects. Thinking love in this way, I turn to Gillian Rose's discussion of love and crisis. For Rose, crisis is inherent in democracy as a structure of governance, and attempts to mend crisis have been articulated through specific articulations of 'love' (1992,164). By considering love in crisis, both historically and in the present socio-political context, I hope to begin to think love differently as an ethico-political practice—a love in *krisis.*

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To begin the discussion, I introduce the *Festival of Love* —a festival which ran annually from 2014 to 2016, covering the months of July and August. Given the summer period falling alongside UK school holidays, the festival had a strong emphasis on activities and events, particularly daytime events, for families, children and young adults. This could be seen in both the curation and use of the various indoor and outdoor spaces and performance and activity venues spread throughout the Southbank site, and in the selection of the activities and performances held during the festival. That being said, given the theme of the festival—love—adults, and particularly couples, had also been considered in the programming.

In the previous year, the festival had been set out around various conceptual understandings of love covering an extremely broad (and arguably rather simplified) range. As the festival programmers stated, whilst the Greeks had around 30 words to describe love, the Southbank Centre decided on 'seven of the most powerful'. This ranged from *Agape* (understood here as the love of humanity); *Storge* (here as family love); *Pragma* (the love which endures, a married couple, life friends); *Philautia* (self-respect, the love we give to ourselves); *Philia* (shared experience, the love when striving for a common goal); *Ludus* (flirting, playful affection, the fluttering heart and feelings of euphoria); and *Eros* (romantic and erotic love, based on sex and powerful magnetism) (Southbank Centre n.d.a.). Whilst time could be spent here considering why and how these particular concepts were narrowed down, the interesting point in terms of the discussion is the shift from 2015 to the following year. In 2016, while the festival no longer curated the program around these seven explicit categories, they evidently kept the same 'Love' ethos, but streamlined the categories a little further. Under the banner of 'Love'—and likewise the *Love Flags,* a work by Mark Titchner commissioned for the first festival in 2014, flown high on the riverfront terrace of the Royal Festival hall building—the various activities, performances and concerts throughout the festival were framed and punctuated by three over-arching events.

The first of these overarching events to take place was *Encampment.* This was organised by Good Chance Theatre and took place within the 'Good Chance Dome' on the Festival Terrace from 30 July to 7 August. As stated in the festival programme by Joe Murphy, one of the founders of Good Chance Theatre, the dome was originally a temporary theatre erected in the Calais Jungle (Southbank Centre, n.d.b) prior to the razing of the camp. For the nine-day event, this structure was rebuilt. The various events held within the dome were both work made by refugees and work about refugees. For example, *Scattered*, written by Tim Baker and presented by Theatre Clywd, was a play about a Syrian refugee relocated to Wales, and *September 11th* was a play written by Kuhel Khalid, a refugee living in the UK. Alongside live performance and theatre, there were film nights including screenings of films such as *Queens of Syria* (dir. Y. Fedda, 2014), a film telling the story of 50 women in exile from Syria who came to together in Jordan to perform Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, an Afghan kite-making workshop with Sanjar Qiam, and an exhibition of art by residents of the Calais refugee camp facilitated by artist Sue Partridge.

The second overarching event, *Strive,* was a three-day event held from Friday until Sunday, 5–7 August. The event was for those aged between 15 and 25, or as the program asks, 'were you born in the 90s? […] [Y]ou grew up in a new age of digital technology and social openness, and your ideas

and creativity will shape the next wave of culture and art' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). The event focused on the learning of new skills and allowing those involved to 'showcase your talents and get a little bit closer to a bright and shiny future' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). The events were split into four character-types that could be mixed and matched: thinker, speaker, dreamer, creator. To paraphrase the programming, the types were described in terms of certain actions and desires: *thinker*—mulling over deep thoughts and new ideas; *speaker*—happiest raising the voice to inspire other people; *dreamer*—loves to get lost in an artwork or performance; *creator*—wants to get creative right now (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). If you saw yourself as a thinker you could expect a program of events including a portraiture sitting and sketching workshop, spoken word performance, or a coding workshop. As a speaker you could engage in the secrets of beat-boxing or pitch ideas about the 'business of creativity' at the *Young Entrepreneur 2016* event. The dreamer could watch performances by the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, explore classical ballet, or learn how to make a music track. And the creator might participate in tie-dye and screen-printing workshops, a performance by Scottish Ballet, a popping and locking session, or a girls' drumming workshop, whilst also picking up tips on making it big in *Industry Bites.*

The finale of the *Festival of Love* was marked by the *Big Wedding Weekend,* running from Saturday to Monday, 27–29 August. In the words of the festival this was 'a huge celebration of love with free events across the bank holiday weekend to celebrate the happy couples getting married as part of the big weekend' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). Events covered a broad range of activities. *Bridesmaid Dress Up* offered the opportunity to 'experience the weekend dressed up in [one of the festival's] fabulous bridesmaid dresses' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). The outfits were available to wear all of the Saturday, and wearers were encouraged to 'swish around the terrace in style' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). *Anniversary Message Eggs* presented a 'drop-in workshop [which] offers everyone a chance to reflect on their years of love […] a gift to celebrate your years together with a friend, family, member, colleague or lover' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). Likewise, creative art and writing workshops such as *Draw Your Love* and *Dedicating Words* gave individuals the platform to demonstrate their love by performing their love to (or on behalf of) their loved one. For romantic couples, there was also the possibility of a romantic *Date Night at the Archive*, in which couples could 'spend a romantic evening in the archive studio working together with your other half to explore the Southbank Centre's archives' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b). Here, as with many of the workshops and events held in the public spaces of the Southbank throughout the festival, a number of the events were free of charge, whilst others were ticketed.

In setting out the aspects of the festival and the analysis to follow it is not my intention to assess or interpret the pleasure garnered and felt from those taking part in the festival, or to analyse the individual events or performances in terms of their value or merit. Rather, I am interested in this festival as an illustrative example of the way in which the idea of love is articulated and asserted as a universally shared concept. The ideas of love asserted in the festival take inspiration from ideas deriving from the Greeks. However, they also share the selective attitude that often exists toward Greek ideas that ignores the exclusionary nature and social reality of that historical period—for example, the fact that Greek love was designed primarily for and by elite male citizens,

members of the *polis.* It is this selective attitude towards, and exclusionary nature of, the seemingly universal and essential love that I aim to interrogate.

## Governing love

In 'Against Essentialist Conceptions of Love: Toward a Social-material Theory' (2015), Christian Lotz addresses the essentialist conception of love, set out most recently by contemporary philosophers such as Alan Badiou (Badiou & Truong 2012) and Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009). Here Lotz identifies a key flaw in essentialist approaches: they obfuscate 'material, historical, and the social form that love takes on in real individuals […] formed by different interests determined by class positions' (2015, 132). In so doing, Lotz continues, 'Love' emerges as part of 'deeply ambivalent projects that lead to a mystification of love by giving it a metaphysical status' (ibid.), such that love exists beyond any particular socio-historical form and becomes 'ahistorical' (143). In contrast to this essentialist approach, Lotz argues for a 'social-material conception of love that is tied to its social form' (132) and addresses 'the real life activity of humans who *reproduce* themselves through and by these activities' (135). Here love is stressed as a historically contingent social form, and is certainly not prior to the social form the act of love takes. And, as Lotz goes on to stress, given the dominance of capitalism in Western societies, then it follows that the social form love takes is necessarily 'commodifiable' (139).

In setting out love as a commodifiable social form, there are two key aspects of particular interest in this discussion. Firstly, social divisions, such as class, are hidden by ideological structures which project a '*universal* image of love as the intimate bond between two people that *seems* to transcend all class divisions' (140). That is to say, love is asserted as 'an ideal achievable for *all* classes' (ibid.). Moreover, this universal love is framed by 'a distribution of loving subjects that, in turn, are created as consumers of love products and activities related to these products' (141). One obvious example is that of online dating. Not only do we pay to exist as a profile on a platform—either through direct subscription charges or indirectly through means such as the farming of our personal data—but we also invest time, money, and labour in various ways to develop our selves physically, mentally, and professionally so as to be, at least algorithmically, love-able.

Secondly, Lotz highlights the contradiction inherent in commodifiable love: love is packaged as a romantic irrational idea, but is an increasingly rationalised and instrumentalised practice. For instance, think of all the therapy available to help you find out why your emotional faculties are not working properly. There is a reason you are unable to love and with the right support, expertise, the right technologies, and, of course, the financial capability, you will be love-able. Such a rationalisation of love is possible through the mechanisms of standardisation (141), and love is no exception: 'the more we experience our modern forms of love as "liberated", "independent" […] the more we actually become dependent on capital itself […] [and love's] increasing subjection to the commodity form' (140).

Here Lotz emphasises a crucial point in terms of love and individual subjection. To fully grasp the implications of this, I turn to the relation between love and governance of the self and others. By

engaging with Michel Foucault's 'governmentality' (Foucault [2004] 2009), and the recent articulation of this concept by Mitchell Dean (2010), love can be understood, not only as a commodifiable social form, but as a regime of love. And moreover, the 'love' of the Southbank Festival will be shown to operate within such a regime.

Whilst it is not my intention here to offer a full analysis of governmentality, I do now want to briefly set out the key aspects most pertinent to this discussion. Firstly, Foucault understands governmentality as the specifically modern mode of governance, emerging contemporaneously with the constitution of 'population' as an object and subject of discourse during the eighteenth century (Foucault 2009, 66). 'Population' becomes understood as a 'multiplicity of individuals who [...] exist biologically bound to the materiality within which they live' (21), involving a specific relationship between the individual and the collective, the everyone and every 'one'. With the prevalence of the idea of 'population', the specific concern in political practice and theories of government becomes the 'set of processes [of life—such as birth, labour, leisure, education, illness] to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes' (74).

Governmentality, then, is the art of governance constituted through 'the ensemble [complex assemblages or regimes of practices] formed by institutions, procedures [...] calculations, and tactics' (108) that exercises a specific and complex form of power. This art of governance 'has the population as its target, political economy as its major knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument' (ibid.). Governance is no longer one based on sovereign obeisance, whereby the individual political agent or a collection of subjects of right must obey the sovereign's will, but one of management of the 'naturalness' of the population. Mitchell Dean (2010) usefully identifies the rationality of this governance with that of liberalism,[1] obeying only one rule: the 'rule of maximal economy' (73). And, importantly, governance and the articulation of sovereignty is immanent, and dispersed within, the population itself. This shift to an immanent understanding of sovereignty, the state, and the individual, without an external authority, Foucault terms the '"governmentalisation" of the state' (Foucault 2002, 220).

Broadly speaking, this modern art of governance—governmentality—acts on two inter-relating levels. First, the practices of government exercise a form of power at the level of the population as a whole, whilst the second level is that of the individual. Here, governance is enacted through ethical practices of the self. These ethical practices of the self, which I make the primary focus in the discussion to follow, are individualising practices of self-governance, or that which Foucault terms: 'the conduct of conduct' (41). This mode of self-governance is outlined in four aspects: the what, the how, the who, and the why, and can be articulated as follows: first, the ethical substance to be worked on (for example, 'the flesh' in Christianity, or 'pleasure' in Ancient Greece); second, the way individuals are incited or invited to work on their conduct through a particular set of practices—ascetics—of the self; third, the recognising of the ethical subject who is in need of transformation (for example, one prone to weakness of the flesh, or the contemporary jobseeker); lastly, teleology, addressing why we govern ourselves, the goals or ends to be achieved, whether that be, for instance, Christian salvation, the virtuous life, or the productive life (Foucault 1997, 265).

Having briefly set out the key aspects of the ethical practices of the self intrinsic to governmentality, I return now to the *Festival of Love.* My aim is to point to the ways in which we might begin to understand the festival as a practice of governmentalised love, immanent and mediated as part of the social sphere. Here love is articulated not only as the commodifiable social form Lotz sets out, but as a regime of love that incites and facilitates ethical practices of the self, which, in turn, constitute particular loving subjects.

The focus for the *Big Wedding Weekend* was quite clearly 'the couple'—either those who have shared lives together so far, or the future aspiration to be not only one, but part of a couple—a two. It is not my intention here to argue against coupledom; for most people, being alone is a difficult and lonely mode of being and many would (and do) choose to be part of a two. That being said, there are aspects to interrogate within the *Big Wedding Weekend.* First, the couples (or hopeful individuals) become performing loving subjects who make their love productive in a double sense, they produce what they consume—or, to draw on Jen Harvie (2013, 50), they become 'prosumers'. Love is also productive for others within the social totality of which they are part—in this case, the stage of the event in the Southbank Centre (whether that be a creative workshop, dance, or date night). In this way, a performance of loving subjects produces love to be consumed not only by themselves, but also by others. Moreover, if we begin to consider the possibility of governmentalised love, the couples (or hopeful individuals) can be understood as 'loving subjects', articulated and governed within a particular regime of love, and within particular ethical practices of the self. Through various practices they demonstrate their love, practices that are identifiable to others through established social norms. Couples perform and present their love for themselves, each other, other couples, and single individuals, a performance which is celebratory, aspirational, and teleological. Not only do loving subjects produce love to be consumed, but modes of conduct are asserted for, and practiced by, the loved, the unloved and the (un)love-able.

*Strive,* in a sense, was a whole weekend dedicated to the self-realisation of the individual (aged between 15 and 25) in achieving a 'bright and shiny future' (Southbank Centre, n.d.b) through the love of work. Putting the religious and salvationary undertones to the side here for the moment, the thing to note is the bright and shiny futures on offer (or at least the aspiration for such a future, a *telos*) are firmly centred on a particularly privileged type of work—that is, aspirational, creative, artistic, intellectual modes of labour. On sale here is the aspiration to do work you love. If you work hard and aspire enough (this vision promises) you can be one of the chosen few, one of those saved from other non-creative, non-thinking, non-speaking modes of labour. *Strive* and you will love your work, and love someone else who will at least partly love 'you' because of who 'you' are as a social subject. Also in *Strive* we see the very thing Lotz asserts—the dissimulation of class (social) divisions, and the assertion of the 'universal image of love as the intimate bond that *seems* to transcend all class divisions' (2015, 140), the universal 'ideal achievable for *all* classes' (140).

The 'intimate bond' that is on offer here, however, is not only the bond between those in a romantic couple, as in the *Big Wedding Weekend*, but that between love of—or through—work and the individual. In fact, the *Strive* weekend is a contemporary re-packaging of the privileged cultural worker originally set out by Schiller over two centuries ago in *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*

(1794). Of course, the present socially lived experience for many is quite different. For example, it is widely recognised, at least in the UK, that if you aspire to a career that is attractive to many, often the only possible way of reaching the goal of work you love is through acquiring thousands of pounds worth of debt for a specific education (current HE undergraduate fees stand at an average of £9,000 p.a.),[2] or being in a position to undertake an unpaid internship and engage in unpaid labour. Love *is* work.

Considering the festival in this way, the various aspects of the 'ethical practices of the self' become evident. The ethical substance to be worked on is love. The particular set of practices of the self are those to work on and transform the individual into a loving subject, someone who is love-able—whether that be through the displays of romantic love in the *Big Wedding Weekend*, or the love of work in *Strive*. And the aim, the *telos,* of love is love, an indefinite and infinite love that will always require continuous work to attain and maintain.[3]

By thinking through the *Festival of Love,* what also becomes apparent are the ways in which the ethical government of the self and the wider practices of government are intertwined through love. Here I point only briefly to two key mechanisms in order to indicate this intertwining governance. First, the concept of marriage put forth in the *Big Wedding Weekend* enacts a key mechanism in the practice of government: the law. This presents us with the contradiction between the equality posited through law, that is, everyone is equally free to marry (here I am referring to the UK and EU legal context), and the reality of who this 'everyone' actually includes and excludes. However, specifically in terms of this discussion, law in modern modes of governance operates more and more as a regulatory principle, a 'norm' (Dean 2010, 142). And as Mitchell Dean makes clear: 'the norm creates an equivalence in that all are comparable in relation to it, but it also creates differences and inequalities in so far as it enables each to be individualised and hierarchically ordered' (141).[4] Certainly the *Big Wedding Weekend* sets out normative practices, the most obvious one being the offer of the opportunity to swish around in a traditional bridesmaid dress. Love is normalised as marriage, along with the social hierarchy (intersecting on various lines of class, race and gender) established between the married, the partnered, and the single.

The second key mechanism I will point to is found in the third umbrella event, *Encampment.* As described above, *Encampment* addressed and highlighted the plight of the millions of refugees involved in what has been termed the 'refugee crisis', and this can certainly be understood as a positive and worthwhile project. The visitors and participants played their part in acknowledging and celebrating the creativity of those who find themselves in adverse conditions, the power of art within the midst of crisis, and the difficult relationships that must navigate difference between cultures. Even so, there is an evident disjuncture between people out for a day of leisure or an evening by the river, having a glass of white wine and nibbles, whilst they take in the plight of refugees and the 'crisis'. The refugee crisis being represented in a cultural institution nestled on prime real estate on the banks of the river Thames in central London brings out two stark contradictions fundamental to capitalist societies: firstly, the supposed formal equality of individuals under the law and the actually existing social inequality, and, secondly, that between the notion of universal human rights and the rights of the citizen.[5]

However, the specific mechanism I aim to highlight here can be understood through the choice of *caritas* as a concept of love in the festival. *Caritas* is most often defined as the love of humankind, or, in everyday language, charity. Yet the *caritas* on the Southbank has arguably been given a particular ontological investment: philanthropy. And as Dean has argued, philanthropy has been a key mechanism of modern liberal modes of governance in that it normalises social problems. An example of this offered by Dean is in his work *The Constitution of Poverty* (1991), which highlights philanthropy's role in the normalisation and inclusion of poverty in England during the 19th century as a necessary corollary of capitalist accumulation of profit. Certainly, the presence of refugee crises throughout the 20th and 21st century can be argued to be co-existent with, and normalised within, the globalised capitalist drives for economic growth at any cost.

In briefly setting out these aspects of the festival, what begins to become identifiable is an object and subject of 'love', discursively articulated through complex assemblages of knowledges, practices, technologies, and mentalities. Through the concept of governmentality we can consider the governmentalisation of love: a regime of love that is tied to the governing of the self and the governing of others, dispersed and mediated within various social sites. And this love is intrinsic to modern liberal governance, inciting and articulating specific loving subjects, whilst following only one internal rule: the rule of economy.

In considering governmentalised love in this way, the question of love and the political arises. Specifically, the political implications of governmentalised love become apparent if we consider the presence of love in crisis, that is, in periods of crises of governance and civil society. In times of crisis, love is often invoked as a concept to overcome the crisis: for example, the claims for communist love in the revolutions of the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries; or 1968 and 'the Summer of Love' that emerged in response to the social crisis during the Vietnam War, the split between the ethical authority of the state and society. If love emerges in the public sphere during periods of social crisis, what is this love doing? What is love's ambition? With this in mind, I turn now to Gillian Rose's discussion of love, which, for Rose, is at the heart of politics.

## Love in crisis

In the section of *The Broken Middle* (1992) entitled 'Love and the State', Gillian Rose reiterates what other philosophers have identified before her: that the relation between the universal, the singular, and the particular is 'the political difficulty' (164), or, more specifically, where politics arises. In other words, the difficulty is the formation of the political will; the will of the individual, the collective will of the 'people', and the aporetic relation between the two.[6] Whilst in Rose's view, the difficulty is triune (the universal, the singular, and the particular), it has most often been seen in binary oppositions, as in the 'us' and 'them' logic of much political discourse. It is these oppositions that 'we invariably attempt to mend', and we do so with 'love, forced or fantasised into the state' (xii). Here love is placed at the heart of the political difficulty. This love, Rose argues, poses a double danger: 'a posited communal love [that] translates into social violence of individuals, and an agapic protestant inwardness [that] affirms hypocritical individualism' (157). This double danger of love forced or fantasised is, for Rose, understood as pietistic politics.

To expound the double danger of pietistic politics Rose turns to Max Weber, whose *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1905] 2011) can be understood precisely as a concern with this same double danger. For Weber, pietistic doctrines of salvation offered an individual greater confidence of being one of the saved, one of those chosen for God's predestined love. This was enacted through pietistic transformative practices of the self which governed individual spontaneity and shaped how the self externalised itself as an individual subject (Weber 2011, 126). In this way, Pietism was an ascetic, one that shaped an ethic of conduct of oneself and others.

In Weber's account, two love ethics can be identified. Firstly, the love ethic which emerges through the 'sect' community: a delimited group of individuals that denied the world beyond their specific community and followed a rigorous ethical conduct, determined in, and by, the specific community (149). Ernst Troeltsch, a contemporary of Weber, termed this the 'sect spirit' (Troeltsch [1911] 1981, 357). For Troeltsch, the lasting influence of the 'sect spirit' was a 'radical individualism and the radical ethic of love combined against the church type' (378). The second love ethic is found in the Protestant ethic, grounded on a vocational calling through which the individual carried out 'brotherly love' in the world (Weber 2011, 146). In Weber's view, the Protestant ethic allowed for a mode of conduct based on a more worldly ethos, specifically a 'middle class vocational ethos built on clear conscious and economic gain', that is, 'one of moralism and charity' (158).

These two ethics of pietistic religion place the individual in a relationship to God's love, either through the radically inward agapic relationship, or the ethical immediacy of a community of love. Both required an ascetic movement, a transformative practice of self, a love ethic, that constituted the individual as a particular loving subject. For Rose, these two forms of love ethic continue in modern societies in the form of pietistic politics. Specifically, in a crisis predicated on the separation of civil society and the state, two 'flights' of love become evident in the ambition to mend the split: 'to opt for individual inwardness or local [love] community' (Rose 1992, 165). These two flights, that see love forced or fantasised into the state, are the transformative ethical movements, with love at the heart. As examples of love's ambition to mend the split of modern civil society and the state, Rose sets out three periods of crisis—the crises of bureaucratic reform at the end of the 18th century, social democratic defeat in pre/post-World War I, and the rise and fall of fascism of pre/post World War II. Rose does so by drawing on three women authors: Rahel Varnagen, Rosa Luxemburg, and Hannah Arendt.

Varnagen articulates the crisis of bureaucratic reform at the end of the 18th century. As a Jew and a woman, Varnagen was witness to (and at the same time excluded from) the emergent modern bureaucratic 'nation' state (196), specifically the German nation state. She confronted the pietistic love ethic of fraternity (the love of fellow men) and the Christian love community. The early work of Luxemburg is situated in the crisis of social democracy in pre/post-World War I Europe. Here, the danger lies in the 'corruption of bourgeois morality' (203); the individual inwardness of revisionism, and the 'culture of terror' (ibid.); the totalising ethical community of nationalism or centralism. Arendt articulates the third period of crisis, the rise and fall of fascism of pre/post-World War II.

As Rose astutely points out, Arendt's earlier work, including the first two sections of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951),[7] rightly identifies the potential violence in love of a 'nation' or a 'nation-state'. This is done initially by interrogating the historical diremptions of the state and civil society in the late 19th century and early 20th century and the accompanying contradictions, whilst, at the same time, resisting overcoming or resolving these contradictions in love of a nation, race, or nation-state.[8] However, of most interest in terms of the present discussion is the shift in Arendt's position. For Rose, Arendt's later work, which most explicitly addresses her own experience of the rise of fascist governance and totalitarian ideology, presents an idealised and transhistorical concept of the political realm modelled on the Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica*.[9] This idealised concept is contrasted with the '"rise" of the debased realm of the social' (231), that is, the modern social realm: society. Here Arendt faces a problem: if the modern debased social realm is not the space of political action, then where exactly *is* the space? Arendt overcomes this difficulty by taking flight into St Augustine's agapic love.

Drawing directly on St Augustine's agapic love, Arendt articulates the modern human being as an apolitical 'mere existence', one that is 'mysteriously given us by birth' and 'can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, "*Volu ut sis*" (I want you to be)' (Arendt [1951] 1976, 301). In setting out the incapacity of individual political action in the modern world, the promise of political action is placed in 'a new beginning', that is, 'each new birth' (478–9). Here, Rose argues that Arendt conflates the 'miracle of each new life' with 'socially developed and recognised differences, the equality and inequality which are historical constructions and which political institutions may equally seek to abolish' (Rose 1992, 226). The modern crisis of the rise of fascism and totalitarianism to which Arendt is witness arguably leads her to opt for an apolitical and transhistorical agapic love.

## A *krisis* of love

Taking into consideration Rose's discussion of love in crisis and the dangers love poses, we might then ask, as Rose herself does not,[10] what the ambition of governmentalised love is, and how might this be thought of in terms of the context of the *Festival of Love*. In the summer of 2016, with the refugee crisis impacting hugely throughout Europe, nationalism, populist rhetoric and political movements were rising vehemently in various European countries. And in June of that year, the EU referendum in the UK resulted in a vote for leaving the EU. The result of this vote, whilst shaped by complex factors, was driven at least partly by love for a certain ideal 'nation'. Likewise, the UK government immigration and austerity policies set up to create a 'hostile environment' within the UK itself were in full operation by the summer of 2016.[11] At the time of writing this article (June 2018) the consequences of these governmental decisions have come to violent fruition.[12]

Considering this wider context of crisis, what the *Festival of Love* arguably presents is a depoliticised love ethic asserting both individual love, and the articulation of a love community. At the same time, the exclusion and social inequality inherent in the reality of such a community of loving subjects is normalised (through mechanisms such as philanthropy) and obfuscated (through

practices such as those targeting individual self-development and self-fulfillment). If, as Rose argues, love is called on to mend in a period of crisis, then the ambition of governmentalised love, evident on the Southbank, is centred on the pacification of the social sphere, [13] and the management of the individual subjects that exist within it. The two flights of love (the individual agapic love and the love community), understood through the lens of Foucauldian governmentality, can be seen as intertwining individualising and totalising practices that manage the individual in order to constitute a particular loving subject situated within a depoliticised social sphere: a subject that 'is either divided inside himself or divided from others' (Foucault 2002, 326). Here we have a specific articulation of the aporetic relationship between the everyone and the every 'one', the crisis at the heart of democracy which Rose emphasised.

Who, what, how, and why we love are intertwined and worked on through complex practices, knowledges, and mentalities of love that, for the most part, remain unquestioned, yet shape how we exist in the world, how we shape the world in which we live now and aspire to in the future. If so, then we need to ask where does this leave the space for political action? What kind of political subjects are we, and what kind of world is aspired to, through governmentalised love? Certainly, these questions need to be considered in relation to the emergence of political protests explicitly involving 'love' as a political tool. One well known example here is the 'Love Trump[']s Hate' and *#lovetrumpshate* protests emerging in 2017 in response to the election of Donald Trump as president of the US. Whilst the 'love' in the protest might allow people to join together in a symbolic rejection of the protest's target (that of the election of Trump), it is questionable what this love offers beyond a symbolic universal ideal, and likewise, whether it offers, in any way, an alternative to the pietistic love ethics identified by Rose.

To draw one final time on Dean, by giving our attention to love, we can gain an understanding of a love regime that 'tr[ies] to shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups' (Dean 2010, 20). By understanding 'love' in such a way, we might also begin to identify its limits and, importantly, its contingent nature (14). With this in mind, I finish with the thought of how, and to what extent, it is possible to think, and do, love differently in this current period of social and political crisis. As Lotz (2015, 147) asserts: 'Instead of thinking about love in terms of a truth procedure or ontological event, we should see its social character and thereby turn our attention to its particular social productivity'. Love in crisis renders palpable the contingency of ambitions to mend through force or fantasy. This opens the possibility of an ethico-political practice—a *krisis* of love—that articulates differently the loving relationship between the individual and the collective.

## Notes

[1] Three points are useful to note in regards the liberal mode of governance identified here. First, the 'free' subject asserted by liberalism is a situated subject free to make choices within a regulated and managed sphere (Dean 2010, 193). Second, as Foucault stressed throughout his work on modern governance, and Dean takes up, liberalism is a rationality that takes various forms, 'the variant forms of liberalism, and indeed of neo-liberalism, stem less from fundamental philosophical differences and more from the historical circumstances and styles of government' (74). Third, liberal modes of governance always 'contain the possibility of non-liberal interventions' (163).

[2] For a fuller discussion on the relationship between debt and governmentality see Lazzarato (2015).

[3] It is interesting here to consider the infinite nature of love in relation to capitalism's infinite aim of the accumulation of profit. See, for instance Harvey (2011, 28).

[4] For a fuller account of liberalism and the law see Dean's section on 'Law and the Norm' (2010, 140–146)

[5] Hannah Arendt set out these very contradictions in her seminal work on 'Imperialism' in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976).

[6] Rose offers a definition of 'aporia' as follows: 'While "contradiction" is a logical term, which, applied to social structure, implies possible resolution, "aporia" is prelogical, it refers to a lack of way, and implies no exit from its condition' (206, note 212). It is this sense she talks of the 'aporia between the everyone and every "one"' (164).

[7] It is useful to bear in mind here Rose's comment on the publishing context of Arendt's work as it is often overlooked: '*The Origins of Totalitarianism* has been received largely as a cold-war, anti-Marxist work on "Totalitarianism", the title of the third of its three parts, each first published separately, when it will be argued here that Part One, "Anti-Semitism", and Part Two, "Imperialism", may be seen, respectively, as the most sustained attempt to develop Marx's account of the split between state and civil society [...] and to provide a political and sociological history of the modern "nation"-state.' (Rose 1992, 217)

[8] The two contradictions referred to here are as follows. The first contradiction is in the premise of equality of all individuals before the law and the social reality of a society based on inequality. The second contradiction is that between the 'state' which is subject to law and the declaration of the rights of man, and that of the 'nation' which presupposes a sovereignty subject to no law (Rose 1992, 220)

[9] For a full account of this idealised concept of the political realm see Arendt (1998).

[10] Rose's philosophical work and thinking emerges from a speculative reading of Hegel and the Hegelian dialectic.

[11] For further information on the 'hostile environment' see Liberty (2018).

[12] One such consequence is the Windrush Scandal. For a brief outline of the Windrush scandal and its relation to the 'Hostile Environment' policies see Amnesty International UK (2018).

[13] This ambition can best be understood in relation to the irreconcilable 'problem of society' that is inherent to modern modes of liberal governance. To quote Dean: 'The problem of society arises from the liberal problematic of security [...] [that is] How can we attain security (a pacified totality) in a milieu constituted by radically heterogenous forces, processes and types of subject?' (Dean 2010, 148).

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## Biography

Rachel Cockburn is an independent scholar, teacher and student cellist, based in London, UK. Her research is situated within the field of performance philosophy, specifically the intersection of philosophy, political theory, and aesthetic practice, and she holds a PhD (2015) form the University of London. Rachel has a number of published works, including recent chapter contributions in *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance, & Radical Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017) and *Performing Interdisciplinarity* (Routledge 2018).

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# THE LISTENING THEATRE: A METAMODERN POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE

**TOM DRAYTON** UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

> I'm ageless / But I'm out of time,
> I'm thoughtless / But I got a lot on my mind…
>
> L.A. Salami, 'Generation L(ost)' (2018)

There has been a notable trend in contemporary performance that engages politically and socially with participants and communities. Andy Lavender (2016) termed this trend the 'age of engagement', a theatre of 'nuanced and differential negotiations, participations and interventions' (21). During the last few years, I have observed an emerging development within the theatre of young performance-makers that engage the audience both performatively and politically, as per Lavender's term, but are also inherently critical of their own processes. Striving 'for utopias, despite their futile nature' (Turner 2015), they are optimistic in their engagement whilst also actively embracing an inherent ineffectuality.

I posit that this trend amongst millennial artists can be described through the idea of metamodernism, characterised by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010) as a 'tension […] of a modern desire for sense and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all' (6), or by James MacDowell (2011) as an oscillation between 'sincerity and irony, enthusiasm and detachment, naïveté and knowingness'. Vermeulen and van den Akker refer to Raymond Williams' structure of feeling in order to determine elements of 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams 1969, 18) that could 'no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern' (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, 2). Williams suggested the concept of structure of feeling as an attempt to discern 'a form

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and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm' (1969, 18) as it is occurring in real time; in this article, I evaluate this idea of metamodernism as a particularly millennial structure of feeling, as well as how it might be seen to inform millennial approaches to socially-engaged theatre and performance. I will examine the inherent cultural modalities of oscillation between sincerity and irony, hope and hopelessness, and how two UK companies, Lung and Feat.Theatre, both integrate and respond to these contradictions. I will examine the work of both companies as responses to specific political and socio-economic crises that have affected the artists, including the economic recession and following austerity imposed on Britain, and the crises affecting the communities involved with their projects, that of the response to the refugee crisis in Britain and the housing crisis within London. Through this analysis, I aim to lay the foundations for further discussion and examination of the current trends within performance created by the millennial generation.

The first section of this article will offer a brief examination of the concept of the millennial in order to lay the foundations for an analysis of its inherent connection to metamodernism. Through an examination of the oscillatory systems inherent within metamodern thought, I will posit that the metamodern oscillation between sincerity and irony has led to a new performance trend that is at once both hopeful and hopeless. I have tentatively labelled this trend 'The Listening Theatre' in response to Hanzi Freinacht's political metamodernism, as detailed in *The Listening Society* (2017), that revolves around empathetic understanding as the catalyst of political change. This will lead into an analysis of the two case studies that exhibit this trend, exploring their hopeful yet self-critical theatre of engagement. If metamodernism is a reappraisal of affect and depth (van den Akker et al 2017), whilst simultaneously accepting the falsity, frailty and irony of such a reappraisal, then these productions by millennial companies are examples of metamodern theatre in response to contemporary crises affecting Britain. They are young artists' paradoxical reactions to a climate of chaos.

I will conclude this article by emphasising the evolving nature of both metamodernism and theatre created by the millennial generation, and how the work of these companies challenges the dominant cultural understanding of millennials as naïve and self-involved. This article aims to open further discussion around the performative trends that make up 'The Listening Theatre' as performance that both strives for actual political and social change through a theatre of engagement, whilst also being explicit in its limits and failings. It is a theatre of hope/lessness.

## The Millennial and the Metamodern

> I'm penniless / But I've sold my soul,
> I'm restless / But I've nowhere to go
>
> L.A. Salami, 'Generation L(ost)' (2018)

As a millennial, I have been accused of killing marmalade (Ormerod 2017), of destroying the housing market (Brown et al 2017, 42) and hating trees (Nicholas and Lewis 2008). I have been described, famously, as a lazy, self-obsessed narcissist (Stein 2013). But what, exactly, does the

term, coined by American historians Howe and Strauss (1991) to label the group of children who would start to come of age at the turn of the millennium, actually encapsulate? Is it a media-based diatribe? A pop-culture appellation? Or does the concept of the millennial describe an experiential understanding of a cultural epoch?

Generational research, by nature, is inherently generalising and based upon some degree of approximation. In his recent book on the subject, *The Myth of the Age of Entitlement* (2017), James Cairns is particularly sceptical of 'treating era-of-birth as the core determinant of ideas and behavior [as it] ignores inequalities running along lines of race, class and gender' (10). So, why would I insist on continued use of the term, and how can I relate new methods and modalities in performance work by millennials to a *shared generational experience* if generational research itself is inherently flawed? This stems from metamodernism's inherent connection to the concept of the millennial, as laid down by van den Akker and Vermuelen (2017), Freinacht (2017) and Turner (2011). Van den Akker and Vermeulen describe their concept of the metamodern, an attempt to define the current situation of post-postmodernity, as a description of the current structure of feeling. Here, Vermeulen and van den Akker refer to Raymond Williams' original term as a 'discourse that gives meaning to our experience' (van den Akker et al 2017, 11). As a theoretical framework, the structure of feeling is particularly useful in understanding how the sociological concepts of the metamodern and the millennial interact with the theatrical, stemming, as it does, from Williams' *Drama from Ibsen To Brecht* (1969). In a way reflexive of metamodernism's 'both, and' nature, Williams describes the concept of the structure of feeling as 'as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet [it] is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience' (18). In essence, structure of feeling refers to almost intangible, and yet experiential, modalities apparent within cultural and artistic practice existing within a particular timeframe that are 'essentially related, although in practice, and in detail, this is not always easy to see' (17).

I propose that the concept of the millennial can be examined within a similar framework. The 'structure' of the millennial refers to particular 'embodied, related feelings' (Williams 1969, 18) that a number of the generation experience, which, possibly in part due to the aforementioned media fixation and amplification through social media and online meme culture, becomes a pervasive appellation. The modality of a structure of feeling is useful in understanding this construct in that it is more conceivable than delineating specific generational epochs simply through era of birth. As James McDowell (2017) notes, such a term also takes into account that 'it is only one of many such localised "structures" at work in a particular time and place' (28), and a multiplicity of structures are in place at any historical moment, including the present one. Importantly, McDowell also raises Williams' admission that 'a structure of feeling will not be "possessed in the same way by many members of the community"' (28; citing Williams 1965, 65). So I would emphasise that the 'millennial' as a concept is not all-encompassing, nor relevant to every person born from the mid-1980s 'up to and (sometimes) after the millennium' (Brown et al 2017, 3)—and yet there is a certain 'experience of the present' (Williams 1977, 128) that can be expressed through Williams' term.

With these caveats, the metamodernist characterisation of the millennial 'psyche', for want of better terminology, oscillates between the 'optimism and idealism of their Boomer parents'

(Huntley 2006, 14) and the cynicism and ironic detachment that has arisen from both childhood exposure to Generation X culture and the economic and political crises of their formative adult years. It is this oscillation between (childhood) optimism and (early-adult) cynicism that defines the metamodern millennial. As Vermeulen puts it in an online video:

> We [millennials] are all, from the start, ironic. That's how we were raised. We were raised on *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, which is magnificent, but we *want* to be sincere. (Frieze 2014)

What has brought about this oscillation between sincerity and cynicism? At the turn of the millennium, Howe and Strauss (2000) noted that 'millennials have never, on the whole, witnessed economic trouble' (100). A few years later, Rebecca Huntley (2006) expanded on this trend by stating that they 'have only known a prosperous world, where […] people only get wealthier, […] where consumerism and capitalism are natural conditions and go largely unchallenged' (2).

At the dawn of the 2010s, however, millennials 'emerged into an adult world where only one rule exists—the certainty of uncertainty' (Huntley 2006, 15). A recent UK House of Commons report cites unique crises as 'having a major impact on millennial's socio-political outlook' (Brown et al. 2017, 5). The same report details 'long term "scarring"' (Brown et al 2017, 5) developing from such events, which include, but are not limited to: the financial crash and following recession; imposed neoliberal austerity; increased rent and the removal of housing benefit for the under-25s in 2014; the rise in zero-hour contracts and the so-called 'gig economy'; the impact of social media upon mental health; increased university intake and lack of graduate opportunities; the fourth wave of terrorism; and the global climate crisis. For a generation 'raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s', our coming of age in a time of economic, political and social crises meant that ours 'is a story of innocence lost' (Williams 2015). I think 'political-metamodernist' Hanzi Freinacht, a figure we will return to later, describes this socio-political outlook best when he depicts a 'subtle but pervasive sadness that seems to lie in the background' of his adult life (Freinacht 2017, 6). For Freinacht, this is a sense that is 'shared by many people, […] a sense of the tragedy of the world, of the suffering of others, and perhaps even more, an awareness of beauty lost, of potentials that never materialize' (6).

So, hard done by neoliberalism and imposed austerity, anxious and depressed about their own mediocrity, the suffering of others and the global climate crisis, have millennials risen up and resorted to large scale political revolt? Until the recent increase in youth turnout in the 2017 UK General Election, in which 'turnout rose by an average of 3 percentage points' (Surridge 2017), and the impact of the youth-led Momentum campaign within the UK Labour Party, I would have suggested that Britain's answer was 'no'. Whilst the 2000s saw youth support furnish Obama's campaign, with 'nearly one third of the Millennial generation' entering the electorate, millennials in Greece 'protest[ing] against the government after the most dramatic economic downfall the world has seen', uprisings in Egypt 'chronicled via social media' and rallies in both Chile and Tel Aviv being 'led by Millennials' (Luttrell and McGrath 2015, 34), *statistically*, UK millennials expressed indifference and cynical disinterest, creating a 'degree of apathy about politically engaging' (White

et al. 2000, 34) as the system, it seemed, was set up against them. In a move exemplary of the hypocritical nature of our generation, millennials decree that we are victims of the gig economy but are also the most 'enthusiastic users of gig-economy apps and services' (Parkinson 2017); we use technology in nearly every aspect of our lives but 'feel that it is depriving [us] of deeper personal relationships' (Huntley 2006, 10). We occupy a contradictory position, one that oscillates between cynicism and hope, one that embraces hypocrisy, a conflicted movement between poles; we are a 'Paradoxical Generation' (Huntley 2006, 10).

Metamodernism's *metaxy* speaks of a movement between these poles, 'not a binary so much as a continuum that stretches from one to the other, not a balance but a pendulum swinging between the various extremes' (van den Akker et al 2017, 10–11). It reconciles an acceptance and utilisation of certain metanarratives, or a 'reintroduction of hope and progress' as Freinacht (2017) terms it, whilst also being inherently critical and aware of their frailties and falsehoods. The metamodern, as a theoretical framework of understanding, speaks to contemporary movements within arts and culture that 'oscillat[e] between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony' (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). The prefix, *meta*, stems from the Greek 'with', 'between' or 'beyond' in relation to both modernity and postmodernity. If modernism strove towards a singular 'truth', and postmodernism at once deconstructed, multiplied, and negated this 'truth', metamodernism operates within a 'both-neither dynamic' (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010), a dialectical oscillation that 'identifies with and negates—and hence, overcomes and undermines—conflicting positions, while never being congruent to these positions' (van den Akker et al. 2017, 10). An effort to describe the cultural shift away from postmodernism's absence of meaning, metamodernism oscillates between postmodern irony and modern sincerity. Luke Turner expands on Vermeulen's previous quotation regarding millennial cynicism when he states that,

> Ours is a generation raised in the '80s and '90s, on a diet of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, for whom postmodern irony and cynicism is a default setting, something ingrained in us. However, despite, or rather because of this, a yearning for meaning—for sincere and constructive progression and expression—has come to shape today's dominant cultural mode. (Turner 2015)

Metamodernism does not indicate a return to the trappings of modernist metanarratives. It is not ingenuous. Instead, it offers what has come to be termed 'informed naivety' or 'pragmatic idealism' (Turner 2015) that engages with a resurgence of the strive for authenticity, romanticism and affect, whilst not 'forfeiting all that we've learnt from postmodernism' (Turner 2015).

Although metamodernism itself is '*neither* a manifesto, *nor* a social movement' (van den Akker et al. 2017, 5), but rather encompasses wildly different movements across the political spectrum, certain political ideologies have arisen through metamodernist discourse. In *The Listening Society: A Metamodern Guide to Politics* (2017), Hanzi Freinacht—described elsewhere as a 'political philosopher, historian and sociologist' (Metamoderna 2016)—posits that metamodernism can be read as a 'developmental stage' that 'builds upon [the] understanding' of Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept of a 'cultural "phase"' (Freinacht 2017, 15), or structure of feeling. In terms similar to Vermeulen's (2017), he states that 'political metamodernism tries to bring about the society that

comes *after*, that goes *beyond*' (Freinacht 2017, 2), championing a political ideology where emotional needs and psychological growth of all citizens is a priority; where cross-party exchanges improve political discourse. (As it will become clear, this empathy, understanding, and co-development is central to the concept of what I am terming 'The Listening Theatre', as an allusion to Freinacht's proposition.)

Recent attention was drawn to Freinacht by an article in *The New Yorker* that describes a 'new political party' in Stockholm, 'The Initiative', which quotes Freinacht's 'Listening Society' as 'philosophical inspiration' (Gessen 2017). However, Freinacht himself doesn't exist. Despite the opening to *The Listening Society* declaring that it was written whilst living 'alone in a house in the French speaking parts of the Swiss Alps' (Freinacht 2017, 7), Gessen's *New Yorker* article revealed to the public that Hanzi Freinacht is in fact the pen name for Emil Ejner Friis and Daniel Görtz. Freinacht 'himself', however, still keeps an active presence on social media and is directly contactable via Facebook to answer questions regarding 'his' work. Freinacht's construction only serves to heighten the metamodern readings of Friis and Görtz's philosophy. Freinacht's politics are formulated around a call-to-arms style dialogue; 'we just have to find one another and work together', he states (Freinacht 2017, 360). But we can't find Freinacht—he is an illusion! Photos of Freinacht published by metamoderna.org are actually of model Paul Mason, more commonly known as 'Fashion Santa' (Chung 2015) due to his long white beard. Friis and Görtz make use of such signifiers associated with famous philosophers—a bearded man in mountainous solitude—as a cultural avatar of sorts for promoting their understanding of metamodernism. This shift is intended to transform metamodernism from a 'cute little obsession for academic conferences and art expositions' to a 'powerful, effective ideology that can save societies from collapse and dramatically improve the lives of millions' (Freinacht 2017, 376). The construction 'Freinacht' is a reclaiming of the metanarrative of the 'philosopher', put to use because of his inherent need to drive forward his own message. An older, learned philosopher thinking 'grand' thoughts in quiet solitude and imparting them down, god-like, to society might be listened to. Two unknown activists, however, probably will not. Freinacht is at once personable and inaccessible, truthful and false, calling for further connection between all members of society, and driving them away via a false persona. Even if you dismiss his politics, he is a wholly metamodern construct.

## The Listening Theatre

They say that it's hopeless / But I'm still here

L.A. Salami, 'Generation L(ost)' (2018)

The idea of the Listening Theatre that I propose here is not a practical methodology, nor a call to arms, but an attempt to speak to a range of aesthetic, political, and philosophical methodologies employed by particular millennial theatre companies and performance makers. Though the specific modes of engagement and stylistic registers vary from company to company, and even performance to performance, my contention is that they are always built around the ethos that curating an empathetic understanding can lead to positive change whilst being simultaneously

critical and sceptical of their own methods of engagement. Just as Vermeulen et al. (2017) emphasise that their understanding of metamodernism is '*neither* a manifesto, *nor* a social movement, stylistic register, or philosophy' (5), I propose that the Listening Theatre, too, can be read as a nascent structure of feeling within portions of the theatrical landscape that is concurrent to, and part of, the emergence of the metamodern.

As a framework of understanding, the Listening Theatre attempts to encapsulate Freinacht's posited act of 'listening' to society to instrumentalise progress (Freinacht 2017, 81) through a state of *metaxis*. It concurrently implements a motion towards a utopian vision whilst importantly being aware of the frailties and falsehoods implicit in such an attempt— 'consciously commit[ing] itself to an impossible possibility' (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). It is sincere in its attempts at human connection and progress through performance whilst embracing the ironies implicit within such endeavours. I appropriate Williams' structure of feeling in order to analyse the Listening Theatre in this respect, as it attempts to discern contemporary 'changes in experience—the responses and their communications; the "subjects" and the "forms"—which make the drama in itself and as a history important' (Williams 1969, 20). As Williams analysed the shift from naturalistic to expressionist structures of feeling, noting that the term encompasses more than that of a convention or stylistic register (17), I understand the Listening Theatre to build upon certain theatrical frameworks, its 'immediate and better recognized predecessors' (19), that could mask the analysis of it as a separate structure of feeling. I propose that this Listening Theatre both builds upon and sits congruently with other localised frameworks of understanding within contemporary theatre, but that its inherent structural connection to the metamodern justifies separate terminology and analysis.

Whilst I focus on the connections between this structure of feeling within performance and the millennial through the metamodern, the concept of the Listening Theatre is of course aware of particular ideas within other theoretical mappings of contemporary performance. Andy Lavender (2016), in particular, refers to the importance placed upon *authenticity* within art in the current cultural state of post-postmodernism: 'After the clarion calls of modernism, and the absences and ironies of postmodernism, came the nuanced and differential negotiations, participations and interventions of an age of engagement' (21). Although Lavender doesn't use the term, this is nearly a description of metamodernism, and Lavender observes traits within contemporary performance that sit firmly within the metamodern sphere. In particular, his appraisal of Janelle Reinelt's poetics of 'caring, engagement, and commitment' within theatre (Reinelt 2006, 83), leads him to observe a 'notably different lexicon from that employed during the height of postmodernism [...] "actuality", "authenticity", "encounter", "engagement"—a set [of terms] that would have seemed naïve or faintly ridiculous if wheeled out a generation or so ago' (Lavender 2016, 25). This 'theatre of engagement', as Lavender terms it, is evident in the performative trends observed later within this article, and his repetition of the import placed upon authenticity in performance is particularly exemplary of the re-emergence of sincerity within the metamodern.

Lavender's theatre of engagement also takes cues from Grant Kester's earlier designation of what he terms dialogical art, in reference to Bahktin, as an attempt to categorise what Kester observed

as an 'emergence of a body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation' (Kester 2006, 2). Kester describes the emergence of this dialogical art as occurring within the mid-1990s, highlighting particular works that 'solicit participation and involvement so openly' (ibid.). Kester draws upon Habermas' concept of the public sphere and contends that dialogical art works to curate a discursive space free of the 'coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life' (4). Mirroring Freinacht's statement regarding political metamodernism's focus on co-development—'even if we don't agree, we come closer to the truth if we create better dialogues' (Freinacht 2017, 4)—Kester encapsulates Habermas' communicative action in which the 'very act of participating in these exchanges makes us better able to engage in discursive encounters and decision-making processes in the future' (Kester 2006, 4). Similarly, Bruce Barber's operative littoral art formulates 'lifeworld affirming' projects that position themselves 'between the private realm and public sphere' (Barber 1998). Again, the terminology is interesting here in terms of its metamodern connotations: 'littoral' refers to the 'intermediate and shifting zone between the sea and the land' (ibid.), which is reminiscent of the 'betwixt' *meta* of Vermeulen and van den Akker. Lavender, Kester, and Barber all point to an emergence of dialogue-based work; work that centres on participation, collaboration and engagement as a reflexive, communicative and progressive force that is, as Barber clarifies, 'essentially political' (ibid.). As Lavender states, it is now 'possible to *re*claim a sense of theatre and performance doing a particular kind of work in the world [...] with the ability to make us see things differently and maybe take action as consequence' (25; emphasis added). This act of *re*-claiming echoes the metamodernist tendency toward *re*-appraisal and *re*-use of metanarratives within a contemporary, critical context.

Finally, a comparison might be made with Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, in which the artwork functions as 'social interstice' (Bourriaud 2002, 45). For Bourriaud, this art 'constructs models of sociability suitable for producing human relations' (70). Bourriaud, however, argues that relational art is not 'concerned with seeking to represent utopias [...] [but] permitting social relations' (46). In this case, can relational aesthetics comfortably fit within the sphere of metamodernism, if a 'yearning for utopias' has, as Turner (2015) states, 'come to the fore'? I would argue that the concept of the Listening Theatre, whilst drawing upon these concurrent and overlapping spheres of performance theory, speaks to a new form of dialogical performance. Whilst the millennial companies I describe in the next section generate differing examples of discursive public spheres and engage in forms analogous to both littoral and dialogical art, the Listening Theatre proffers a further metamodern interpretation in two important respects. It at once negotiates a discourse between the audience and the artist in order to strive towards a form of utopic vision through political interface, whilst also struggling with self-critique through an awareness of this form's failings, frailties and falsehoods. In this way, it oscillates between genuine human connection and engagement (built upon performance modalities engaging with the concepts of the littoral and dialogical) and an ironic self-awareness of its own limitations. It strives 'for utopias despite their futile nature' (Turner 2015).

## Feat.Theatre

Feat.Theatre's *The Welcome Revolution* (2018) imagines 'a world where inviting strangers for cups of tea is no longer a radical act' (Theatre Royal Stratford East 2018). The production was created as a response to the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric the two-woman company experienced upon returning to Britain from a period in Germany, as well as being directly inspired by the *Welcome is a Radical Act* conference at Goldsmiths University, London (2017), which engaged with the increase in nationalism and rise in hostility towards refugees and migrants.

The act of welcoming is key to the dialogical and littoral art described within the previous section and remains important for the Listening Theatre as I conceive it. In order for participants to engage within the public sphere fashioned by Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, they will have to be welcomed into, and feel welcome within, the artistic process, or risk feeling disempowered by the experience (Jackson 2012). If, however, the act of welcoming itself has become a radical, political act, how can artists best utilise this within performance built within the spheres of dialogical, littoral, and *listening* art? As an exploration of this question, Feat.Theatre utilised a quintessentially British thematic that both plays to and parodies the rise in nostalgic and nationalist discourse within Britain at the time—that of a tea party. If we are to see national identity as an 'imagined and convenient conception of nationhood adjusted to the current political and social circumstances' (Navarro Romero 2011, 244), we are able to view the current period of *re*-construction and *re*-appropriation of 'Britishness' (whatever that might be) in the rise of nationalist politics. Feat.Theatre's specific focus on nostalgia within Britain is particularly acute, with 'a significant part of the cultural economy [being] built around these feelings, ranging from preserved steam railways to historical TV serials about midwives and country policemen' (Jack 2017). Their utilisation of nostalgia appears as an ironic simulation of a nationalistic event; however, it is not purely cynical in its re-appropriation, but imbued with hope, and even utopic in vision. It is both ironic in utilising nostalgic, nationalist modalities, and sincere in its desire to provide a meaningful forum for participants. It is this metaxis between the two poles of irony and sincerity that epitomizes the metamodernist tendencies apparent within *The Welcome Revolution*.

The show itself is divided into two halves: a participatory tea party, in which local members of the community are invited to engage in discussions and practical workshops; and an interactive performance piece formed around the responses collected within the previous section. The first part relies heavily upon concepts covered within the above discussion on dialogical and littoral arts practice. Members of the local community are invited to a tea party at a theatre or arts centre, where they share tea, cake, and biscuits, participate in family-friendly arts and craft activities, and engage with discussions led by the company about how 'welcome' they feel and what community means to them (Theatre Royal Stratford East 2018). This section is purely based around the act of *listening*. The company are both welcoming the community into a public sphere in order to engage in a dialogue regarding their own thoughts on the issues surrounding the idea of 'being welcome', and they are gathering material from the participants in order to craft their show. The discussions in this section are led by questions the company have prepared but take free form between the participants involved.

The levels of engagement within this process are particularly noteworthy. At the stage I interviewed the company, the piece was being presented as part of the *Stronger Than Fear* festival at Theatre Royal Stratford East after a residency at artsdepot, North London. When developing the work at artsdepot, the company had access to a number of community groups already connected to the arts centre itself. The level of engagement, therefore, was relatively high, although the demographic was limited to people already engaging with the arts or artsdepot specifically. When the piece moved to Stratford, the company attempted to engage with the local community through social media, leaflets, and posters. This led to a lower level of engagement, but a different demographic of participants. Stratford's borough, Newham, is an area of extremely high deprivation (Newham Clinical Commissioning Group 2017), with the lowest level of adult arts engagement in the UK according to Arts Council England (ACE 2011). The company stated that a range of participants attended the tea party at Gerry's Café in Stratford and contributed to the performance, including migrants, a homeless participant, and a member of the local council. However, it is interesting to note that none of the tea party participants attended the performance a week later. This brings into question the effectiveness of the company's interpretation of the act of welcoming. If participants did not feel welcome enough to return to the café in order to experience the outcomes, was the company unsuccessful in providing a lasting public sphere? What is the efficacy of such dialogical processes if the dialogue between artist and participant ends prematurely? Feat.Theatre, however, do not shy away from such questions, and, in the spirit of the Listening Theatre, offer a critique of this practice within the second half of the project.

The second section of *The Welcome Revolution* sees the audience sat on sofas, sharing more tea and biscuits, a week or so after the tea party event. The performer, on a stage filled with bunting and origami sculptures created by the tea party participants, takes us through her own personal journey towards political engagement. Throughout this, we are invited to play particular characters, without having to leave the comfort of our sofa (or our cup of tea). One audience member becomes the performer's parent and pushes her on a 'swing'; another acts as her school friend, reading pre-prepared lines into a microphone. We are then taken through the creation of a 'Welcome Revolution' in an imagined land, with many of us donning hats, wigs, or fairy wings as various characters from children's literature. This use of children's stories to interrogate the act of a revolution is particularly interesting. Firstly, it deepens the nostalgic rhetoric employed within the production itself; not only do we return to the performer's own childhood experience of stories, but we also see quintessentially British figures *re-appropriated* for political purpose. Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, and Harry Potter are particularly important British exports, heightened by their inclusion in the London 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony, arguably a list of Britishness's fundamental 'elements' as seen by the organisers (Lee and Joon 2017); within this imagined 'Welcome Revolution', all three become socialist revolutionaries. Secondly, this imagined staging of the 'Welcome Revolution' is the closest the company gets to the act of revolution within the piece. The remainder of the show edges slowly away from the idea of revolt and into a critique of the *Welcome Revolution* project itself. It is an affirmation of the oscillation between hope and hopelessness made evident within Feat.Theatre's production. The company strive to curate a public sphere as an effectual communicative forum between local communities, to perform the act of welcoming as a radical action of political defiance—and yet the only revolution the company

create occurs within a storybook-land amongst the joint imaginations of the audience and actor. It is at once both a call to arms and an admission of defeat.

As stated earlier, this shared feeling of comfort is deliberately challenged further when the company address responses to their previous tea party. As the production I experienced was performed in Newham, it was not surprising to hear stories of social isolation, inequality, poverty, and homelessness, stories that are antithetical to the collective and communal 'feel-good' experience curated through the first half of the production. Whilst some of these responses, read in a dead-pan manner into a microphone, explicitly address the fact that the participants enjoyed their time at the tea party itself, others offer insights into issues that the company admit they cannot address. One moment in particular concerns the story of one participant at the Stratford tea party who was currently homeless. The company speak to their shortcomings as artists in addressing such issues: 'I offer him a plate of cake and biscuits. I teach him how to make an origami frog [as they did with the other participants] because that's all I can think of at the time' (Feat.Theatre 2018). It is here that *The Welcome Revolution* shows a departure from both dialogical art and relational aesthetics. In projects under both former frameworks, the dialogical act itself may be the focal point of each artwork; the creation of participatory space being the performance itself. Some projects might go further and also offer a summation of the dialogical participation as a performance or artwork, as does *The Welcome Revolution*, too. However, Feat.Theatre are attempting something else with their further exploration and critique of such an encounter in that they are not only listening to participants and offering a summation of this listening but are also listening to the critiques of their listening itself. They address the shortcomings experienced within the participatory act, of being unable to affect change, of appropriating participants' stories, of the failure to create an extended relational platform between the tea party and the performance. Yes, their tea party was a welcoming and hopeful event, but their on-stage analysis conveys an awareness and acceptance of the critiques of such a process. Feat.Theatre aim to directly address issues of nationalism, anti-immigration, and community through long-form participatory engagement. However, as artists, they are also critical and questioning of this format, and of their place within such frameworks. In this way, *The Welcome Revolution* project is representative of a metamodern sensibility being apparent within theatre created by millennial artists. It strives for utopia, whether through participatory practice or through imagined literary amalgam, whilst overtly admitting that it expects to fail.

## Lung

The work of Manchester-based Lung is particularly exemplary of another continual and progressive dialogical engagement with an audience and community participants, whilst also showing an integral awareness of the limitations and fallibility of such a process. Their 2015 piece, *E15*, illustrated the journey of the Focus E15 campaign in Newham (a borough in East London) in a way that aimed 'to provide a truthful re-telling of a national issue and how one group of women refused to be marginalised' (Lung 2017). The company worked with members of the Focus E15 campaign group in a series of interviews and workshops, as well as attending regular protest

events. The campaign itself is built around a group of young mothers who had been forcibly evicted from their homes after Newham Council cut its funding for the Focus E15 Hostel for young homeless people in 2013 (Focus E15 2014), and the council advised that the families 'would have to accept private rented accommodation as far away as Manchester, Hastings and Birmingham' (Monks and Woodhead 2016, vii). During the ongoing campaign, the group occupied a disused block of flats in a nearby estate, which were then 'opened to the public and ran as a social centre for two weeks, with an evolving program of daily events, including workshops, meetings, and music and comedy gigs' (Focus E15 2014).

Lung's work with the group formed a verbatim performance that continued to rally support for the group's cause over the next three years, gaining signatures and donations for the group from audience members post-performance, and offering a national platform of awareness for the Focus E15 campaign. When the show transferred to London's Battersea Arts Centre in 2017, the company opened the run by marching into the theatre from the local train station with the campaign group themselves. The performance then opened with banners, protestors, and even babies on the stage (Woodhead 2018), emphasising the reality of the situation—that real families' homes and lives are still at stake. The company's work with the campaign group also continues weekly, with the play's authors travelling to Stratford to protest with the group on the high street.

Lung describe their work as 'platforming political issues' (KCOM 2017), but their work extends further than this. In a recent interview with the company, Helen Monks described their struggle with the responsibility towards communities and audience's post-performance to me: 'You can't just give someone a piece of theatre that's incredibly triggering for lots of issues they might have in their life and then just leave. There becomes a responsibility around that play and what that play is trying to do' (Monks 2018). The dialogical processes employed by Lung exist in both the creation of the piece, the piece itself, and past the piece's immediate life. This is evident in their continued work with the Focus E15 campaign, and even more explicit in their 2017 production *Who Cares*, which aimed to identify young carers within schools and youth centres. This project was built around a two-year relationship with four young carers from around the UK, with playwright Matt Woodhead (2018) describing the process as becoming an 'holistic' experience, with the young carers 'feeding into casting the actors, the set, the props, the costume, the tracks that went in the show'. This dialogical engagement with their participants extends beyond listening, such that the participants themselves becoming integral to the aesthetics and theatrics of the performance itself. In their continued experiment with artists' responsibility, LUNG also provided access to support for young carers at each performance, with a number of young carers either identifying themselves or being identified by friends or teachers throughout the process.

In this way, Lung's work can be viewed as an attempt at engaging audiences within a socio-political dialogue, whilst also endeavouring to continue the performance's engagement *after* the theatrical event itself. *E15* is exemplary in its attempt at impassioned and empathetic understanding between community, artist, and audience through an amalgam of dialogical and littoral engagement that places emphasis on the act of listening. It differs aesthetically from Feat.Theatre's work, in that Lung's actual engagement with the community isn't performed until it has been filtered through

more traditional theatrical means whilst Feat.Theatre's tea parties are part of the performative event. However, both build upon previous forms in that they aim for engaged connectivity whilst offering an inherent and integral critique of their own process.

In *E15*, this critique comes from two jarringly explicit moments of criticism that disrupt both the performance and the audience's engagement. The first comes roughly three-quarters of the way into the piece when, in a moment reminiscent of Tim Crouch's *The Author* (2009), the production is interrupted by a member of the audience. A voice cuts in midway through a scene, disrupting the actors onstage who eventually ask for the house lights to be brought up. The audience member who caused the interruption continues to speak. He claims to be homeless and criticises the company's singular focus on the *Focus E15* campaign, stating that that audience members most likely would have walked passed homeless people on their way to the theatre without a second look (Monks and Woodhead 2016, 80). He holds up a bag that contains all he owns. 'That's my world', he states. (Monks and Woodhead 2016, 80). In the particular performance I attended, the audience didn't know how to react. Some shifted awkwardly, others tutted, some even told him to be quiet. 'You'd be surprised how much he got told to be quiet […] that it's not about him,' states co-author Helen Monks (2018). However, at the end of his speech that I observed, a number of audience members applauded his statement. The house lights came back on, the play awkwardly continued, and it wasn't until the actor joined the others onstage for the bows that many of the audience members realised it was staged. This criticism, in fact, is still part of the verbatim approach of the performance, with the words taken from a chance encounter at a conference about the housing crisis attended by Monks. Its insertion into the piece, and the intentionally disruptive staging, came from an understanding that the group's focus on the campaign ignored the wider issue of homelessness, and a desire to challenge an audience's complacency in watching the issue on stage whilst they 'could be sat next to someone' in a similar situation (Monks 2018).

The second piece of explicit criticism comes at the play's finale. During the climax, the audience are roused into a chant with the campaign group, rallying behind the small group's success. 'The future is ours', they are told, 'so make some noise!' (Monks and Woodhead 2016, 88). Cutting through the chant, one performer takes the microphone and offers a dramatically different update on the group's efforts. 'It's happening to me', she states. 'My tenancy's run out. My year's up. Right now it's like shit' (ibid.). The chanting stops and the audience stills, forced to accept that a rallying cry for change isn't enough. The performer repeats the fact that the families in the piece are real and are going through the situations presented on stage as she speaks. 'This isn't someone standing on a stage thinking what they're going to do, remembering their lines', she states ironically. 'This is the reality […] Look what's happening' (ibid.).

Despite the staging's sincere intentions at providing a platform for the campaign, Lung are aware of the complacency and disconnect afforded to an audience of a verbatim work. As a piece of theatre, *E15* is fundamentally and inescapably insincere in its staging; similarly to *The Welcome Revolution*, these are the voices of others, not the artists. As such, there is arguably an inherent falsity within its sincere efforts, with the theatrical devices utilised within its staging adding a layer of dramatics and possible distortion. However, it is their intentional disrupting of the piece, and of

the performative space itself in the interruption from within the audience, that imbues the work with a dual nature; one that oscillates between an attempt at sincere verbatim platforming, and a jarringly disconnected critique of this focus and its effects. Evidently, Lung's aim is to platform the voices of the Focus E15 campaign, but they also embrace the complexities and ironies that arise from this platforming. It is at once uplifting and devitalising; calling, even shouting, for change while also questioning the overall point of both the campaign and the performance project itself.

It is this oscillation between sincere, heartfelt engagement and platforming, and legitimate critique that places Lung's *E15* within a metamodern framework. It at once believes in the power of platforming the campaign and is simultaneously cynical of its own potential. Whilst it differs from the critiques evident within *The Welcome Revolution*, in that the company of the latter determine their scepticism of the project within the piece themselves, Lung's *E15* asks its *characters* to provide an extant critique of the audience's reception of the performance. Yes, Lung want change, but they are also inherently mindful of the limitations of theatre, working their own cynicism, that of the campaigners, and their pre-conceived criticism of the reception of the work, into the play's text.

## Conclusion

The Listening Theatre is an attempt to understand an emerging structure of feeling observable within the works of certain millennial artists. This work is created on the interstices of socio-political issues and metamodern sensibilities affected by the artist's personal and artistic responses to particular crises experienced by their generation. I posit the Listening Theatre as new terminology in which to analyse current and ongoing developments within the millennial artist bracket. It both builds upon, and expands, certain aspects of dialogical, littoral, and relational artworks, and yet I believe that the metamodernist frameworks apparent within such work requires it to have a new delineation. The Listening Theatre is a theatre of oscillation. A theatre that listens to others, but also listens to critiques of its own act of listening. A theatre that is utopic in vision, but cynical of its own processes. A theatre of both progressive and sceptical theatrical engagement; of hope/lessness.

Other artists engaging with such frameworks include the Nottingham-based, female company, The Gramophones, whose 2014 *Playful Acts of Rebellion* theatricalised the story of the company's own political engagement and interpreted political issues collected from current and past audiences, 'involv[ing] the audience in a lively conversation, providing a safe, friendly environment to unpack these ethically stimulating issues' (Hart 2014). It is a framework built upon dialogical foundations, whilst extending into a metamodernist discourse of a fluctuation between hope and apathy. As a further example of this, Eager Spark, who rebranded themselves from Write By Numbers in March 2018, created a whole production that critiqued their previous engagement projects. *Regeneration* (2016) addressed issues that became apparent through the company's work with certain regeneration projects around London in both 2010 and 2012, explicitly referring to the fact that the company 'were accused of having socially cleansed the [local] market [with their involvement in gentrification projects], with someone pointing out on Facebook that no black locals went anymore' (Wyver 2016). *Regeneration* was a theatrical attempt at unpicking the ethically

complicated issues arising from such work; a whole performance built around a critique of their own process. I am reminded here of Jen Harvie's critique of immersive theatre's efficaciousness, in that it seems 'to offer social bonds which are, in fact, thin' (Harvie 2013, 59). This is the irony of such engaged performances; that theatre is inherently temporal and fleeting. The millennials' self-critique is important here in its oscillation between hope for betterment with simultaneous acceptance of inevitable hopelessness.

When I posited the concept of the Listening Theatre at New York University's *Performance as Activism* conference in early 2018, I was met with an interesting question regarding the role of Arts Council England (ACE) in the development of young companies' repertoires. Are these companies simply ticking 'community engagement' boxes to acquire funding? Is this increase in adapting dialogical and littoral processes actually affected by restricted financial structures? It is true that, to paraphrase Theatre Deli's co-artistic director Jessica Brewster (2018), the narrative of theatre and performance within the UK has been moulded by ACE's financial guidelines. ACE is financed both through the UK government and the National Lottery, meaning that outgoing funds have a responsibility to work for the public, with ACE commenting on the importance of funded companies becoming 'more focused on audiences […] to give more people the chance to *take part* in the arts' (ACE 2018; my emphasis). It is also true that certain companies, in particular Lung and The Gramophones, have been in receipt of Arts Council funding for specific projects. However, upon talking to the companies directly, it is evident that the work is never set out with funding as a precedence. As Lung's Helen Monks explained to me,

> It's such a cliché, but [theatre] should be a mirror that reflects the world but also presents, maybe an alternative ideal world. And I think that what's cool about it being real people is that it offers to stage […] a platform. […] Part of the reason that we make our own work is so that we don't have to adhere to those people who are giving pots of money, or the people sat in buildings deciding what's going to offend their board members or their trustees. (Monks 2018)

I see this concept of the Listening Theatre as inherently connected to the emerging field of the metamodern, with an acknowledgement of the development of metamodernism's conceptual boundaries still being in developmental flux. This is due, in part, to the Listening Theatre's focus on self-critique through an oscillation between sincerity and irony, and its intrinsic connection to the concept of the millennial generation, emerging, as I see it, as a response to particular socio-economic, political, and philosophical crises affecting the artists in their formative adult years. Vermeulen et al. (2017), Turner (2015), and Freinacht (2017) all draw a connection between the emergence of the metamodern structure of feeling and the advent of millennial cultures or philosophies, with a desire for sincerity stemming from an upbringing based within the ironic.

The Listening Theatre draws aspects from Freinacht's posited political metamodernism—a utopic vision of the 'society that comes *after*, that goes *beyond*' (2017, 2)—in that these artists are engaging with a process that aims to understand, involve, and engage with audiences in an equal level of co-development. We can see how particular crises that have formulated this generation's experiences have led some millennial artists to strive for deeper, more sincere connections, dialogues, and

exchanges, whilst also being critical of these theatrical, political, and sociological forms. It may be that these millennial artists creating work within the Listening Theatre bracket are actively undermining what has come to be the dominant narrative concerning millennials. For a cohort described as 'Generation Me, Me, Me' (Stein 2013), these millennials are creating performance work that has empathy, sincerity, and connection at its heart. The popular media's characterisation of this generation does not hold up to these emerging artist's sensibilities. Yet, the impact of particular crises upon the generation means that this theatre is not naively hopeful or wholly sanguine. As Alex Williams (2015) states, the millennial's innocence has been lost. Instead, an awareness, critique and distrust of particular structures has imbued this theatre with oscillatory, metamodern sensibilities. It is simultaneously hopeful and cynical, utopic in vision and critical in application. It is work that wants to change the world—even though it knows it probably can't.

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## Biography

Tom Drayton is a theatre director and researcher based in East London. He has written for and directed *Pregnant Fish Theatre* since 2010 and lectures at The University of Worcester and The University of East London, where he is also studying his doctorate focused on political theatre of the millennial generation. Tom is particularly interested in emerging companies, millennial theatre makers and work created on the interstices of youth politics and urban space. He is also an associate artist for *Project Phakama* and works with schools in East London to provide children with access to quality, interactive theatre.

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# CRISIS AND THE EMOTIONAL BODY: TOWARDS (ANOTHER) FREEDOM

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In his theorisation of the relationship between poetry and finance, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi discusses Europe's recent and current social crisis as a phenomenon which is not 'only economic and financial' but also, and more significantly, 'a crisis of imagination about the future' (Berardi 2012, 8). Such an irreversible crisis, the 'European collapse' of the last decade, as Berardi posits, is the product of the automatisation, financialisation, and virtualisation of the economy which, by rendering the production of capital immaterial, has interrupted the 'relation between time and value', sign and thing, and has led to the 'floating values' of 'semio-capitalism' (86). The deregulation of signifying processes, and the deactivation of the affective sphere that has resulted, have irremediably compromised social autonomy. Taking forward the conceptualisations of the interconnection of language, economy, and politics formulated, among others, by the Italian post-workerist[1] authors Paolo Virno, Christian Marazzi, and Maurizio Lazzarato, Berardi theorises the role played by poetry and the sensuous body in rediscovering the relationship between language and desire and reopening the possibility of social freedom.

In his discussion of how 'poetry may start the process of reactivating the emotional body, and therefore of reactivating social solidarity' (20), the Italian thinker pursues Félix Guattari's ([1992] 1995; [1979] 2011) reflections on the correlation between singular refrain and universal chaos in the reinvention of subjectivity and conceptualises rhythm as a poetic feature which can contribute to restoring our ability to conjoin with other singularities and with our social and cosmic environment. For Guattari (and Gilles Deleuze) the refrain functions to keep chaos at bay; as they write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the refrain is a 'territorial assemblage' with an intrinsic connection to

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a 'home', a 'land': bird songs, traditional rhythms, a child singing in the night to appease the fear of the dark are illustrative examples (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, 343–344). The refrain 'always carries earth with it' (344); it is a *ritournelle* that 'seeks to regain control of events that deterritorialized too quickly […] and that started to proliferate on the side of the cosmos and the Imaginary' (Guattari [1979] 2011, 107).

In this article, I consider how a close engagement with rhythmical, repetitive, and cyclical performative practices in examples of recent European choreography may offer ways of responding to today's crisis of social cohesion, reimagining channels of intensive communication. In particular, I look at works by the Italian artist Alessandro Sciarroni (*Folk-s, will you still love me tomorrow?*, 2012 and *Chroma_don't be frightened of turning the page*, 2017) and by the London-based duo Igor and Moreno (*Idiot-Syncrasy*, 2013) and discuss how, in revisiting elements of folk traditions, they mobilise their potential as semantic and affective modalities. I suggest that these movement-based pieces, by embracing and intensifying the physical experience of repetition, reawaken the emotional body and work towards establishing a continuousness of relations in time and space and between individual singularities. Invoking Bojana Kunst's critical and theoretical exploration of the relationship of art and performance practice with capitalism, I observe these dances within the context of Western post-industrial society, founded on the erosion of boundaries between labour and non-labour, between work and free time. Kunst considers how the loss of this distinction has, in turn, transformed what were once understood as forms of freedom into controlled conditions upon which productivity is based: flexibility, mobility, speed, spontaneity, and creativity have become the instruments of subjugation of the contemporary subject. Qualities traditionally associated with artistic activity and experimentation have become essential attributes of labour. Examined from this perspective, post-industrial and neoliberal economies are seen as based on a form of 'exploitation of everyday movement' that relies on the 'appropriation' and 'exhaustion' of generic human faculties (Kunst 2015, 113).

In dialogue with post-Marxist thought and, in particular, with Virno's political philosophy, recent performance research has critically interrogated the relationship between labour and performance, offering 'a reflection upon the social and economic dimensions of performance as one of the important production forces of today' (Klein and Kunst 2012, 2). In parallel with Kunst, Randy Martin and André Lepecki have discussed how dance, while caught in capital's structures and flows, can also resist, complicate and suffuse them. Martin (2012, 68) depicts dancers as 'the ideal laborers in an idealized creative economy': despite their precarious economic conditions and vulnerable social status, 'dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs—they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meagre wages'. Imbricated as it is in the movements and routines of politics and finance, dance—with its understanding of arrangements, relationships, and partnerships of bodies in time and space—is well-positioned to develop a critical response to the 'neoliberal *idealization* of creative work', to reject and propose alternatives to the exploitative mechanisms of today's economy (Lepecki 2016, 17).

Although crisis may appear to be 'endemic to capitalism' (Martin 2010, 361), an understanding of today's crisis ought to engage with the specific conjunctures of the present socio-political moment. In this respect, Martin's rethinking of Marixist political economy invites us to consider today's crisis as 'a crisis of knowledge in an economy based on making it serviceable' (Martin 2015, 4): whether the limits of knowledge lie in how it is (over)produced, organised or applied, today knowledge is 'unable to master its environment' (Martin 2010, 361). Insofar as knowing is entangled with other aspects of being, both public and private, a crisis of knowledge implicates affects, bodies, movement, of both collectivities and individuals. Martin's project throughout his academic oeuvre has been that of employing dance as a privileged 'analytic lens to engage the inner movement of politics' (Martin 2015, 5). He has argued that '[f]oregrounding the analytics of movement so redolent in dance can make for a richer evaluation of what is generated through political mobilization' (Martin 2012, 66).

Following Martin and other dance and performance theorists, I uphold the view that movement is 'intrinsically political' (Kunst 2015, 102; see also e.g. Lepecki 2006 and 2016; Burt 2017), and that the ways in which movement articulates and evaluates the relationship between the subject and the world at any given historical time has the potential to reveal the problematic aspects of that relationship and help us discern an alternative perspective. My contribution attempts to understand how contemporary dance is mobilised to engage with the current socio-political crisis by examining how recent choreographic practice by European artists invites us to confront the present impasse and co-imagine another outcome. This article does so by establishing a thread between the orchestration of dancing bodies in these dance works and Berardi's analysis of the embodied effects of the recent financial crisis, which speak of 'the subjugation of the biopolitical sphere of affection and language to financial capitalism' (Berardi 2012, 13). Berardi's discussion of the 'emotional body', while gesturing to the pre-subjective notion of affect (traceable to the philosophies of Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Deleuze and Guattari) and to the 'affective turn' in the humanities and social sciences, accounts also for the semiotic processes of signifying subjects. With its focus on language and poetry, it combines an appreciation for the sensuous qualities of enunciation with an attention for the formal and structural aspects of modes of expression.

If my argument is prefigured by Kunst's and Martin's conceptualisations of the 'work' of performance, and of contemporary movement artists as exemplary labour force, it funnels these reflections towards an interrogation of dance's capacity for imaginative and emotional signification. It embraces the idea of the choreographic as a 'possibility of sensual address' (Joy 2014, 1), as an 'affective-political force' that mobilises the potential of imagination to generate dissent (Lepecki 2016, 17)—'to think through the present' (Martin 2012, 66). Building on analyses of dance as a site for 'challeng[ing] the practices of value-circulation […] in contemporary capitalism' (Klein and Kunst 2012, 2), my contribution attends to the modalities through which choreography might intervene in the production of subjectivity in moments of crisis by calling upon the poetic and affective intensities of what we might term 'bodily refrains'. In particular, the article explores the ways in which, in the performances I examine, skill and intuition, control and abandonment are conjoined; it considers how the confusion between interiority and exteriority that characterises

contemporary subjectivity is critically exposed by these practices. In *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea*, Svetlana Boym (2010, 12–13) explores how the interplay of opposites and paradoxes, the 'renaming and remapping of *this* world', can be conceptualised as an experience of freedom. This leads me to co-imagine with Boym that, through the interconnectedness between *technê* and *mania*—in their ambivalent meanings of art/craft and madness/inspiration—a space might be open for thinking 'what if': for a reconfiguration of social freedom, towards 'another freedom'.

## Dance and labour: Im/materiality and dis/orientation

In his analysis of the politico-economic manifestations of the global era, Virno investigates the shift in contemporary modes of being brought about by post-Fordism and introduces the category of the multitude, a form of life that is located beyond traditional divisions between individual and collective, private and public, one and many, and that transcends previously accepted categorisations of human experience. The advent of the multitude is a consequence of the ever-increasing changeability of the world around us, which is subject to (and, in turn, demands) incessant transformation. It signals the end of the clear separation between inside and outside that characterised the modern nation state and its people, and brings about a generalised sense of insecurity and disorientation, associated with the continuous 'experience of "not feeling at home"' (Virno 2004, 34). In the sphere of human activity, the speed at which contemporary reality is required to change also causes the dissolution of the classic distinction, first put forward by Aristotle, and later revived by Hannah Arendt ([1958] 1989), between labour (*poiesis*), political action (*praxis*) and thought (*theoría*). Instead of focusing on the production of new objects, post-Fordist labour, which is centred around the culture and communication industries, relies on the linguistic and cognitive abilities that once characterised the spheres of political action and thought. The talents required in post-industrial labour are shared by the multitude; they make up what Marxist thought identified as the 'general intellect', which has now come to encompass all human faculties: 'to speak/to think are generic habits of the human animal, the opposite of any sort of specialization' (Virno 2004, 41).

Immaterial post-Fordist labour ultimately becomes a communicative and performative activity, a virtuosic spectacle, which, instead of producing distinctive objects, finds its purpose in its own publicly-staged execution. As Virno postulates,

> contemporary production becomes 'virtuosic' (and thus political) precisely because it includes within itself linguistic experience as such. If this is so, the matrix of post-Fordism can be found in the industrial sector in which there is 'production of communication by means of communication'; hence, in the culture industry. (56)

In the age of post-industrial capitalism, the virtuosic talents which pertain to the performing artist are not only needed in political action (which traditionally relies on public speaking), but also in all areas of production: 'while the material production of objects is delegated to an automated system of machines, the services rendered by living labor […] resemble linguistic-virtuosic services more

and more' (58). Moreover, the need for changeability and mobility of post-Fordist modes of production leads to increased flexibility and shareability of labour, which replace traditional patterns of division of duties. In place of specialised expertise and skills, generic human faculties (speaking, thinking) are now required. Whilst, on the one hand, this transforms all labour into a communicative and performative activity (as already noted), on the other hand the reliance of labour on linguistic and cognitive faculties also results in the dissolution of the distinction between labour and non-labour, between work and free time. The whole person is involved in, and therefore subdued by, the process of production. Yet, although communication is at the centre of the post-Fordist era, the 'instrumental use of communication' ignores the complexity generated by a plural and multiple world: 'at the peak of the "communication society", we are paradoxically witnessing a *crisis* of communication' (Marazzi [1994] 2011, 43, original emphasis).

In dialogue with Virno and the Italian political philosophers who have critically examined post-Fordist social organisation and its modes of 'control' (Lazzarato 2006), Kunst offers a compelling reading of the relation that artistic practice entertains with these socio-political transformations. Kunst's understanding of crisis in the post-industrial world is that it is characterised by 'short (but not very effective) outbursts' (Kunst 2015, 110). If flexibility, changeability, and speed are at the centre of the social reorganisation brought about by post-Fordism, the sudden upheaval triggered by moments of crisis must be absorbed within the fast-paced, disharmonious, overlapping rhythms imposed by the new patterns and networks of labour. Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of the new modes of production that penetrate every sphere of an individual's life also results in a permanent 'crisis of the autonomous subject' (114), inasmuch as all human faculties and potentialities are subjugated to the organisation of production and become a source of value: 'Not only is the division between work and life erased in post-industrial society; the once essential qualities of life after work (imagination, autonomy, sociality, communication) actually turn out to be at the core of contemporary work' (100–101). Because communication is integrated within the cycle of production, 'the worker's personality and subjectivity [are involved] within the production of value' (Lazzarato 1996, 135).

In order to understand the impact that these shifts have had on movement-based performance practices, Kunst reflects on how the transformation of social organisation and modes of production between industrial and post-industrial capitalism is mirrored by significant changes in the approach to movement in recent dance history. In particular, she observes how, for the modern dancers of the twentieth century, movement was a form of self-expression and a way to achieve emancipation from the constraints of social rules and work patterns. In contrast, in contemporary performance, movement can no longer be used as a medium for freedom insofar as it has already been subsumed by the new modes of production: 'Celebrated throughout the twentieth century as the discovery of the potentiality of freedom, the movement of the individual now stands at the centre of the appropriation; its affective, linguistic and desiring aspects are exploited' (Kunst 2015, 110). Thus, if movement is no longer synonymous with freedom, but has actually come to signify its opposite due to the crucial role it plays in the organisation of labour, how can dance still function as a critical practice? Kunst points towards recent trends in dance performance that have 'called for [...] a broadening of the notion of choreography' and suggests that 'the materiality of dance can

resist the abstracted notion of work and reveal the problematic connection between the abstracted new work modes and bodies' (119). In this sense, contemporary dance's capacity to employ movement as a form of resistance to, critique of, or emancipation from dominant socio-political modes lies in its ability to rethink movement beyond those modalities that have already entered the modes of production, including immateriality, flexibility, spontaneity, and expressiveness (which can no longer be associated with an ideal of freedom). In this respect, Kunst specifically examines duration and slowing down as subversive practices that have the potential to reveal how deeply our understanding of time and our need for speed, adaptability, and efficiency are shaped by external conditions—that is, how far our subjectivity is imbricated with social protocols: 'we need to think in the direction of duration as a dispossession that overwhelms us with non-functioning and non-operativity' (131).

For Kunst, duration can be thought to have critical value in the sense that it sabotages dominant patterns of perception and operation and disables us by deactivating our attention. Pursuing this line of thinking around duration and our socially-conditioned understanding of it, I propose to look specifically at rhythm, refrain, and repetition as movement modalities that, through sustained engagement (that is, also in conjunction with duration), call instead for a reactivation of our ability to perceive and reawaken what Berardi calls 'the emotional body'. Shifting the focus away from choreographic practices founded on the 'exhaustion' of dance (Lepecki 2006)—that is, on the refusal to identify dance with movement—I engage with contemporary work that has signalled a turn in choreo-dramaturgical approaches away from the logic and politics of the exhaustion of movement. In the last decade, experimental choreography has 'called for a connection between movement and dance', engaging with the temporality of movement in ways that challenge the attention of the spectator (Kunst 2015, 119). I suggest that the modalities of movement of the works I discuss, which draw on the repetitive rhythmicity of social dance traditions, trigger a reflection on and an assessment of contemporary dance's dramaturgical choices—they solicit the discernment, the judgement that the experience of crisis requires. Engaging with intensive movement in tight formations, they bring physical effort back into dance, foregrounding the entanglement of exertion and skill, excess and rule to articulate a critical and affective response to the immaterial and dispersed conditions of living in the present.

The engagement with repetitive patterns of movement and variations of speed as a form of socio-political critique is not new in the history of performance practices. Charlie Chaplin's classic film *Modern Times* (1936) is a well-known example of a performative satire of the ideology of liberal capitalism, through sequences that expose and problematise Taylorism's 'denial of individuality' and 'deskilling of labour' (van Wijhe 2013, 8). In particular, the famous scene of the assembly line 'deregulates' Taylorism's social choreography of efficiency and scientific management by performing its failure (ibid.). Moreover, with specific reference to dance practices, rhythm and repetition have of course a long and varied tradition as movement and dramaturgical devices. I am thinking, for instance, of modalities of repetition connected with minimalist movement experiments and with the germinal work of the Judson Church choreographers from the 1960s onwards. In contrast with these uses of repetitive patterns, what I examine in this article is how, in a number of recent choreographic works, a distinctly uncompromising exploration of rhythm and

repetition is accompanied by a renewed interest in folk traditions. I argue that this signals the desire to reflect on the organisation of time in a different socio-historical context and relies on the capacity to invite reflection and activate judgement through operations of displacement. What is distinctive in the examples I discuss is their engagement with the rhythmic and affective intensity of movement as a means to evoke the group solidarity of social dance traditions, expose its loss and the resulting disorientation, and mobilise forms of cohesion in the present.

Igor and Moreno's *Idiot-Syncrasy* centres around the act of jumping and has the feel of fast-paced southern-European folk dances such as the Italian tarantella; Sciarroni's *Folk-s* draws on the Schuhplattler, a Bavarian and Tyrolean folk dance in which the performers hop, stomp and slap their thighs, knees, and shoes with their hands; Sciarroni's *Chroma* explores the practice and concept of turning through the act of a body rotating incessantly around its axis, in a manner reminiscent of the intensity and abandon involved in Sufi whirling. The works have in common a strong emphasis on physical endurance: they rely on training the body to execute a repetitive action to the limit of exhaustion. Nevertheless, it appears that these recent choreographic works do not foreground the social dimension of the folk dance and/or music elements they draw on; instead, by emphasising the intensive rhythmicity of the traditional languages they take inspiration from, through an obstinate, nearly obsessive use of repetition and circular patterns, these works expose the affective potency of the dancing body. In this sense, I understand the relentlessness of the rhythmical gestures and sequences in Igor and Moreno's and Sciarroni's works as a recourse to repetition first and foremost as a 'protective strategy', one which is used 'in the face of the shock caused by new and unexpected experiences'—that is, in the face of crisis (Virno 2004, 39). Moreover, through the stability and predictability of its structure, repetition is also offered in these choreographies as a modality through which individuals may re-orient themselves to the environment and 'territorialize' (Berardi 2012, 130)—as an opportunity to rediscover social solidarity.

## Danced refrains: Reclaiming singularity and common space

Igor and Moreno's artistic collaboration started in 2007. Igor Urzelai is from the Basque Country and Moreno Solinas is from Sardinia; they are associate artists at The Place, London. Their duet *Idiot-Syncrasy*, which premiered in 2013, was conceived as a work about perseverance, as an attempt to offer a vision for change. They introduce their piece with these words:

> We started with wanting to change the world with a performance. We felt like idiots. Then we danced a lot. We jumped. We called on the folk traditions of Sardinia and the Basque Country. We sang. We jumped some more. We committed. Now we promise to stick together. We promise to persevere. We promise to do our best. (Igor and Moreno n.d.)

The performance opens with Igor and Moreno standing in front of the audience: in simple clothes, incongruously dressed in jeans and anoraks done up to their necks, they present the audience with their a-cappella singing, which starts quietly and then gains momentum. It is a Sardinian folk song

from the eighteenth century, a protest hymn against feudal exploitation, which became known as the island's pro-independence anthem. A song of resistance and opposition to the tyranny of the land owners, urging them to show restraint and warning them that a war against their arrogance has already been declared. Igor and Moreno sing it in a loop for well over five minutes; the singing becomes almost hypnotic—it has the quality of the 'incantatory refrains' Guattari writes about in *The Machinic Unconscious*, where he reflects on the rituals that 'every individual, every group, every nation is [...] "equipped" with' (Guattari [1979] 2011, 107); refrains that assist us in finding personal and social cohesion and resisting deterritorialisation when navigating the proliferation of events and constant changes of the environment. The opening of Igor and Moreno's performance places us in relation to a modality of semiotisation which, although abstracted from its context (it is a song from Moreno's homeland and would not explicitly resonate with many audiences), relies on the refrain as a 'function of the collective and asignifying subject of the enunciation' (ibid.). As such, it signals the possibility of collective identification—a form of recognition with which post-Fordist societies have lost familiarity, having substituted it with internalised refrains and the 'rhythmic schemata of machinic propositions' originating from media and network technologies (109).

The duo's singing is a vocal performance of escalating vigour and drama, which almost imperceptibly becomes accompanied by rhythmical movement: a foot tapping the floor to keep time progressively turns into rocking and then into solid, steady bouncing. Once the jumping becomes established, the two bodies' movements continue following the same regular rhythm for nearly forty minutes, until an energy shift morphs them into more grounded steps in a spiralling pattern: Igor and Moreno end up in each other's arms, spent by the incessant hopping and dizzy with exhaustion. For the duration of their rhythmical jumping, their movements are choreographed so as to allow glimpses of the performers' distinct individualities. Little by little the two young men in front of us reveal the interplay between the choreographed patterns and their singularity: as they take off their jackets and then more layers of clothes until they are wearing just a t-shirt and shorts, we begin to identify Igor as the tidy, punctilious one who, while Moreno carelessly drops everything onto the floor, folds every item he removes even when this implies extra effort and agility to accomplish the tasks without interrupting the jumping. As we notice these *idio*-syncrasies, we warm to them—'around 30 minutes into the show, everyone is loving Igor and Moreno, and some of the audience are cheering them along' (Mackrell 2015). A channel of communication is established between the performers and the audience which engages the spectators' attention and stimulates their capacity to perceive.

The repetitive and rhythmic qualities of the jumping enable us to identify relations: between singular movements and the whole choreography, or between the specific event of the performance and the complex patterns of our daily existence. For Guattari, refrains serve the function of defining a territory, whether personal or collective. And, as already mentioned, Berardi draws on Guattari when foregrounding the refrain—and rhythm, as its distinctive feature—as a relational mode that, by enabling recognition and territorialisation, could support the emancipation of language and affects in the information economy.

*Image 1:* Idiot-Syncrasy *by Igor and Moreno. Credit: Alicia Clarke 2013*

> The refrain is an obsessive ritual that allows the individual [...] to find identification points, and to territorialize herself and to represent herself in relation to the surrounding world. The refrain is the modality of semiotization that allows an individual (a group, a people, a nation, a subculture, a movement) to receive and project the world according to reproducible and communicable formats. [...] Rhythm is the relation of a subjective flow of signs (musical, poetic, gestural signs) with the environment: the cosmic environment, earthly environment, social environment. (Berardi 2012, 130, 131)

Guattari and Berardi are concerned with the ways in which changes to the organisation of refrains have transformed the processes through which subjectivity is produced. Reflecting on the effects of the globalisation of mass media, Guattari ([1992] 1995, 104) discusses how 'the neutralisation, the systematic dequalification, of the materials of expression' resulting from the informatisation of communication have led to the standardisation of subjectivity. In dialogue with Guattari, Berardi depicts a world in which 'singularity is forgotten, erased, and cancelled' (Berardi 2012, 146). Berardi's writing is borne out of the European crisis, the 'financial collapse' which, from 2010 onwards, led to 'the beginning of an insurrection' in the form of strikes and protests against the debt crisis in Athens, strikes and demonstrations against austerity measures in Rome, the occupations of public spaces in Spain in Spring 2011, and the London riots in August 2011 (7). His philosophical analysis engages with the role of language, media, and information technology in

post-industrial capitalism. In *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, the focus of Berardi's discussion is the point of rupture between industrial capitalism, based on the 'physical, muscular work of industrial production', and post-industrial or financial capitalism, which Berardi calls 'semio-capitalism', in which 'indeterminacy takes the place of the fixed relation between labor-time and value' (86).

In Berardi's reading, this is not simply an issue at the level of our economy; it affects language and communication as well. As currencies were freed from the gold standard, the relationship between time and value has also become aleatory. Semantic exchanges are involved in the same process: sign and object have become autonomous entities, and language has been divorced from affective communication, having lost its evocative potential. 'Signs produce signs without any longer passing through the flesh' (17). The deregulation of signifying processes and consequent deactivation of the affective sphere have irremediably compromised social autonomy. 'In the age of infinite acceleration of the infosphere' (10), financial and linguistic automatism have resulted in a separation from our instincts, from our sentient bodies. Pursuing the ethico-aesthetic paradigm outlined by Guattari in his late book *Chaosmosis* as a path towards the reconceptualisation of subjectivity,[2] Berardi advocates the role of refrains that break with expectations, allow singularity to emerge and 'create resonances [which] may produce common space' (147).

In *Idiot-Syncrasy*, Igor and Moreno employ simple spatio-dynamic devices to produce variation within the repetition: they modify their steps; they create lines through the space; in turn, they temporarily disappear behind the wings; they add or remove layers of t-shirts. Admittedly, they resort at times to banal expedients to generate unexpected opportunities of interaction with the audience, such as when (always jumping) they open a bottle of whisky, pour themselves a shot, and pass the rest around to the spectators for us to help ourselves. Yet, through the unpretentious character of their performance, they are able to establish a closeness with members of the audience. In spectating such display of endurance, their sweat and heavy breathing, we reflect on the power of commitment and perseverance; we think about what human bodies—not just theirs, but also our own—can *do* in the present. '[W]e need refrains that disentangle singular existence from the social game of competition and productivity: […] refrains of the singularization and sensibilization of breathing' (146). It is no longer a case of us and them; we share a common space.

## Performing exhaustion: Non-exchangeability and sensuous understanding

The work of the Italian performance artist Alessandro Sciarroni offers a reflection on the relationship between choreographic action and time, through an exploration of duration and endurance as critical performative practices. *Folk-s* is the first of a trilogy of works entitled *Will you still love me tomorrow?*, which engage with skilled actions displaced from their original context and presented as (repurposed) performative practices. In the case of *Folk-s*, the seven performers learn the Bavarian and Tyrolean popular dance form of the Schuhplattler, which is then reconstructed in the context of a durational stage performance, stripped of its traditional costumes and musical accompaniment.

> For the performers of *Folk-s*, there's no other time than the present, a time that is not-past and not-future. It's the infinite insistence of the tide against the sand, the endless return of the same wave to the same shore. It's sound. In the repetition, geographically and culturally decontextualized, the folk material finds its clearest revelation. (Sciarroni n.d.)

As one of the dancers explains to the audience at the beginning of the show, we have permission to leave during the performance, but we do not have the option to come back. Equally, the dancers will decide when to exit the stage. The performance will carry on so long as there is at least one spectator watching and one performer dancing. The execution of the dance, an acrobatic male courtship ritual in its social context, aims to engage with its rhythmical, repetitive patterns (the percussive actions of hands hitting shoes, knees and thighs in an endless loop) rather than with its content (Sciarroni n.d.). The folk-dance element is further decontextualised by replacing the traditional accordion music with the absence of musical accompaniment (not the same as silence, as the slapping of hands and stomping of feet are always audible), interspersed with a diverse playlist of genres from orchestra music to pop tunes. The steps of the popular dance style are assumed as the starting point for an exploration of simple variations of formation, directionality, and sequencing. The dancers' actions are strongly connoted as fatiguing due to the effort and undivided concentration the performance requires: they contend with physical tiredness and with the challenge of performing to a random soundtrack with continuous changes of rhythm, for an unknown duration (which, on some occasions, reached well over two hours) and to a decreasing number of spectators (Chiappori 2017).

*Image 2: Folk-s, will you still love me tomorrow? by Alessandro Sciarroni. Credit: Andrea Macchia 2013*

As I have already discussed, Virno reflects on how post-Fordism has transformed the organisation of human activity, infusing productive labour with the publicness and virtuosity of political action. I suggest that this work by Sciarroni intervenes in our understanding of these relationships as they shape contemporary life, foregrounding the physical body and its affective power as the medium for a rethinking of virtuosic activity—intended, following Virno (who in turn acknowledges Arendt), as the domain of both the performing arts and political action. In *Folk-s*, the attributes of the traditional categories of activity (*poiesis*, *praxis*, and *theoría*) are confounded, as strenuous activity (conventionally associated with *poiesis*, with making and labour) comes to qualify *praxis*, that is, virtuosic, public action with an end in itself. As we watch the seven performers (including Sciarroni) repurpose the steps of the Schuhplattler, we become more and more conscious of their commitment and perseverance: our focus moves away from the choreography and the variations it deploys to keep the dance going and is drawn instead to the remarkable force that fuels the performance event. Moreover, the piece also offers a space for thinking about the organisation of time and human activity themselves, translating and displacing an action from its traditional context to the present. What we witness in this performance is the dancers' resilience, their going on and on, all the way to exhaustion (and exit). When most of the performers have left the stage, having exited almost unnoticed one by one, the two remaining dancers prepare to perform one final sequence, to the notes of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*: facing each other, they slowly bring their arms to position, sliding their thumbs up the sides of their chests to just below their shoulders, to hold the imaginary straps of the lederhosen (the traditional costume they would be wearing, but are not); then they pause, in an intense moment of contemplation and recognition of each other, until they let go of their pose and, together, walk out of the stage: 'So you think you can tell Heaven from Hell, blue skies from pain. [...] We're just two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl, year after year'.

Through the cycle of repetitions, the movement refrains generate a form of communication based on 'a common ground of understanding' (Berardi 2012, 147) by inducing entrainment between dancers and with the spectators: 'A trust builds among [the dancers], which the audience starts to share, cheering them on, laughing with them as they acknowledge their exhaustion' (Burke 2015). Exhaustion is what this performance produces: exhausted dancers and exhausted spectators, after a marathon performance. I venture that this is significant in two different, albeit connected, ways. On the one hand, it blurs the distinction between labour and activity through an event that generates a surplus-value of an unusual kind, a product that cannot be expropriated and turned into profit: exhaustion itself. On the other hand, the resulting exhaustion is not an erasure of potentialities; on the contrary, by entailing a heightened connection with the faculties of the human body, which are engaged to their fullest capacity (either through performing or through spectating), it awakens the affective potencies of communication. Arguably, in the physical exhaustion at play in these works, a force can be detected akin to the emancipatory potential that the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo identifies in nihilism, rejecting tragic readings of Nietzsche's thought and drawing attention to the idea 'that it is not possible to build without destroying' (Vattimo 2004, xxvii). For Vattimo, rethinking nihilism in terms of the constraints it frees us from means underscoring its relationship with ideas of freedom and liberation.[3] More specifically, in these

dances, exhaustion becomes synonymous with 'excess of sensuousness', the strategy for the reactivation of the emotional body that Berardi ascribes to poetry (Berardi 2012, 21).[4]

In Sciarroni's latest work *Chroma_don't be frightened of turning the page*, the audience is similarly called to synchronise with a performance, this time a solo, of stark simplicity, featuring Sciarroni unceasingly spinning at the centre of a bare stage, with the spectators sitting on all four sides. Unpretentious and unembellished, Sciarroni's execution is focused on maintaining pace and balance; his arms go through a myriad of positions without following a predetermined sequence and his spiralling around the stage creates different looping patterns—the wandering of a man tracing his paths in this world. His commitment to the repeated action is unfaltering throughout the thirty-five minutes of the performance, as we witness a body's complete focus and complete abandon, its extemporaneous reactions passing through Sciarroni's changing facial expressions. The work is the outcome of a longer research project on turning and the phenomenon of migration, which explores the cyclical patterns of journeys across geographical territories and emotional landscapes.

*Image 3: Chroma_don't be frightened of turning the page by Alessandro Sciarroni. Credit: Alessandro Sciarroni 2017*

I argue that Sciarroni's repetitive steps are a response to the generalised feeling of anxiety and insecurity Virno attributes to today's world, the experience of 'not feeling at home': they are an attempt at making a home in the here and now of the performance event, in the here and now of today—even when, or perhaps especially because, the here and now manifest themselves as 'nonlocalizable, nondimensional chaos' (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, 344). They are a 'strategy of reassurance' (Virno 2004, 35), but also a way of rediscovering personal coherence and social cohesion. They visualise and spatialise Guattari's and Berardi's idea of the refrain as a ritual of identification and territorialisation, a way of understanding one's place in the world. They are wordless poetry in motion, obsessive refrains of the body that exceed communication and interpretation and tap into our affects and desires, into the 'infinite ambiguity of meaning as sensuous understanding' (Berardi 2012, 21). In a time characterised by 'pervasive insecurity' and 'social and political disorientation' (Marazzi [1994] 2011, 67), these danced refrains allow for judgement and discernment in the face of crisis, recovering the capacity of our faculties to escape the logic of exchange and engage in the production of 'shared meaning: the creation of a new world' (Berardi 2012, 147).

## Between judgement and imagination: Endurance and/as freedom

In these recent examples of European choreography, the dancing body envisions a mode of being in and thinking with crisis—in and with disorientation, insecurity, failed communication, erosion of singularity, loss of social cohesion, permanent self-reinvention. The moving body enlists our attention and compels us to engage with 'the *entirety* of human faculties' (Virno 2004, 84), reclaiming them from the sphere of labour-power and biopolitics to the space of art—that is, restoring their affective function as an essential component of their productive potential. The body's endurance is tested to the limit and exhaustion is offered as the outcome of this labouring activity: a product with no apparent value and no exchangeability. Nevertheless, what we are observing here is not the erasure of the idea of value through the negation of surplus, but rather the conflation of excess with exhaustion, which in turn frustrates the patterns of 'homogenization of exchange and valorization' that characterise the information economy (Berardi 2012, 147). In this sense, exhaustion becomes a critical concept for rethinking current paradigms of productivity. The intensive engagement with the body's faculties and senses traces the path for the rediscovery of the emotional body and its communicative potentialities.

Through their insistence on rhythm, refrain, and repetition, the performing bodies of the works I have discussed become vehicles for poetic signification; they exceed the logic of exchange and instrumentality by reclaiming their creative, transformative, and relational power. Poetry is here intended, with Berardi, as the language of excess, of emancipation from fixed correspondences, of singularity and its infinite possibilities—'a hidden resource which enables us to shift from one paradigm to another' (Berardi 2012, 140). As such, the poetic bodies of these dances resist the social and emotional fragmentation of today's world, giving articulation to singular occurrences among its multiple dispositions. Their refrains borrow patterns and *paces* that in specific socio-cultural conjunctures are associated with home, with commonality, offering a moment of

reassurance in a time of uncertainty. They fleetingly reconnect singular sensitivity with plural meanings and shared understanding. Calling upon folk movement practices, these works allow the reverberation of different social ways of being to reawaken the possibility of social cohesion. In other words, whilst the traditional practices they draw on are mobilised through an attention to their *motifs*[5] (their formal qualities and the affective intensities they conjure) beyond their specific social contents and contexts, this process of displacement generates resonances and materialises the possibility of a common ground of understanding.

In the era of 'no future' (Marazzi [1994] 2011), of 'not feeling at home' and of 'being exposed omnilaterally to the world' (Virno 2004, 34), these examples of choreography offer a vision, invite us to co-imagine an alternative space, a space of freedom. Also reflecting on the transformations that have accompanied the advent of the communication society, Vattimo proposes that 'to live in a pluralistic world means to experience freedom as a continual oscillation between belonging and disorientation' (Vattimo [1989] 1992, 10). These stances call us to acknowledge the limitations of our own situation as a pre-requisite to overcoming disorientation. Invoking Boym's rethinking of freedom as the space of 'what if', as the exploration of spatial and temporal discontinuities and the adventure of traversing border zones and confronting paradoxes, I suggest that these dance works, while compelling us to think in and with crisis, also ask us to imagine a 'between' and a 'beyond' (Boym, 2010)—the *between* of co-creation, which encompasses both individuality and commonality, of 'conjunction' as a 'becoming-other' (Berardi 2012, 24), and the *beyond* of adventure, of poetry as generative excess. By acknowledging the uncertainty and exhaustion that characterise the present moment and the need for strategies of reassurance in the face of crisis, these performances are able to mobilise a space of freedom through a cross-cultural approach that conjures other worlds and their past or distant rituals of identification and territorialisation. For Boym, freedom is not found in the absence of boundaries; rather, it presupposes an encounter between 'convention and invention, responsibility and play' (Boym 2010, 5). It is an experience of co-creation which arises from the interaction of imagination with judgement, 'the most urgent form of passionate thinking,[6] which mediates between universal and particular, theory and practice; [...] a border zone between precedent and unprecedented' (27). As such, freedom suggests an interplay of 'introspection' and 'care for shared worldliness' (28), an openness to invention, creativity and experimentation, combined with an engagement with existing practices, paradigms and architectures. In Boym's words, rethinking freedom also means re-examining the relationship between *mania* and *technê*, starting from their articulation in Greek tragedy. It entails conceptualising freedom as reciprocal movement between Dionysian inspiration and Promethean skill, between '*deliverance* from worldly conditions [and] *deliberation* about them' (42, original emphasis), feeding on the tension between the two. In the choreographic works I have discussed, the experience of being beside oneself with dizziness and exhaustion combines with technical skill to articulate a critical and emotional response to today's crisis of knowledge (Martin 2015) and crisis of communication (Marazzi [1994] 2011).

Confronting the forms of submission and the insecurities of the contemporary moment, works such as Igor and Moreno's *Idiot-Syncrasy* and Sciarroni's *Folk-s* and *Chroma* call on both *technê* and *mania* and, ultimately, on 'judgement and imagination', to 'negotiate the space of "between" and

"beyond", collective and individual, precedent and unprecedented', tradition and invention, rule and excess (Boym 2010, 29). Endurance and exhaustion are the path to reclaiming a space for singularity and solidarity. When Igor and Moreno end their dizzying hopping in each other's arms, their exhaustion coincides with their acknowledgement that they have each other, that they are not alone. When the performers of *Folk-s* exit the stage, they do not leave an empty space: their jumping continues to resonate as a bouncing back and forth between individual and group, echoing questions about one's place in the world. When Sciarroni embarks with utter concentration and complete abandon on a ritual of territorialisation in *Chroma*, a new world is made possible, where we can feel at home. The faculties of the emotional body, from its physical stamina to its affective potentiality, are summoned to rethink strategies of reassurance, individuation, and social organisation as critical and engaged routes to 'another freedom'.


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## Notes

[1] Italian workerism (*operaismo*) was an autonomist movement of thought which reassessed the Marxist philosophical tradition following the period of social and political unrest of the 1960s and 1970s. Post-workerists focus on the understanding of the changes in the organisation of labour that characterise post-industrial capitalism.

[2] Concerned with new possibilities of being and ethico-political configurations, Guattari considers all spheres of human activity and the paradigms they embody; he identifies art as the paradigm capable of 'engender[ing] unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being', which support the creation of collective subjectivities (Guattari 1995, 106).

[3] Vattimo is best known as a philosopher of postmodernity and theorist of 'weak thought', as well as for his political career. The foundations of his philosophy lie predominantly in Heidegger's hermeneutics and in Nietzsche's nihilism. Vattimo understands nihilism as 'the dissolution of any ultimate foundation' (Vattimo [2003] 2004, xxv), which he describes as the condition of Western culture in the age of postmodernity. For Vattimo, emancipation, which he defines as a 'process in which constraints are shed and we gain greater freedom, autonomy, and opportunity to choose' (Vattimo [2003] 2004, xxv), is a direct consequence of today's dissolution of foundations.

[4] It should be noted here that, whilst my discussion of exhaustion stems from an observation of the potentialities of physical exhaustion as mobilised in these examples of choreography, the idea of exhaustion as 'an opening out of new possibilities in/for dance' is discussed by Efrosini Protopapa (2016, 168) in response to Lepecki's theorisation of Western contemporary dance's 'exhaustion' of the concept of movement, that is, of its 'questioning of dance's identity as a *being-in-flow*', of its rejection of 'the bind between dance and movement' (Lepecki 2006, 1, original emphasis).

[5] With this term, which I borrow from Guattari, I aim to evoke the formal and structural qualities of the dances, beyond the semantic fixity that the idea of 'form' suggests. Guattari (1995, 17) writes: 'Like Bakhtin, I would say that the refrain is not based on elements of form, material or ordinary signification, but on the detachment of an existential "motif" (or leitmotiv) which installs itself like an "attractor" within a sensible and significational chaos'. Similarly, the term *pace* I use above follows Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between 'pace' and 'form' as it operates in the refrain: 'a calm and stable "pace" (rather than a form)' organised around a 'fragile point' that the *ritournelle* establishes in the midst of chaos (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 344).

[6] For Boym, 'passionate' means 'yielding to the "nearness" of life, to everyday experience, relying upon one's curiosity and listening to worldliness. Passionate thinking is not thinking through mastery; it is fundamentally about understanding, not control. Understanding means yielding to the uncomfortable and incalculable' (Boym 2010, 25).

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## Biography

Daniela Perazzo Domm is Senior Lecturer in Dance at Kingston University London. Her research interrogates the intersections of the aesthetic and the political in contemporary choreography. She writes on the ethical, po(i)etic and critical potentialities of experimental and collaborative dance practices and has published academically, including in *Choreographic Practices* and *Contemporary Theatre Review*. Her monograph project (forthcoming, Palgrave) examines the work of the choreographer Jonathan Burrows. She is a founding member of the performing arts festival 'Uovo' (Milan, Italy), which supports forward-thinking and socially-engaged artistic practice.

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# WHAT IS REFUGEE?

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## Preface

For the 2017 meeting of Performance Studies international in Hamburg, Germany, the Performance and Philosophy Working Group convened a six-hour discussion on the figure of the refugee. Designed as a kind of "conference in reverse," the participants in the conversation did not arrive with anything specific to present but, rather, utilized the meeting in Hamburg to think collectively about the refugee and the conference theme of "Overflow." The plan was to perform this thinking as a mode of research and then compile our thoughts afterward, thereby inverting the typical conference format. Ultimately, the six-hour conversation left us with many questions, some of which were complete while others were mere fragments. In each of them, however, one can sense a distinct theme: the figure of the refugee challenges thought.

What is an appropriate art-philosophical response to the enforced homelessness of over 60 million people? Are we prepared to use the word "refugee" to name each of these people, or is the name itself a red herring that leads us down pre-paved discursive paths? Does the term "crisis" compound this problem? Would one million displaced individuals not constitute a crisis? How does one begin to think about these numbers, these global movements, these words we deploy to think the so-called refugee?

What follows is a curated, collective response to the set of questions (or fragments of questions) derived from our conference experiment. The questions reproduced here are selections from responses from various participants at the Hamburg event, including the named contributors to this piece as well as others who came in and out of the room over the six-hour duration. Delivered through mixed-media, the responses cover a vast range of territory, from the relation between refugees and global capitalism to the reign of bio- and necro-politics, from analytical philosophies of naming to continental philosophies of territorialized flows, and from conceptual mappings of interstitial space to concrete mappings of "refugee" movements across the globe.

How can performance philosophy conceptualize "crisis" in its methods and subjects of study? How is crisis organized, delivered and received in thought and performance? These are the questions we answer through both the form and content of our curated response. The form is one of arranged fragments that speak to the "trailing off" of thought that so frequently occurs when faced with "big ideas." Meanwhile, the content delivers multiple theses on the ways performance philosophy scholarship might grapple with the figure of the refugee, a figure that will surely dominate ethical discussions for years to come.

Ultimately, most of the epistemological work falls to you, the reader, whose role it is to assemble these fragments and provocations into a mode of action. You will find that this piece asserts itself less through traditional, academic argument and more through affective jolts. Please register these jolts, reflect on them, and see where they lead you.

Collectively authored by Will Daddario, Janhavi Dhamankar, Milton Loayza, Jon McKenzie, Yana Meerzon, Tero Nauha, Theron Schmidt, and Aneta Stojnić.

How to distinguish

host refugee stranger

A host determines a position for a refugee. A host itself is a position. A refugee is not looking for a host, but she is looking for a position for herself, which is different one from being a refugee. These are both identities that are unilateral positions. A stranger is what replaces the humanitarian Other. The Stranger is not a position, in other words it is not determined by the instance of humanity.

**(Preliminary response)**

A negative/pitiful connotation extends through the etymology of "refugee" in different languages. For example: *Sharanaarthi* in Hindi meaning one who prays/begs (for a place), *Nirvaasit* in Sanskrit meaning homeless or one who is uprooted from his homeland, *Muhajir* in Urdu meaning one who abandons or quits.

To analyse the etymology of "refugee" in English and to couple its meaning with "intensified flight" offers an interesting possibility viz. the same noun "flight" describes the act of the refugee on the one hand, who acts out of/takes flight due to lack of other options/choice. On the other hand, a bird's flight is used as a metaphor for freedom and for a situation with multiple possibilities and choices.

The following verse from a Bollywood song highlights this aspect.

*Panchhee, nadiyaan, pawan ke jhonke*
*Koi sarhad naa inhe roke*
*Sarhadein insaanon ke liye hai*
*Socho, tumne aur maine,*
*Kya paaya insaan ho ke!*

—Javed Akhtar

As far as birds, rivers and gusts of wind go,
There are no borders to stop their flow.
It's worth giving it a thought
What being human has wrought.

(My translation)

**(Social/political context of the terms)**

Host is hospitality, social term. It inherently entails an action to extend hospitality, viz. food, shelter, (basic) comfort to an-other.

”Refugee” is a political term/concept, and this fact shapes its image in the social context. Hence, if the social image of the refugee is to change, in terms of how we interact with and view refugees, the political connotation and political language would have to change/ shift.

Stranger is an intersubjective term since one is a stranger to someone or something. Hence, it entails a **relation to/ relatedness to** something. Similarly, a host also entails an audience or a relation to someone or a group. But a host also carries a hierarchy within it i.e. the host is the giver or presenter. In contrast, a refugee is one at the lower step or other end of the hierarchy, i.e. the receiver.

If this notion and hierarchy of the giver and receiver roles can be interchanged or seen as shifting and reciprocating regularly, the refugee could become the giver sometimes, for example in some cultural aspects such as contributing to the food/cuisine of a place. However, for this too, the “host” needs to be able to shift his/her role (or the host country its role) and be able to receive. this would entail, not to discard everything brought in and offered by the refugees as a blanket rule.

hostrangerefugee

Thus, can we look at the refugee as a unit/possibility of culture? Either the refugee needs to restore and reinvent his own culture in order to survive in the new land, or the refugee needs to imbibe the culture of the new land.[1] This conception may help to build an image of the refugee as someone who carries richness within him/herself and can thereby offer possibilities to the new land/country.

**(Sense of entitlement vs. being done a favour to)**

As compared to each other, host, refugee and stranger would also differ in the sense of entitlement they carry. The host (citizen or country) is entitled to certain rights, privileges and is also, to an extent, the one who decides such entitlement, its terms, its processes. Refugee could yearn for (and earn) a sense of entitlement, depending on the proximity of the traumatic past and of “arriving” in another place/land/ country. However, in most cases, refugee views himself/herself and is also viewed by the state, society as someone who is being done a favour to. This implicitly means that refugee is not entitled to certain rights e.g. land, food, warmth, any kinds of basic needs as well as comfort (and even recreation). If the/a refugee receives any of these, it is a favour that the government or individual citizens extend to him.

**(Types of Freedom)**

Joel Feinberg discusses varieties of freedom in the first chapter of his *Social Philosophy* (1973). I find 2 of these kinds of freedom useful to distinguish the host, refugee, stranger.

**Actual freedom**: freedom *from* certain constraints.

**Dispositional freedom**: freedom *to* perform certain actions.

A host is "entitled" to actual and dispositional freedom. i.e. s/he is free *from* constrains for instance of persecution and also free *to* act e.g. seek a job. Refugee, however, experiences a lack of both (or at least one) of these freedoms. Refugee is seldom free from persecution in his/her own country but also in the host country or the foreign land. In addition, refugee has no dispositional freedom which is hypothetical, e.g. if the refugee were to choose so, s/he would not be free to take up a job, or simply, live in the land of one's choice.

These conceptualizations of freedom are in practice so loaded with ideas of culture, identity, nation, citizenship etc. Is the refugee crisis evidence that these concepts which serve bio- and necro-politics (see Stojnić) need to be transformed or replaced by new ones (see Meerzon on cosmopolitanism and "naked life," and Nauha on "X"), so we can think of a strategy to survive the crisis?!

Examining the etymology of the word crisis in English, I came across the German term *Torschlusspanik* (for mid-life crisis), which literally means "shut-door-panic" or fear of being on the wrong side of a closing gate. I believe this describes exactly the situation of the refugee and therefore the "crisis." This fear or panic can be understood to stem from a threat to dispositional (or hypothetical) freedom. Along with the actual freedom (*freedom from* certain constraints), even the dispositional freedom (*freedom to* perform certain acts) is curtailed, and that is precisely why this is a crisis. In this sense, crisis can also be said to loom over those who feel on the verge of losing either or both of these freedoms.

How to distinguish

knowledge ignorance uncertainty

I don't know.

By starting from the place of situated knowledge while listening to other knowledges, and abandoning the Western-centric, logo-centric epistemology.

Citizenship

biopolitical (naturalized)

necropolitical (after death on the soil)

After Achille Mbembe, we recognize that in the era of global capitalism, there is never only biopolitics and biopower, but also necropolitics and necropower. The 'production' of death is an essential part of the capitalist apparatus.

The age of necropolitics is characterized by production and localization of the death-worlds where the whole populations are brought to the life in the condition of death and whole societies are reduced to the level of the 'living dead'. Necrocapitalism and necroeconomy produce and exploit this form of life on the verge of death. Although Achille Mbembe articulated this concept in order to explain the process in the context of third worlds, necropolitics today, also operates within the context of the first capitalist world. These relations are important to understand as they define the social, political and economic reality of the neoliberal global capitalism. In the First Capitalist World, there is a life with a style (biopolitics), and outside of the First Capitalist World, the process of necropolitics is happening, where death is the major regulator of life. However, it is crucial to understand that biopolitics and necropolitics are not separate processes, but quite the contrary that they are connected and together explain the complex contemporary power relations.

This becomes quite evident in the case of the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers at the EU borders, or as put forward by Marina Gržinić: "The new proposed measures to control the external borders of the Schengen agreement may be seen as those lines of division that will regulate the process and politics of death. Those who will be stopped at the EU frontier are already the living dead: those who have nothing to lose, not even life. The EU's improved and coordinated immigration policy is obsolete, as it is nothing more than a policy enabling the setting up of a system to select, reject, and ultimately kill" (Gržinić 2016, 39).

An example of necropolitical citizenship is connected to the Lampedusa shipwreck from 2013 when hundreds of migrants tragically drowned trying to reach the EU vial Italian island Lampedusa. In a cynical populist twist the recovered bodies of drowned migrants were proclaimed to be Italian citizens, i.e. granted Italian citizenship in their death.

deathscapes

non-places

I cannot speak about this. It would be a philosophising intellectual position where from I would speak on the behalf of the dead and the victims, from purely speculative point of view. Like a philosopher who can make anything about his discourse. Death is not theoretical question.

Places of immobility, of "waiting in the limbo" in the zones between borders, at the wastelands of seas and desserts of anonymous deaths at the increasingly militarized borders of the first world (EU, US...) fortresses.

How to overcome the sense of impotence in the face of planetary capitalism?

We should not be mobilized into the war machine the capitalism has created. This war machine is determined by the economy, agon and positions. Should we then create our own war machines? Should we create war at all or more agon and more positions? The war is always a crusade for something and against the Other. The planetary capitalism is necropower.

As the Hindi song I mentioned above asks "what has being human wrought?", I see a similar kind of impotence or paralysis induced by any crisis situation. To quote Shelley Sacks, "Sustainability without the 'I' sense is nonsense." Hence, my response would be to snap out of this impotence by realising ourselves as agents who are responsible. However, it is fruitful here to understand responsibility as response-ability, as developed by Sacks.

- Response-ability: Artist and social sculpture practitioner Shelley Sacks proposes responsibility not as imposed on us by an exterior law or God, but rather as stemming from our (inner) "ability to respond." Furthermore, to behave response-ably in a crisis situation can steer us away from paralysing ourselves in the shadow of the overwhelming "crisis" or "event" of the Refugee. It is in understanding this responsibility as response-ability (which differs from the responsibility that is thrust on us or that burdens us from without, e.g. that which is dispensed by the state, family, religion, etc.) that we can choose a course of action from myriad options. It is precisely in this choosing, that our freedom lies, which can itself be a strong motivator to act. Thus, failure/crisis seems to feed itself, because it is at the end that so many new possibilities can be born.

- Warmth work: Some quotes which describe warmth work. These can be very valuable in approaching the kind of response that the event of the Refugee calls us to perform.

  > [t]he *inner movement* to shape a humane and ecologically viable world first occurs, *warmth work* can be understood as intensive, inner thought work, in which the activated and enlivened will engages with the thought of the heart. Such active, inner imaginative work is integral to entering 'the dynamic being of things' (another footnote) and to developing *new organs of perception* (footnote). (Sacks 2011, 88)
  >
  > A phrase (terminus consciousness) I have borrowed from Declan McGonagle. It parallels Beuys' idea of crystalline, fossilised thought that needs to be overcome with the warmth work of negotiation and exchange, through forms like the "permanent conference" (96). "A phrase often used by Beuys to describe the new, connective forms of thought needed to overcome cold forms of rationalist thinking that seek *unity in multiplicity* by abstracting what is common from the parts. For both Goethe and Beuys, it is essential to understand the multiplicity *in the unity*. This *active entry* into the dynamic being of things is part of the 'warmth character of thought. (Ibid.)

- John Cage: John Cage's *4'33"* can be seen as a performance philosophy that could be extended to the event of the refugee with respect to its invitation and freedom to listen (connected and similar to active listening outlined below). Cage invites the listener (and the performer) to experience freedom. The piece, originally provocative, "still demands a willingness of the listener and prompts him to think and reflect. Additionally, it also has the virtue of installing a way of listening that does not allow for jumping to conclusions, but that demands a quiet and simple listening to sounds. Could this way of listening be described as a susceptibility to the other, passive in its dedication to the sounds that present themselves, and active in its alertness to and preparedness for a diversity of acoustic events?" "The performance ought to make clear to the listener that the hearing of the piece is his own action—that the music, so to speak, is his rather than the composer's" (Cage in Gena and Brent, 22). With this comment, Cage gives more freedom to the listener, but also more responsibility. In its non-articulatedness *4'33"* provides the listener (and the performer as well) with the freedom to add value and meaning (or none at all!) to the piece. It is the responsibility (response-ability) of the listener to assign meaning and sense to this music" (quoted in Cobussen 2002). Thus, listening with a sense and awareness of response-ability which opens us up to freedom can also be an example of how performance philosophy can organise, deliver and receive crisis and the event of the refugee.

- Agents of change: Response-ability and realising ourselves as an "agent" of change, i.e. contributing to a change rather than trying to change something big. This social sculpture practice (which has also been translated into performances in some previous projects and hence has the potential to become a performance in this situation of the refugee), can truly help one/us snap out of existential paralysis and contribute towards a political, social and economic transformation.

How is philosophy of the refugee different from philosophy of any other marginalized group / (group of) people under threat?

Without objectifying the refugee?

I would say, that it would have to be non-philosophy. Here, I don't mean specifically the non-philosophy by François Laruelle, but any gestures of thought, which do not function philosophically. Then, it would mean thinking as practice, and as an immanent practice. There would be no 'questions' or 'topics' such as "What is a refugee?" I am not a refugee, but I am a Stranger, more than the Other. Laruelle proposes that we should practice 'victim-thinking', from the force-of-thought. Not to become a philosopher and not to become a victim, or refugee. So, we would have to stop regarding the refugee as an exception (Carl Schmitt), a deviant (Émile Durkheim), or the existential Stranger (Albert Camus). The persecution of the refugees is the foundation of humanism, it is the foundation of victim-thinking.

To turn these questions around we can ask: whose philosophy is the philosophy of the refugee? Can/does bare life philosophize?

What word(s) other than "refugee"?

Victim or a heretic.

What word(s) other than "philosophy"?

Non-philosophy or cloning.
Politics.

To engage with questions of "philosophy" and "refugee" may be confounding, producing a series of critical failures (or failures in criticism): an inability to imagine the experience of another; an insufficiency of vocabulary that is already overdetermined by media discourse; an unwillingness to speak on behalf of others' experiences; a disjuncture between what everyone knows (these people do not deserve their horrors) and what everyone does (proclaim their helplessness to do anything about it).

These cards are intended to "un-block" critical thinking by undertaking conversations that begin with a collective choice between two alternatives, where the options are not straightforward binaries, and where the basis for making a choice is itself an area for discussion. As a tool for creative conversation they are directly inspired by artist Hamish MacPherson's *How Many Things to Build the Future?* (2007), an open-ended score for collaboration consisting of cards that contain pairs of words, instructions for collaboration, and a prompt for an intervention or reflection on that collaboration.

*mobility*

or

*security*

*underrepresented*

or

*overdetermined*

*unknowable*

or

*unsayable*

*refusee*

or

*refugee*

*transplant*

or

*translate*

*repair*

or

*prepare*

*interstitial*

or

*institutional*

*empathy*

or

*estrangement*

*crisis (krísis)*

or

*revelation (apokálypsis)*

*no borders*

or

*no protections*

*safe space*

or

*liminal space*

*persona*

or

*stranger*

*illegal*

or

*illegible*

*no future*

or

*no past*

*democracy*

*or*

*insurgency*

*civility*

or

*ethics*

*testimony*

or

*mimesis*

*representation*

or

*surrogation*

*sacred*

or

*naked*

*bones*

or

*breath*

Where I see "or," I feel a need to re-wire and re-think. As such, I started imagining a kind of epistemological choreography that commences through a strategic exchange of "as" for "or," like in the phrase "Bones as Breath" (modified from Theron's original Bones or Breath). This shift leads to short flights of thought:

> *Breath, the numinous, unseen vouchsafe of shared humanity, humanity being something more than bodies...but now, with Refugees, the breath is transmuted to bone, and these bones are lost at sea, and this loss is the unseen vouchsafe of a hierarchical humanity where those with the privilege of permanence count and those who live on the wind do not...*

I think of this as choreography because the "as" moves my thought and frees it from its static stuckness. I am left with neither an argument nor a complete thought, but, instead, a tiny dynamism: Something about breath—that which we all share—transmuted to bone and thus weighted down...

Here are a few more flights of fancy that are the results of other small dances in me:

*Interstitial as institutional: What a dream! I'd like to teach there, at that institution*

*Crisis as revelation: Ah! Crisis is our mediality.*

*Persona as stranger: We do not know ourselves, only those parts we think we perform.*

*Democracy as insurgency: Viva Zapatista!*

*Civility as ethics: Sad, perhaps, that it has come to this, but we have an opportunity to act ethically by merely acting civilly.*

*Unsettling as demystifying: If we could see what is actually here in front of us, we would not be able to remain silent.*

How do we know how we truly feel,
when "feeling" is mined for value
and as political tool?

**"Philosopher in the Camp II"**
**(a musicalized "tango poem")**
**with music by Garlos Gardel**

https://soundcloud.com/performancephilosophy/philosopher-in-the-camp-ii

Never mind I am persecuted
I could be dead, I seek no friendship
No tomorrow and no abode.
I came here, I knew I'd find you
The camp was always here
Awaiting for me, from the moment
You left this land to win the World.

I am colonized, that makes me a criminal
And the camp, you left it empty
At all costs you looked away
While I moved in to see what it is like
To arrive sans passport et sans rights
My journey is a mere ritual
of return to something lost.

I stir up history, I feel rude
When I laugh at your friendship
Because I found myself
As your potential enemy

Your envy is my triumph
As I explore my jungle
I also see you, observe your habits:
In you comfort I see loss.

Leaving it all to a few,
who will multiply the bread,
with money... god knows how.

And all along you have been dreaming of the camp
A "place" where history could be dumped
Because you figured it was mud
Or so you thought.

And the world became meaningless
In the desert of your comfort
It was only you and the camp

That you dreamed as an unreal
abstract space, a simulacrum
of two dimensional zombies
and apocalyptic fantasies.

I tell you the camp is real
With more landscapes that your video games
I bring it to you as a gift:

A Trojan horse, a Pandora's box
The world is a camp my dear
And history in it ferments
And revives like compost.

To the leftovers of your cities
I invite you to move in
No such thing as calculation.

This is not a place one goes to
This is not home, and home is never
Where one goes to anyway.

Leave your tired Humanity
Because it is insulting
To feel so lonely and unique
In the universe.

My friend, a criminal you are not
but a refugee invited
to the ghetto of the World.

Music recorded live with Nacho Gonzalez on guitar and Naseem Alatrash on cello (Berklee Internet Radio Network, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEGJeUTAVKw) .

(I philosophize, therefore I am.)

**Can you specify the relationship between death production and a refugee?**

At the agriculture industry in the region of Almería in Andalusía the large number of the workers who are doing the boring and tedious labour at the 'plasticulture'—the greenhouses—are from North-Africa or Sub-Saharan countries. The majority of them has arrived there without papers. Large number of the workers are also illiterate or at least have no understanding how the employers are obliged to follow the collective agreement based on the European and Spanish law. They are refugees or illegal immigrants crudely exploited, also for the reason that there is an excess of labour for the employer to select his workers. Some of the workers live in the huts build from the same plastic than the greenhouses, and they live within the same area of the greenhouses. It is a 'camp' not for refugees, but for the cheap labour. The relationship is between the production of strawberries, melons, zucchini, etc., and the production of agonizing conditions for the immigrant workers and in the end, production of death. The food is produced by the potentially dead labour.

https://vimeo.com/performancephilosophy/what-is-refugee-assehli

Can the right to mobility be put forward as an immanent force (political) for the refugee?

While developing a new definition of "new cosmopolitanism," I have decided to adopt Étienne Balibar's "right for circulation," or right for global movement, as one of the fundamental human rights and as the basis of nomadic or cosmopolitan citizenship. "To ask whether a nomadic citizenship, being at the same time a mobile or traveling citizenship and a citizenship for the travelers, is thinkable [...] means to ask how the age-old figure of the citizen could be reconfigured in the age of global migrations, and if it proves inevitable, how it could also become an institutional reality" (2011, 207). Balibar identifies four characteristics of nomadic citizenship: "1. The right for circulation or movement; 2. anthropological effects and ontological paradoxes of globalization; 3. antagonistic tendencies of (de)terrorization; and 4. The instruments of enlargement of the right of circulation and its political recognition." In this context, the right for circulation can be recognized as "an immanent force (political) for the refugee" as well as a right for unconditional hospitality as articulated by Derrida (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000); and further in the context of refugee crisis and rising nationalist movements, the right to mobility becomes a political force for each individual and a call for responsibility as well as an issue of hospitality on the part of the nation state.

Right to mobility is unfortunately precisely what is denied to refugees. For example, when refugees are fingerprinted at the borders of fortress EU, their bodies are immobilized because of the speed of this digital information, which is at once, in a matter of seconds sent to all the border crossings inside Europe. Moreover by the act of fingerprinting the border becomes (digitally) inscribed into the body, thus rendering it immobile / deportable.

It was Hannah Arendt, who suggested that after the World War II, our view of the world must drastically change ([1943] 1994). The figure of a refugee must now be hold in the centre of political philosophy, economics and state's functioning. Agamben 2000), Derrida (and Dufourmantelle 2000), and Appiah (1997) similarly argued, after Arendt, for recognizing the right for mobility, the right for seeking refuge and settlement as a new social order and political imperative to be adopted by the nation states. In this imperative, cosmopolitanism provides the dictum of acceptance. It opposes the paradigm of stranger-danger (Ahmed 2000) and it becomes a motion for dialogue, the only model of contemporary life that could aid us in dealing with the outcomes of mass migration and rising nationalistic xenophobia.

Following Arendt's analysis of the psychologically degrading power of being a refugee (1994, 119), Agamben suggests

> the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time and the only category in which one may see today—at least until the process of dissolution of the nation-state and of its sovereignty has achieved full completion—the forms and limits of a coming political community. It is even possible that, if we want to be

> equal to the absolutely new tasks ahead, we will have to abandon decidedly, without reservation, the fundamental concepts through which we have so far represented the subjects of the political (Man, the Citizen and its rights, but also the sovereign people, the worker, and so forth) and build our political philosophy anew starting from the one and only figure of the refugee. (2000, 90)

In his plea, Agamben is concerned with de-valuing of the so called "naked life", our preference to thinking of people as citizens. He traces the origins of this dangerous distinction back to the *Declaration of Human Rights*, in which naked life "comes to the forefront in the management of the state and becomes, so to speak, its earthly foundation" (93). A refugee, stripped of his/her rights as a citizen, presents the essence of this naked life; and so, as Agamben insists the right of movement and asylum "must no longer be considered as the conceptual category in which to inscribe the phenomenon of refugees. […] The refugee should be considered for what it is, namely, nothing less than a limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the nation-state and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed" (94). When it comes to the foundations of a new democratic state, Agamben's political recipe consists of rethinking Europe (as his example of such a state) as

> an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which all the (citizen and noncitizen) residents of the European states would be in a position of exodus or refuge; the status of European would then mean the being-in-exodus of the citizen (a condition that obviously could also be one of immobility). European space would thus mark an irreducible difference between birth [*nascita*] and nation in which the old concept of people (which, as is well known, is always a minority) could again find a political meaning, thus decidedly opposing itself to the concept of nation (which has so far unduly usurped it). This space would coincide neither with any of the homogeneous national territories nor with their topographical sum, but would rather act on them by articulating and perforating them topologically as in the Klein bottle or in the Möbius strip, where exterior and interior in-determine each other. In this new space, European cities would rediscover their ancient vocation of cities of the world by entering into a relation of reciprocal extraterritoriality. (95)

In this argument, Agamben makes a philosophical leap impossible to achieve through the logic of immobility or settlement, and so he proposes to consider movement as one of the basic human rights and hence the driving force for rethinking of the foundations and functions of the nation state.

How would this question relate with the labour market in Europe, that would not only exploit the refugees? What would guarantee that the refugee, who would become an immigrant worker, would not be exploited in the labour market in sweatshop conditions? Why the production of death in Sub-Saharan countries exist in the first place, or what is the significance of it to the global economy? The situation in the farms mentioned above is different for the Polish or Romanian workers in the Andalusía. They have a citizenship from an EU nation, and they have more place to argue better conditions for work and to live for themselves. How can we guarantee that the immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa would not become the janitors of Europe? How can we resist the philosophy of capitalism, economy and agon, which is the determination in the last instance of global capitalism?

Kwame Anthony Appiah offers a further thought on the right of mobility: in his advocacy of "rooted cosmopolitanism" or "cosmopolitan patriotism", Kwame Anthony Appiah cites Gertrude Stein's famous saying: "America is my country, and Paris is my hometown" (quoted in Appiah 1997, 618). This saying helps Appiah to articulate the view of mobility as a foundation for the new philosophy of cosmopolitanism, in which the idea of a cosmopolitan citizen who belongs to the human community is concretized through this citizen's willingness to take interest in the lives, practices and beliefs of others. According to Appiah, "cosmopolitanism begins with conversation across boundaries", and so he "encourages us to embrace both local and universal loyalties and allegiances and denies that they necessarily come into conflict with each other" (Seifikar 2008, 307–308).

Jacques Derrida has articulated this position of cosmopolitan dividedness as the "politics of exodus" (1984, 120), which can serve as "a subversion of fixed assumptions and a privileging of disorder." This politics is rooted in the simultaneity of inbetweenness, the cosmopolitan imperative to "gesture in opposite directions at the same time: on one hand to preserve the distance and suspicion with regard to the official political codes governing the reality; on the other, to intervene here and now in a practical manner and engage whenever the necessity arises. The position of dual allegiance, in which I personally find myself, is one of perpetual uneasiness" (ibid.). Such position might be strictly personal to Derrida, but it is shared by other philosophers of displacement, including Edward Said, Julia Kristeva or Helen Cixous, who have experienced the rupture of dislocation themselves. The politics of cosmopolitanism as Derrida would show himself, spills into the cosmopolitan artist's aesthetics. Thus, in responding to the questions about the tension between the politics of exodus and the work of deconstruction, Derrida said: "I try where I can to act politically while recognizing that such action remains incommensurate with my intellectual project of deconstruction" (121). "Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. […] the critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and 'the other of language'" (123). In this discourse, the other is beyond language, it is "not a referent in the normal sense that linguists have attached to the term" (124); it is a production of meaning through the work of distancing and difference (125).

But the pleasure of encounter goes beyond an intellectual exchange of ideas, it becomes experiential and sensual, the process where the cosmopolitan encounter is located as well. Today's cosmopolitanism is equally rooted in the tendencies of localization as nationalism and globalization as (in)voluntarily re- settlement of masses, as well as in the individual practices of exile, economic migration, nomadism, and personal post- exilic heritage. Hence, it re-enforces a responsibility of a politically aware artist for taking a moral, ethical, and political stand. It often is manifested as the artist's world view and/or personal philosophy; their pointed look at the conditions of migration and refugee crisis, their questioning the impact theatre and performance arts can make today.

How to distinguish

capital labour play

Mohammed is from Rif, Morocco. He has been working at the plasticultures for seven years. He is not illegal immigrant anymore, but he does not have the permanent work permit, which would allow him to look for job somewhere else in Spain or Europe. His employer is deliberately not giving him long enough contracts, which would entitle him to receive this permit. The wife of Mohammed, Fatima works on the same plasticulture. They don't like the work, where the workday may easily be prolonged over eight hours if an emergent order arrives. In the summertime, the temperature in the plastic house rise to 80 degrees Celsius. Fatima worked until the eighth month of her pregnancy, just like anybody else. They have four children and they live in a concrete building, that is just beside the plasticulture compound. Their son Younes cannot play football at the nearby field after dark, because at one night he was beaten by some racist thugs. He is fourteen years old, and he would like to become a professional sportsman. He also wants to move to north, to Basque country, which is not that hostile to Moroccans, so they say. Every evening they sit at home, because of the fear of racist attacks. The capital in this picture is the house, which they rent from the owner of the plasticulture farm. The labour they do in the plasticulture, will never allow them to gain so much money that they could save for property. Any playtime is away from the possible gained position. To have children is not a choice. It is self-evident, and it is self-evidently also a capital, a possibility. After they have joined the Soc-Sat worker's syndicate in Andalusía they have faced difficulties with keeping the job. But through meeting with other people, they have understood the relationship between capital, exploitation of labour and their possibilities in life.

How to distinguish

| philosophy | belief | dox |
|---|---|---|
| science | religion | common |
| art | spirituality | knowledge |

How do you address the relationship between overflow as the economic apparatus, or a model, and refugee, migrant worker, or asylum seeker?

The overflow is a necessary part of the production of value. It is axiomatic where each factor such as the refugee or worker has a potential. The value of each factor is never zero or below zero, but the value is infinitely decreasing towards zero. Following the necropolitical paradigm even death has a value, until a body has become pure matter—which in turn follows another parameter of value.

How does a post-nation world look like?

On one hand it looks like that the neoliberal form of capitalism aims to dismantle nations into different economic zones, as it is now for the European Union. How can we distinguish the neoliberal assemblage of economic zones in terms of the need for Universal Basic Income, for instance? We need to dismantle the Nation States as the creations based on identities, but how to do this, when the neoliberal transformation dismantles the nations into zones of competence, agon and cooperative enterprises of *noopolitics*? The economy is the decisional operation of the noopolitics in practice. The crisis is a mandatory practice determined in the last instance of the economy.

(handwritten working notes:)

| international | artistic nation | e.g. Somalia |
|---|---|---|
| global | NSK, El glob | Venezuela |
| | Quebec | something |
| | 1st nations | Palestine |
| | bolo'bolo sci fi | |
| | Christiania | |

IMAGES

Humane

Human

Hunger

Honour

Happiness

Heat (warmth)

IMAGES

> Intended to shock, visual images of 'third-world' suffering in Western media—of the dead, wounded, starving—constitute generic decontextualized horrors that elicit pity and sympathy, not discernment and assessment. As Rey Chow (2006) has argued, Americans have increasingly come to know the world as a target: when wars break out, foreign areas and peoples briefly enter American mainstream public discourses, often via deeply disturbing images of suffering, as embodiments of (naturalized) violence, crisis, and disasters (Fernandes 2013, 193). The hyperfocus on suffering, and the outpouring of outrage and concern over dead and injured refugees, has become a substitute for serious analysis of the geopolitical conditions that produced their displacement in the first instance. Constructed for Western consumption, these spectacular(ized) images render invisible and inaudible displaced people's everyday and out-of-sight struggles as well as their triumphs as they manage war's impact on their lives (Lubkemann 2008, 36; Hyndman 2010).
>
> (Espiritu and Duong 2018, 587)

IMAGES

Borders

Brave

Bombs

IMAGES

How does the interstitial flow?

How to distinguish

home away unsure

The victim thinking has never had a home. It is radically immanent practice.

How to distinguish

enemy neutral

We need to think what the Stranger or victim-thinking is, where the Stranger and human is without a universal consistency. How to create a non-philosophical practice alongside the postulation by François Laruelle, where the victim is the “last point of view on history” (2011, 34).

Bare life
Precarious life
Disposable life
Mere life
After life
improper life

And ‘lived’ without a life, in other words, performing living without the transcendental concept of life.

(am schlafen speak?)

How to think as determined by the X,
which does not appear at all, remains to be
nonrepresented, and not even a shadow?

The function of the Other is a reduction of the X into a position of a deviant from the norm, which is defined by the universally accepted (*katholikos*) and the proper (*orthodoxos*) thought. The community of the proper and the universal thought must define the victim=X as a position or a sufficient identity of the Other. Thus, the axiomatic X is not only a placeholder for the Other in the dualist calculation, but the axiomatic X is a function that performs without a subjectivity or signified identity. The Other is already a concept—it is a postulation for metaphysical problems that exist. The Other has potentiality, possibility, duration and existence, whereas the axiomatic X is a function. It would be a mistake to conflate the Other and the X together, and search for the 'Othering' as a replacement for the axiomatic X. In other words, subjectification will not cease the axiomatic function of the X. They are from the two different registers, with different functions. The Other $\neq$ X. The Other is a particle of a dual system, whereas the X is a complex number. The concept of the Other acquires meaning from a discourse, but the X is merely a function. In the logbook of a slave ship, the X may have stood for the indeterminate amount of loss of cargo, i.e. humans as slaves. The X does not signify a face, but only a body, in other words, it is a thing or matter. The X may also signify slavery itself, for instance in the performative of rejecting the last name inherited from the slave owners by Malcolm X. The X may have a radical function, but it is hardly an alterity.

Is it possible to make fragility a general, social value?

(Handwritten notes:)
tragic - comic - romance
jokester
resilience / rigid male
female

How to distinguish

safe at risk unsettled

The artist Michael Murphy, known for his series of what I think of as parallax sculptures, has created a piece called Identity Crisis. From one position, we (i.e., you, I, other observers) perceive an outline of the continental United States. Looking closely we notice that the appearance of the continent comes into being thanks to carefully placed objects hanging from the ceiling. In turn, these objects reveal themselves to be fire arms, most of which are automatic assault weapons. We are looking at a representation of the United States made from guns.

If we start to walk to the right, a shift occurs. The predominant composite image of the United States falls apart and the individual guns take focus. There must be at least 100 weapons. All of them are predominately black. Some silver accents gleam in the gallery lights. They are all hanging there harmlessly. But as we continue on our slow walk, the individual guns collude once again in the production of another representation. This one is a giant handgun. The giant gun, made of many smaller guns, aims to the left, back to where we once stood to view the United States.

**Discargo: *Uber*over*und*under**

https://vimeo.com/121857166

*Music by Chrys Bocast. Video montage by Jon McKenzie.*

To rethink overflow through the refugee, let us start with a highly charged philosopheme of "over": Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, and pose refugee as *Übermensch*: not as Aryan superman but under-man or under-human, the dispossessed and migrant, the ones who go overboard in going under: under the border, under the fence, under the ground, under the water, over and under all the overseers, political checkpoints, and conceptual markers of belonging and non-belonging.

If we understand refugees as those seeking shelter but also experiencing the intensity of flight, we find the strangely embodied im/mobility of going under: the refugee's flight for and from shelter after shelter and the shelter of and from flight after flight. An unsettling intensity of settling, a mobile immobility and immobile mobility. Bodies swaying here in hopes of staying there and swaying there in despair of staying here. Going somewhere while going nowhere and vice versa. Going over and under, over and over: the refugee goes Uberoverundunder, overundover.

Now we understand the title of the artwork. The identity of the United States is torn between, on the one hand, its status as a geopolity housing a democratic government predicated upon the liberty of each and every one of its citizens, and, on the other hand, its violent day-to-day killings of men, women, and children at the hands of civilians and law enforcement officials alike. The United States is a country of guns and therefore a country of murder and suicide. It is a divided nation, split internally between fear of the other and the militant defense of private property.

And refugee as *refusée* of humanity: precious cargo discarded, thus discargo, persons without the proper card, papers, rights of passage. Yet pass they do, in waves upon waves: bodies in cargo ships and wooden boats, in hidden compartments of semi-trailers, in the wheel wells of transoceanic jets, on foot across borders, rivers, fences and walls. The precious cargo of discargo, waves upon waves, sometimes going over, sometimes going under, the unsettling of settling in or up or down. A primary site of my contribution will be Buffalo, New York, US, home to scores of immigrant and refugee communities, as well as safe houses on a new Underground Railroad.

Murphy's artwork compels me to think of a parallel representational scheme for the refugee where the parallax vision would reveal not the identity crisis of the United States but the inner tension of the figure "Refugee." Who is this figure we read about so much in newspapers and social media feeds?

Does "refugee" have a foundational identity, or must we draw instead upon philosophies of difference to prescribe an array of subject positions to this figure? What composite image would greet the observer from the starting position of a Murphy-like parallax sculpture of refugee? In the place of guns, what objects would function as the atoms of this larger image? What thoughts would come during the transit from the first position to the final position? And what image would act as the antipode to the starting scene? By working through these thoughts and creating an imaginary counterpart to Murphy's *Identity Crisis*, might we be able to discern the complexities of the particular "identity crisis" summoned by the singular "Refugee"?

Here's what I see. The starting image is a representation of the dead body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi who drowned along with his older brother Ghalib and his mother Rihanna on September 2, 2015 as they fled war-torn Syria via Turkey. The particular identity of *this* child challenges you to abandon the general noun "Refugee" and seek out the name of each person who is made to belong to that group. In the words of Seyla Benhabib, this image assists in imagining the refugee as concrete other.

The composite image of Alan arises from many dangling rafts, referencing the treacherous mode of conveyance utilized by those seeking to cross the Mediterranean. Unlike Murphy's *Identity Crisis*, however, where approximately 100 guns make up the sculpture, the scale of this imagined work of art would necessitate at least 15,000 tiny boats. That number brushes up against a loose estimate of the lives lost crossing the Mediterranean since Alan Kurdi's death. The optical effect that results from focusing on an individual hanging raft and then refocusing to take in the totality of hanging rafts causes a mild case of vertigo, not unlike the dizziness that results from reading one report after another of the deaths and rescue operations taking place in the Mediterranean.

As you continue walking, the rafts begin to coalesce into the final image, that of an aleph. The aleph functions here as the antipode to the particularity of Alan Kurdi. As a citation of the set theory of Georg Cantor, the aleph enables your mind to make computations with figures that seem too big to count. How do you conceptualize the 65,000,000 people currently dislocated form their homes across the globe? How do you design, propose, and then enact political changes capable of providing those 65,000,000 people with a life worth living? It is not impossible to do such things, but we need to overcome the stultification that comes from the encounter with many millions of suffering people. The aleph of set theory might help us with our displaced-persons calculus. Second, the aleph conjures the story of the same name by Borges and the quasi-mystical vision that unfolds for the story's narrator. Such a vision, one that encapsulates the Everything of the world can translate in this sculpture into a prophetic vision of radical alterity through which a kind of Levinasian politics of the other comes into view.

The identity of the "refugee" is not contained in either the pole of the aleph or the pole of Alan Kurdi but, rather, in the crisis of emotional and epistemological instability that comes from traversing both poles of this imagined sculpture. We move from an affective encounter with the death of a child, through a dizzying array of tiny plastic boats, to the epistemological encounter with infinite sets and mystical visions. Somewhere in there we determine what else "refugee" might be besides a statistic, a sad story, a crisis, or an unsolvable paradox of the contemporary moment.

In his story, Borges presents us with two Alephs: the first one is platonic, offering us the "complete" mirror vision of our personal obsession (Borges' love for Beatriz), particularly the one that seems to slip away from us (in Borges's grieving). The other Aleph (or the "X"?, see Nauha) is the one that confronts us with the paradox of our own humanity, one that exists *because* it does not *seem* to exist (in the interior of a column of a Mosque in Cairo). The "crisis" of the refugee may be a confrontation with the radical nature of this paradox, where our own humanity is denied (actually and symbolically), and a human leap of faith (for existing) is being resisted (passive/active point of tension) because of our *limiting* obsession with a "complete" vision.

## Notes

[1] As the character Frank Stokes (played by George Clooney) states in *The Monuments Men* (2014): "You can wipe out an entire generation, you can burn their homes to the ground and somehow they'll still find their way back. But if you destroy their history, you destroy their achievements (art and culture) and it's as if they never existed. That's what Hitler (IS?) wants and that's exactly what we are fighting for." (Additions in italics to adopt the quote to the current refugee crisis in Europe).

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# FROM NORTH KOREA WITH LOVE: REVIEWING PYONGYANG'S ARIRANG MASS GAMES

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This year's 2018 Winter Olympics hosted in Pyeongchang, South Korea featured both a historic moment and a contemporary geopolitical breakthrough when the South Korean and North Korean Olympic delegations marched together under one flag for the opening ceremony. The *New York Times* described how as "athletes from the two Koreas marched into the stadium together less than 50 miles from the heavily fortified border between their nations [...they represented] hope of a breakthrough in a tense, geopolitical standoff that has stirred fears of nuclear conflict" (Rich 2018). This hopeful display of détente had personal resonance for me because of my connection to North Korea, which I toured eleven years earlier. As I watched the delegations parade together as one unified presence, thereby embodying the reunification hopes of a peninsula divided by history and ideology, I was brought back to my first-hand witnessing of a parallel scene similarly celebrating such reunification hopes at the Arirang Mass Games in Pyongyang.

I had the rare opportunity of touring North Korea in April 2007. During this tour, I was in a unique and privileged position to conduct original research on North Korea's library system because of my then-ongoing doctoral studies in Library and Information Science and my professional background in librarianship. The tour was of specific interest to me because it offered tightly controlled visits to the Grand People's Study House (North Korea's national library) and various other library-related settings; in fact, my subsequent publications on North Korea's library system became some of the first English-language literature on this subject. But the chance to see, first-hand, this library system was not the only reason that enticed me to enter this isolated, closed country.

The tour also presented the opportunity of attending the Arirang Mass Games, a spectacular artistic-cultural-athletic-gymnastic extravaganza performed in the capital's impressive May Day


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Stadium, the world's largest with a seating capacity of 150,000 spectators (Weller 2015). The Arirang Mass Games, which involves 100,000 performers and participants, could perhaps be described as a fantastical fusion of an impossibly largescale Broadway play, West End musical, Bolshoi Ballet performance, Cirque du Soleil show, military parade, Rio de Janeiro carnival pageant, Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, and Super Bowl half-time show. This description is exaggerated but that is because this performance is on an exaggerated scale. Or as described in *The Guardian* later the same year as my repeat attendances, there is "nothing in the world—not even the Olympic opening ceremony—that can compare" (Watts 2007). Moreover, that same year in fact, the Guinness Book of World Records recognized the Arirang Mass Games as the largest event of its kind in the world (Reuters 2007). It is certainly without any contemporary comparison or equivalent.

I attended the Arirang Mass Games during the middle of my tour. My first experience was so surreal that I wanted, needed, to witness it again to not only have the once/twice in a lifetime opportunity to do so, but also to try to better understand what the performance was doing (ultimately to exalt and edify North Korea, or at least the Communist regime's peculiar idea of the country's identity). I also wanted to attend it twice to more fully appreciate and enjoy the experience, specifically because the first time was so, at the risk of sounding or being hyperbolic, mind-blowing.

Reviewing the Arirang Mass Games, eleven years later during an international spotlight on the Korean peninsula, returns me to my own first-hand experience of "one of the greatest, strangest, most awe-inspiring political spectacles on earth" (Watts 2005). It also takes me back to a different world, time, and place. On a personal level, I was younger (incidentally, I celebrated my birthday in the country that year) in the midst of my doctoral studies and still based in my homeland of Canada. On a broader geopolitical level, Kim Jong-Il was still North Korea's dictatorial Dear Leader, Pyongyang had not yet perfected nuclear bombs or intercontinental ballistic missiles, President Donald Trump had not yet threatened "fire and fury" (Baker and Shang-Hun 2017) against North Korea, and the world was not yet threatened with the imminent prospect of a nuclear war between North Korea and the USA.

Eleven years later, the hostilities between the two countries intensified to the point of a potential "nuclear-to-nuclear showdown" (Landler 2018). Although there is some reasonable hope for peace after the recent historic first-ever summit between the leaders of the two countries, an event representing "a momentous step in an improbable courtship between the world's largest nuclear power and the most reclusive one" (Landler 2018).[1]

## Reviewing the Arirang Mass Games

This review of North Korea's Airirang Mass Games allows me the opportunity to respond to this year's Pyeongchang Olympics by sharing some of my experiences in North Korea. With the benefit of hindsight of over a decade, this review helps me to better situate this surreal spectacle into some kind of analytical perspective. Perhaps the times that I attended the performance in person (and

maybe even for long afterwards), they were too close to engage in a sober conversation about its possible purpose or meaning. I now understand that this performance was/is more than politics or show (although it is certainly both of those things). As Andrew Bowie argues, “a decisive aspect of performance both for performer and audience is that it enables us to inhabit a world that makes sense by the very nature of our participation in it” (Bowie 2015, 56). The Arirang Mass Games arguably enables performers and spectators alike to inhabit the peculiar North Korean world. Ultimately, the event is a crucial tool for the regime’s careful construction and curation of its version of North Korean culture and identity and, simultaneously, the materialization and enactment of its political agenda for ideological living.

In the following sections, I present my experience of a performance unlike anything and unseen anywhere else in the contemporary world. As one of the few foreigners and even fewer scholars to have witnessed the event, I can contribute a privileged perspective to the beginning of a conversation about this performance that has been nearly inaccessible and unavailable to most people, including most other academic researchers or commentators, outside of North Korea.

This review, however, does not aim to provide justifications for or intend to give support to the North Korean government, nor does it argue that this performance or other artistic or athletic achievements redeem the regime from other actual or alleged abuses, atrocities, or animosities (Salam and Haag 2018, Yeo and Chubb 2018, Clemens 2016, BBC 2014, Cumming-Bruce 2014, Lankov 2014, United Nations Human Rights Council 2014, Demick 2010). The purpose instead is twofold: first, to help shed light on a spectacular performance that few people outside of North Korea have experienced in such a little known or little understood country; and second, to present a perspective on repetition established in such an isolated and mysterious place, at least compared to the relative openness of most other countries, that few other individuals have personally experienced.

As Lisa Burnett argues, the Arirang Mass Games is “an astonishingly unique work of art. The participants and organizers of the Mass Games are, so far as is known, simply human beings—musicians, athletes, dancers, college students, and even children—who have joined forces to create something wondrously beautiful (for the Mass Games are nothing if not beautiful) under extreme and challenging circumstances” (Burnett 2013, 25). It is further hoped that this review will help illuminate how this event, comprised of masses of individuals coming together to create something spectacular despite their grim circumstances, serves as both embodied ideology of the North Korean regime, and also as ideology itself as an embodied enactment.

This review is arranged into an account and then an analysis of the Arirang Mass Games. It presents a description of my attendance with emphasis on my first witnessing of the show because of its lasting impression. My second viewing on the very next evening was nearly identical to my first experience, except that there were no opening speeches.

This identicality between the two live performances felt strange because of their seemingly perfect and seamless sameness. I do not necessarily expect major alterations between performances of the same live event, whether it is the Arirang Mass Games or other kinds of artistic, gymnastic,

musical, or theatrical productions. Yet, sometimes upon a second viewing of the same live performance there could possibly be some differences between them, such as a missed cue or altered lighting or some other production-related accident. There could also be a change in atmosphere because of a largely different crowd for a subsequent viewing. The point is that there sometimes is and can be room for some kind of alteration or mistake in repeat performances. But from what I could see, there were no differences between each night's performance. Both times seemed to be precisely the same—even the audience's energy and reactions seemed so similar—as though I was either watching a recorded version or I had somehow been transported back to the night before. Perhaps this seeming sameness is one reason why my memories of these repeat viewings have become largely conflated as though I attended only once.

The effect that this repeat viewing had/has on me was/is complicated both intellectually and emotionally. On the one hand, this exactitude in a live and massively complex performance was impressive. It fostered awe and respect for all those involved—the designers, organizers, choreographers, musicians, actors, gymnasts, schoolchildren, everyone—being able to seemingly perfectly repeat their parts without alteration or error. This show's beautiful complexity and perfect execution was in many ways inspiring.

On the other hand, however, this exactitude also engendered a vaguely sinister feeling. To begin, it has made my memories of the event seem to be from one experience, not two. I attended twice, I paid twice, I remember going twice, and yet, my memories of the two times have become—I guess like the event itself—the same. It is indeed strange to reflect upon two separate experiences as though they were one and consequently an almost-indistinguishable remembrance.

Additionally, watching the show for the second time, seeing it unfold exactly as before without any seeming change, made me wonder how and why such perfection was achieved. One of the purposes of the event is to illuminate the Communist collective over the self-interested individual; consequently, the performers and "the participants know that the slightest individual mistake on their part could damage the group's performance. They therefore surrender to the group and, in this way, the performers become ideologically prepared, thus becoming true Communists" (Bonner and Battsek 2004). This second viewing made me consider what these people had to go through to surrender to the group, to surrender to the Mass Games, to put on this show, and to do it over and over for a period of weeks (and then later again in the late-summer). It also made me wonder what, if any, cost there would be to them or their loved ones if they did make a slight individual mistake. What would or could happen to them if there was any perceptible imperfection in the execution of their roles? What, if any, repercussion would follow? I did not ask my North Korean guides. It seemed inappropriate to do so, especially since my female guide proudly noted how her sister was performing in the event that year.

Nevertheless, I do appreciate that my second viewing, whilst still as surreal as my first, allowed me space to experience it with more sober awareness of what was happening. I also acknowledge that because the near identicality of the two nights, my memories have converged, conflated, and coloured each other over the past eleven years. Thankfully my diary accounts, photographs, videos

(our tour group was filmed by one of our government minders and, interestingly, we were given an edited documentary film about our tour), and memories of my tour helped reconstitute my experiences of the Arirang Mass Games.

This review, moreover, provides me an opportunity to reflect upon my own presence inside this country, not only as a tourist, but also as a scholar. The reason why I went to North Korea, at the risk of sounding pretentious, was as a kind of fact-finding mission of my own. I wanted to visit, research, and begin to learn about a country so willingly and unwillingly closed-off from the wider world and so vilified in the media and many other quarters. I wanted to see for myself what this place was about. I realized that my overall experience would be highly scripted and severely circumscribed (which it undoubtedly was); however, it would be a start to a deeper understanding of this so-called hermit kingdom and its atmosphere, culture, and people.

This review further provides an analysis of the Arirang Mass Games through a discussion of the materialization, enactment, and embodiment of the regime's ethnocentric Communist ideology and culture. The regime, for example, has its own version of Communism—Juche—which promotes national independence, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency within a socialist system guided by the Kim dynasty. This analysis draws upon the work of performance philosophers and the work of other scholars and journalists, who have either analyzed and/or also attended the event, to begin connecting the ways in which this performance can be regarded as the material embodiment of North Korean culture, national identity, and ideology, or at least the regime's construction and fantasy of these aspects of the country.

## Attending the Arirang Mass Games, April 2007

My first attendance of the Arirang Mass Games coincided with that year's opening ceremony celebration. It was a cold, crisp, but clear, early-spring evening as our tour bus approached the imposing May Day stadium. As dusk fell, the world's largest stadium was eerily illuminated by pastel-blue lights and framed by a gradually darkening blue, pink, and violet sky. The May Day Stadium is a retro-futuristic venue on the northern edges of the wide Daedong River that cleaves through central Pyongyang. A manifestation of mid-20th century fantasies of future aesthetics, the stadium resembles an alien spaceship waiting to blast off to return to its home planet. It is a gigantic white structure with massive 60m-high vaulting archways ringing its oval perimeter. We entered the stadium through one of these imposing arches that dwarfed us, reducing us to tiny ants entering a mountain.

Immediately upon entering the stadium, an exciting, electrifying energy struck us as deafening militaristic chants thundered through the cavernous corridors. Once we passed through these high hallways into the actual field, we encountered the source of these impressive sounds and an equally staggering sight. Directly across from us, covering nearly the entire opposite side of this colosseum, appeared a massive mural comprised of 20,000 seated schoolchildren rhythmically stomping their feet and roaring the names of their school districts in unison whilst forming colourful synchronized mosaics using oversized colour-coded books.

Each child had her/his own book and would seamlessly and simultaneously flip the pages according to signals given by a backdrop conductor and a giant digital screen displaying changing three-number combinations both placed on the opposite side of the stadium. The conductor and screen would signal, at the exact moment, when to turn the pages, which the children managed to do with choreographed precision. Like pixels making up a screen image, these book pages created a mammoth image. Through small binoculars, provided by our North Korean minders, I could see the top of the students' heads as they peeped above their books to read the signals and then, once flipping their pages, they'd immediately duck down in order not to interrupt the perfect solid appearance of the overall mosaic. When it was time to transition to the next image, they'd repeat the quick process over again. It created a jaw-dropping illusion of the opposite wall moving to the militaristic chants and shouts by the schoolchildren. It sounded like a military parade or inspection.

The mural itself served as the main backdrop for the show, forming around ninety different major pictures detailing the country's achievements and revolutionary history as accompaniment to the performances and tableaux on the field. When images of the Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il were displayed, the crowd erupted in enthusiastic applause of sustained devotion. Some of these huge pictures, moreover, featured dynamic and moving images, as though it was an animated screen, including a flashing sun (representing Kim Il-Sung), shimmering stars, winking eyes of smiling children, falling snow, flashing lightening, and smoke streaming from the engine of a train traversing a snowy mountain. But, at this point, the children were listing their schools' names in vertical rows featuring giant Korean block letters. The children also formed vertical or horizontal black lines cutting across the mural whilst shouting compliments about Pyongyang to the packed audience.

Above this grand backdrop was a giant electronic torch atop of the building which was lit during the performance by a bright white electronic star. On each side of this backdrop were multi-leveled manicured gardens covered in colourful lights and the years of Juche in huge block numbers: 1912 (Kim Il Sung's birth year, marking the formal start of the North Korean Juche calendar, thus making it Juche 1) on the left side the then-current year 2007 (or Juche 95) on the right side.

We were given prime seating in the centre of the stadium with ideal elevation to observe the entire spectacle unfolding in front of us. This prime seating also meant that high-ranking North Koreans in attendance were seated in our section (although their reserved area was segregated by a special concrete cantilevered viewing deck jetting out from the rows of seats). There appeared to be many such important individuals in attendance, the men dressed in dark conservative suits and the women in brightly coloured traditional Korean gowns (although, the rest of the audience were smartly dressed themselves). The sartorial choices of the North Koreans gave the impression that this show was not some rowdy event, like a soccer game or rugby match, but instead an upscale affair.

Our government minders informed us that because this night's performance was the opening ceremony it was hoped that Kim Jong-Il himself would attend. They certainly appeared excitedly expectant. This suggestion had a strange chilling effect over me, not only because I would, for the

first time in my life that I knew or was aware of, be in the same space as an actual dictator, but that he would be sitting very near to me (directly behind, slightly to the left, and only a few rows above me).

The show began promptly at 8PM. The schoolchildren's chanting and stomping subsided and their mural settled into long, thick vertical rows of different colours. The stadium became silent as a man in the reserved area for special attendees—allegedly a major-ranking Communist Party member—approached a microphone to deliver a speech to officially open the 2007 Arirang Mass Games. His voice boomed over the loudspeakers that, in turn, echoed throughout the stadium. It appeared that Kim was not attending after all. Our minders whispered to us that, because of his "regretful absence", we were permitted to photograph the event.

Suddenly fireworks exploded above the open roof, lighting up the sky with colourful bursts, shots, and showers whilst the electronic spiderweb, crisscrossing the roof's open space, and its hanging ornaments brightly flashed and sweeping orchestral music swept over us. I became immersed in an incredible world that I'd never experienced before and most probably will never do so again. Indeed, as Scott Burgeson argues,

> it would be facile to dismiss this production as mere Stalinist propaganda or Orwellian kitsch, for "Arirang" really is a case in which the sum is greater than its parts, a triumph of human creativity that on a purely aesthetic level trumps all political or ideological underpinnings. In a word, it is the ultimate *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of art of the kind that Wagner or Andrew Lloyd Webber could only ever dream of replicating. From opera, ballet, and traditional Korean dance to high-wire circus routines, gymnastics and martial-arts displays, a virtual encyclopedia of theatrical forms is deployed to stunning and always seamless effect. (Burgeson 2015)

My jaw dropped and my mouth remained open whilst my eyes bulged and remained unblinking for the following ninety or so minutes, neither believing nor wanting to miss any of this over-the-top sumptuous but surreal spectacle.

The performance's theme is Arirang based on arguably the most famous Korean folk song on the Korean peninsula. The song's meaning, interestingly, has different lyrical variations and multiple interpretations without consensus of the main or original version. Yet, regardless of variation or interpretation, Arirang is ultimately a bittersweet love song expressing the longing and sorrow of two lovers tragically separated by fate. It is indeed a particularly poignant song for North Koreans who claim to yearn for reunification with South Korea. It serves as a kind of bridge that connects the show's different parts together, and eleven years later, a kind of back-to-the-future bridge that connects my experience to the scenes from the Pyeongchang Olympics.

The performance is divided into a prelude and finale and five main chapters covering the interconnecting narratives of the Kim dynasty, North Korean nationalism, the country's military and military-first policy (Songun), the Communist system of government and life, and Korean reunification. It compresses the country's past, present, and future—from its brutal colonization

under and joyous liberation from Japanese imperialists; the tragic separation of the Korean peninsula between North and South; its military, civilian, cultural, industrial, agricultural, and technological achievements; and its dream for peaceful Korean reunification—into one seemingly suspended, eternal moment that always anticipates (but has not yet fully achieved) the promised socialist paradise for the Korean people. The show, in other words, does not make any reference to the widespread famines, chronic malnutrition, electricity shortages, or economic collapse that afflicted the country in recent decades, let alone the alleged and actual human rights abuses inflicted upon the people.

Apparently, according to our government minders, this year's performance reduced the anti-American and anti-Japanese sentiments and toned down the military components that were usual for previous years' narratives and acts. They did not make clear why these changes were made but I presumed it was perhaps partly in response to the then-ongoing international six-party talks involving North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, and Japan and the USA (Onishi 2007; Ramzy and Cochrane 2018) to reach compromise on the dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and, in turn, the international community's isolation and sanctioning of the country.

The event nevertheless remained, at least to me, highly militarized. If it was toned down, I wondered how more militaristic it could have been. The military and militaristic aspects were quite conspicuous. An entire chapter, for example, was devoted to the regime's Songun ('military-first') policy with many military-themed uniforms, costumes, weapons, marches, parades, movements, tableaux, music, and backdrops. One of the acts within this chapter, in fact, dramatized Kim Jong-Il's selfless devotion to military duty by displaying him travelling in the mountains, through the dark night, to inspect and inspire his brave troops.

The reigning Kim dynasty, particularly its founder Kim Il-Sung, is continuously lauded with a fervent religious devotion. The Kims are celebrated and upheld as godlike figures who are, in equal measure, the great saviours, selfless defenders, tireless builders, responsible stewards, and loving parents of the North Korean people and nation. For example, the children's part of the performance—a breathtaking gymnastics display of girls as young as seven—begins with the kids playfully running onto the field shouting, in unison, "Kim Jong-Il is our father!"

The audience, including our government minders, would energetically cheer when images of Kim Il-Sung were displayed or narratives about the Kims were enacted. This devotion was astounding to see, indeed feel, in person. Being embedded within this mostly North Korean audience, who all joyously and loudly responded to any mention of the Kims, immersed me within the live enactment of this cult of personality that is part of North Koreans' lives.

The performance's first chapter, in fact, centres on Kim Il-Sung as the bright star who brought light and hope to the North Korean nation and people. One of the first major acts, entitled the "Star of Korea", tells the pseudo-historical story of Kim Il-Sung liberating North Korea from Japan. He is represented as a shimmering star in a dark sky—displayed on the backdrop mural—leading the people out of Japanese colonial oppression. Rows of women dressed in golden-yellow gowns, holding oversized fans of the same colour, gracefully dance a mixture of Korean classical dance

and Russian ballet across the field and make complicated gestures with their fans, all in perfect unison, to the orchestra's grand rendition of "Arirang".

This act's exultant finale shows the Star of Korea, now manifested as a three-dimensional shining, silvery, stylized orb, perched on a pedestal situated high above the field near the stadium's open roof. The star rises and then ascends even higher to ignite the gigantic torch positioned at the stadium's zenith. Fire explodes from the torch in a glorious flourish. At that precise moment, the backdrop mural changes to display images of the shining torch and a fluttering red flag whilst rows of young men in red jumpsuits rush onto the field and perform complicated calisthenics routines to the upbeat militaristic song entitled "Song of Comradeship". Kim Il-Sung, in other words, has not only ignited the people's revolutionary spirit but also fulfills his divine destiny of freeing them and bringing independence and sovereignty to their nation.

The performance's ultimate conclusion celebrates a hopeful reconciliation and peaceful reunification with South Korea. It begins with the backdrop mural displaying a bleak landscape of the DMZ, the symbol of the divided peninsula, with a single booming male voice reciting a paean to the Korean people accompanied by the orchestra playing a melancholic "Arirang". As the music gradually becomes louder and fuller, a chorus and female soloist replaces the male speaker singing the song's lyrics, two large groups of women in identical flowing white gowns emerge on opposite ends of the darkened field, reaching and slowly gravitating toward each other. When their leaders reach one another, they join hands—imitating the massive Reunification Archway, of two female figures reaching toward each other, that serves as a grand entrance to Pyongyang—crying with happiness as the stadium is illuminated in bright light and the music changes to the stirringly upbeat song "We are One". The women, through their uniformity in dress, movement, and affect, seamlessly form an image of a single unified Korean peninsula as a monumental Korean-centred globe emerges in the middle of the field, the backdrop mural changes into the Star of Korea, fireworks light up the sky, and the field overflows with thousands more performers portraying overjoyed citizens of both countries celebrating their reunification.

It is an emotional scene. As Burnett argues, the Arirang Mass Games expresses the North Korean "vision of reunification in a way that is uniquely and powerfully moving, whatever one's assessment of its political and ideological underpinning" (Burnett 2013, 21–22). This hope of a single reunified Korea—or what would be their mythical Arirang nation—imparted a warm feeling. But it simultaneously cooled this warmth by making it clear that North Korea would dominate the reunified country. It is North Korean songs, slogans, and symbols—and nothing from contemporary South Korean culture or society—that fill the stadium after the two sides reunite and the people celebrate. This otherwise joyous scene left a sour aftertaste of an ethnonationalist-supremacist atmosphere of a distorted dream that can not be, at least not under then (or present) circumstances.

I attended the Arirang Mass Games for a second time the following evening. I needed to witness it again to believe that it was real and that I truly experienced it, that it was not some strange dream or hallucination. This second viewing was as surreal as my first experience, not only because of it

being so unique, but also because of its identicality. It felt as though they were the exact same performances of the same event. From our travel to and arrival at the stadium, to being ushered to our prime seats, to the militaristic atmosphere of the surroundings, and to the full house of spectators. It was déjà vu. Even the weather cooperated in this exactitude, being another clear, crisp, and cold early-spring evening. The second viewing was as impactful as the first time, but I was at least somewhat more prepared for this surreal spectacle created in this very singular world. I was indeed more prepared for a sober experience then I at first anticipated because of the seeming sameness between the two nights.

### Analyzing the Arirang Mass Games, February 2018 (11 Years Later)

The Arirang Mass Games is unparalleled political propaganda. But it is more than propaganda. Merkel notes that "although outside North Korea they are often criticized as being nothing more than a blunt propaganda tool praising the communist state and its leaders, their role and meaning is much more complex and multi-layered" (Merkel 2010, 2481). There is more going on than only ideology and politics. These games also materialize North Korean culture, or at least the regime's carefully constructed and curated concept of the country's culture. As David P. Terry and Andrew F. Wood argue, "any understanding of North Koreans…must account for the ways in which they are embedded in particular communication systems that are materialized by the Mass Games, among other concrete performance practices" (Terry and Wood 2015, 197). Thus, while the games help propagate the regime's political agenda, they also help constitute the regime's version of North Korean culture through its materialization and enactment. The event further constitutes this Communist ideology and ethnocentric culture through each performer's enacting, and by extension embodiment, of the epic show.

The event helps the regime to materialize, in extravagant form, the country's ethnocentric Communist ideology. As Merkel describes, "this festival is primarily meant to demonstrate the uniqueness and success of the country's political system and the popularity of its rulers, and contribute to the ongoing identity-formation processes [of the regime's ideological paradigm]" (Merkel 2014, 383). But this demonstration does more than represent North Korean ideology. It *is* North Korean ideology. Because of and through its enactment, the event transforms this ideology into an embodied way of thinking about, expressing, and living the regime's political agenda and fantasies. Laura Cull, for example, argues that performance can be a form of thought. She states that one can "see performance not as represented in another thought, but simply as thought itself—to see 'performance as philosophy'" (Cull 2014, 20). The "grand scale of thousands of…people working in complete unison, as through a single body, reflects the philosophy that underpins both these mass spectacles as well as North Korean society" (Merkel 2010, 2487). The Arirang Mass Games is not simply a part of the regime's propaganda, it is a materialization and enactment of the regime's ideology itself.

This ideology in action conjoins the performance with the ideology. Cull explains how "the aim of conjoining performance and philosophy might…aspire to generate *new ideas of both* on the basis of a mutually transformative encounter, or what Isabelle Stengers calls 'reciprocal capture': 'a *dual*

process of identity construction'" (Cull 2012, 11). Philosophy and ideology are not identical approaches; the former explores aspects of the nature of life, knowledge, and reality whilst the latter establishes systems of ideas to in turn construct policies or politics. Cull's explanation of the conjoining of performance and philosophy, however, can also help illuminate the conjoining of performance and ideology. The event has a kind of reciprocal capture between, first, the state and performance and, second, between the state, performance, and performers. It is a similar dual process of constructing the state's version of North Korean identity as and through the event itself, whilst simultaneously helping participants construct for themselves this culture through their performance.

Terry and Wood help to shed further light on this conjoining of performance and ideology, explaining how

> performers materialize this willpower through palpable energy behind and commitment to each gesture. These are not merely bodies that go where they have been told; these are bodies that move how they have been told, with a sheer physical presence of unmatched intensity. It is one thing to watch tens of thousands of people move in unison, quite another to watch tens of thousands of people simultaneously extend themselves physically and emotionally, each smiling more widely than her neighbor, each extending every gesture as far as possible, each pair of eyes seemingly overcome with joy that increases with every passing moment. (Terry and Wood 2015, 196–197)

This conjoining thus serves a dual process of constitution. First, it helps constitute the regime's ideology as embodied lived experience by having citizens devote themselves to its enactment as though devoting themselves to North Korea and the Kims. Second, it helps constitute the regime's version of the country's cultural identity and way of life for citizens. The event certainly materializes and demonstrates what the regime thinks about itself (an idealized socialist paradise) and how citizens are to think about the regime (a benevolent Kim family providing an independent and sovereign socialist life).

This dual process has an underlying dual nature in which the Arirang Mass Games is both the materialization and enactment of ideology, and simultaneously the enacting and embodying/embodiment of ideology. Cull states that "performance practice might be seen to avoid application when it conceives itself as a way of thinking rather than as the mere demonstration of existing ideas" (Cull 2012, 23). She argues that performance is a kind of "embodied encounter with the resistant materiality of performance's thinking: its embodied-thinking, participatory-thinking, or durational-thinking—encounters that generate new ideas of what thought is and where, when and how it occurs" (Cull 2012, 25). The entirety of the Arirang Mass Games—from its design, recruitment, training, staging, enactment, and viewing—not only materializes and enacts ideology but, through their enactment and ultimate display, provides a way of thinking about them.

Cull discusses Allan Kaprow's concept of "experienced insight" to further illuminate the embodied thinking inherent in performance. She explains that Kaprow "saw little value in generating artworks

that 'remain only an illustration of thought' rather than providing participants with what he called 'experienced insight: an event of embodied thinking by the participant in the act of doing, which is not the same as the recognition of some underlying metaphorical meaning of the work determined in advance by the artist" (Cull 2012, 23). Or as Esa Kirkkopelto states, "performance makers and performers can make contact with philosophical thinking" through performance, which arguably constitutes a form of thinking that "takes place at the very level of performance practice with its material, corporeal and institutional arrangements and the related power play…these arrangements imply" (Kirkkopelto 2015, 5). Performing the event provides an embodied experience of the regime's ideology and identity; that is, through the act of doing the performance, each performer embodies the state's ideological narratives. Each person's role, in other words, is not simply an enactment of ideology but an embodiment of it, a lived material experience of it.

The event further demands that "even if [they] are aware of present shortages of food and electricity […] to take comfort in the constant assurance that what really matters is not the gloom of the here and now, but the bright rays of sunlight that lie just beyond the horizon, where all (Koreans) will live in peace, friendship, and prosperity" (Burnett 2013, 25). Thus, the performers enact and embody its "powerfully affective images of the glorious future yet to come and the present sacrifices that must be made to bring it into being […and, in so doing] help to obscure the differences between the utopia described by the regime and the reality on the ground" (Burnett 2013, 25).

The entire organization of the Arirang Mass Games, in fact, involves and mirrors the strict communal synchronizing of society. Lee, for example, describes how the performers

> in color-coordinated outfits take the field and begin dancing, jumping, and tumbling in [perfect] synchronicity. Their bodies move to form…blooming flowers to intersecting geometric shapes that expand, collapse, and flow into each other, and every last gymnast moves in perfect time with the group. There are no missed steps, no awkward legs, and no slow individuals who are off by beat, no unseemly breaks to distract the audience from the patterns of perfection. The coordination is astonishing. (Lee 2012)

The performers "will practice [and perform the show] with severe physical and emotional stress that combines the need to please the state with the need to assure that […] their family's overall political standing [does] not suffer" (Jimin 2012). The grand scale of the performance, coupled with the grand scale of effort required to make it a reality through intense practice and enactment, enables the individual to experience this propaganda with other people as a single collective. They must surrender their individuality to the group to promote "a single, unified collective will and effort above any individual desires or self-interest" (Merkel 2013, 1254). North Koreans of course live in the reality of a closed, isolated, and totalitarian Communist dictatorship every day. But the event provides each person with another way in which to interact with the regime's fantasies about the country as a pure Korean race living in a socialist utopia made possible by the beneficent Kim family.

Participation in the Arirang Mass Games also, significantly, extends into the daily organization and control of society. The government-appointed Mass Gymnastics Organizing Committee, for example, oversees the recruitment, training, and participation of every participant and performer thereby using the performance as an important "means to check ideological reliability and cut off any emerging recalcitrance among [...] members of society, figuratively speaking, at the roots" (Lee 2012). This infiltration directly influences the lives of Pyongyang residents (who make up the majority of the people involved in the show) who must, in turn, materially make sense of their lives and culture through "experience in drill, in subordination to the group, of veneration of a distant leader, [and] of ordering the family unit [and daily life] around political performance and political status" (Lee 2012).

The following statement by Kim Jong-Il is also worth quoting in full to help illuminate the role that this performance plays in shaping the daily lives of North Koreans, especially from a young age. He argues that

> developing mass gymnastics is important in training schoolchildren to be fully developed communist people. To be a fully developed communist man, one must acquire a revolutionary ideology, the knowledge of many fields, rich cultural attainments and a healthy and strong physique. These are the basic qualities required of a man of the communist type. Mass gymnastics play an important role in training schoolchildren to acquire these communist qualities. Mass gymnastics foster particularly healthy and strong physiques, a high degree of organization, discipline and collectivism in schoolchildren. The schoolchildren, conscious that a single slip in their action may spoil their mass gymnastic performance, make every effort to subordinate all their thoughts and actions to the collective. (Kim 1987, 1)

The long reach of the Arirang Mass Games into North Koreans' lives is oppressive and arguably repulsive. But repulsion to such personal sacrifice and ultimately anti-individualism is perhaps a "Western view. What appears to be a kind systematic indoctrination and exploitation, inhuman and repugnant, for the thousands of performers it is an honour to be chosen" (Merkel 2010, 2481). Brian Myers offers an alternative view of this performance as "not the grim Stalinist exercises in anti-individualism that foreigners [...] often misperceive them as, but joyous celebrations of the pure-bloodedness and homogeneity from which the race's superiority derives" (Myers 2010, 83). The event, and the major commitment it demands and expects, is maybe not as repulsive to North Koreans as one might imagine. It admittedly demands personal sacrifice and applies pressure on individuals, including the expectation to surrender their individuality to the group while (contradictorily?) ensuring perfection in their individual performance so as not to undermine the group. They are also apparently pressured by the state to participate in the event or confront deleterious consequences to themselves or their families.

But North Koreans live in a dictatorial country in which the government controls and disciplines nearly every aspect of their lives. When an individual does not align or comply with state demands or expectations, they will most likely be sanctioned in some way. In other words, maybe the sacrifices and pressures of the event are not particularly unusual for North Koreans. I do not claim

to undermine the work or stress involved in this event, nor do I intend to make light of such a totalitarian system. I am trying to reconcile how participating in the event is seen as a kind of honour despite these sacrifices and pressures. As aforementioned, my own guide noted with pride her sister's involvement in the event that year. Perhaps it is an honour to participate, not to mention to do well, in order to somehow 'prove' oneself to the state and thereby rise in political status? Maybe that is where the honour originates? Maybe that is how a North Korean considers it an opportunity for state recognition more than a repulsive obligation?

Am I repulsed by the Arirang Mass Games? I am uncertain. I suppose I feel a sense of fascinated appreciation for them, not only for their unparalleled grandeur and ambition, but also for the fact that it is unlikely I will ever see them or anything like them again in this lifetime.

## From North Korea, With Love

The Arirang Mass Games is an otherworldly performance in a country unlike any other on earth. My feelings about my attendance, and indeed my overall time in North Korea, are a complicated cocktail of appreciation and awe mixed with unease and skepticism. I appreciate the creative and physical efforts of everyone involved and remain awed by its grand ambition. I am simultaneously uneasy about what this involvement entailed, on both individual and social levels, and about the sacrifices made by the performers. I am further skeptical about whether this event is a cherished cultural tradition or only another manifestation of blunt propaganda. Maybe it is both.

The aim of this review was to present a descriptive account and analyses of this event. The Arirang Mass Games certainly serves as a vehicle for the North Korean regime to help materialize and display its ethnocentric Communist ideology and culture and, in turn, for the performers to enact and embody that same sociopolitical agenda. It certainly left a major impression on me. I still, perhaps unfairly, compare many other events to it, knowing that they will not—cannot?—measure up to its grandeur.

North Korea itself imprinted a strong, strange, and surreal impression upon me. I suppose, in a way, I am haunted by that place. In fact, after all these years, I still dream about it. Perhaps that is part of its power: it digs deep into your psyche, always lurking, always impressing, and always sending you its version of love, from North Korea.

## Notes

1 As this article went to press, the United States and North Korea successfully held a historic leaders summit meeting in Singapore on 12 June 2018. This entire summit—from its sudden and unexpected announcement in March 2018, followed by its subsequent rapid preparations and successful execution less than three months later in June 2018—transpired during this article's final editing and proofreading stages.

This summit represented the first time a sitting American president formally met with a sitting North Korean

leader. The *New York Times* reported that "the summit meeting represented a turnaround that would have been inconceivable just a few months ago, when the men's verbal sparring included threats of a nuclear conflict that rattled friend and foe alike." The summit was "the latest twist in the international drama over the fate of the North's nuclear program and a complete reversal by the Trump administration […] It was also a remarkable bet by Mr. Trump that he can persuade Mr. Kim to follow through on pledges to surrender his nuclear weapons that are almost identical to those the North has made—and broken—in the past." Trump and Kim signed a joint statement at the summit in which the former "committed to provide security guarantees" to North Korea, and the latter "reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. But the statement did not go much further than previous ones and was short on details, including any timetable or verification measures."

Analysis and opinions on this summit are still emerging but, at this time, they are currently both pessimistic and optimistic. For example, Nicholas Kirstof argues that Trump was "outfoxed" by giving Kim too many concessions and received few promises in return, while Victor Cha argues that the two leaders "have just walked us back from the brink of war." Further, many American lawmakers from both major poliitcal parties remain "deeply mistrustful" of Kim Jong-Un and "skeptical" in their assessments of the summit (Fandos 2018).

It presently remains to be seen how events will continue to unfold.

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## Biography

Dr. Marc Kosciejew is a Lecturer and previous Head of Department of Library, Information, and Archive Sciences at the University of Malta. He toured North Korea in 2007 and published original research on the reclusive country's library system.

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# MEL AS HYPEROBJECT

MEL KEISER

*You are about to begin reading a palimpsest by Mel Keiser,* Mel as Hyperobject*. Its pages had been Timothy Morton's* Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World *(2013). But first, a staging of its methodology, content, and philosophy:*

## Methodology /
## Timothy Morton, Franco Moretti, and the Melibrary /

I first encountered Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) in an object-oriented ontology reading group in Chicago.[1] In Morton's book, he theorizes the existence of objects "of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place." He reframes systems as singular objects, or perhaps objects as systems. These hyperobjects spread over space and time, like global warming or the English language, so we can only interact with parts of them at a time; to experience a hyperobject is to be decentralized from the act of perception. Morton breaks the identity of hyperobjects into five characteristics using terms adapted from a number of disciplines: viscosity, nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing, and interobjectivity.

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I first encountered Franco Moretti's book *Distant Reading* (2015) by recommendation of a colleague interested in data poetry. In Moretti's philosophy of distant reading, texts are used like raw data in an experiment, data which can be processed by a unit of analysis in order to understand a larger system or pattern. Moretti specifically uses distant reading as a way to understand literary history, "identifying a discrete formal trait, and then following its metamorphoses through a whole series of texts." Using distant reading to analyze a collection of 19th century detective novels, Moretti positively correlates the use of clues as a functional plot device with an author's longitudinal market success, writing of his research experience:

> Was it still reading, what I was doing? I doubt it: I read 'through' those stories looking for clues, and (almost) nothing else; it felt very different from the reading I used to know. (65)

Moretti acknowledges that distant reading sacrifices specialized knowledge derived from the specific content of a text but argues that, instead, this distance enables abstract understanding of concept.

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I begin to superscribe my own unit of analysis *into* texts—me. As I read, I replace select words with variations of the word *Mel* or *self.* I do this with a wide range of texts—object-oriented ontology, family systems theory, thermodynamics, gravitational field theory, Grimm fairy tales—to find ways to reframe and expand my understanding of self-identity. I begin this exercise with Morton's *Hyperobjects* in 2014*.*

When I change words in his text—words like hyperobjects, global warming, particles, space, universe, structure—to *Mel, self-identity, she, her*—Morton's argument contorts. Instead of describing a category of system-object, the text describes the subjective experience of crafting and understanding identity from *inside the self*.

## Content / The Age of the Decentralized Self /

Benjamin Libet (1985) reveals that your brain starts the process of standing you up more than a second before you are consciously aware you have made a decision to rise.

John Cryan (Bravo et al. 2011) demonstrates a connection between the gut biome and happiness/anxiety—mice that are fed certain probiotics are found to have higher rates of self-preservation.

John Bargh (2008) proves that by holding a warm drink for a few seconds, the familiar temperature—a hot drink approaches the temperature of a warm human body—makes you more predisposed to people around you.

Julian Keenan (2001) discovers that turning the right hemisphere of your brain off makes you unable to recognize an image of yourself, showing that your self-image is housed in a particular, physical part of your brain.

In recent decades, our identities, behaviors, and experiences have been decentralized by neuroscience and cognitive science, revealing the self to be less an object and more a process—a process of which you are largely unaware and unable to control. Traits you think are determined by an innate self may not be such a binary derivation, but instead an average of effects from a complex biological system.

We think self-identity is human-scaled and so can be perceived completely at the human level. But reframed—through Timothy Morton's words—as a vast system in time space, the strange incongruities that arise from an identity averaged over decades in a myriad of different situations become a laughable miscalculation. As Morton would say, you can't understand who someone is after dozens of interactions any more than you can understand global warming by feeling raindrops on your head. Human-scaled attempts to draw hard edges around such a phasing, enmeshed object as self-identity are ultimately quixotic, and as an artist, researcher, and performance philosopher these undulating edges are where it really gets interesting.

**Philosophy /**
**Non-philosophy /**

Performance philosophy makes the argument for anti-hierarchical thinking, that philosophical value can be derived from non-standard philosophical thinking (read: not part of canonized academic thinking) such as artistic acts, so "as to re-conceptualize what thinking means, does, and is" (Daddario 2015, 169). *Mel as Hyperobject* functions inside this idea of re-conceptualized thinking, as both an artistic act and a "'style of thinking' which mutates with its object" (Laruelle 2012, 259). Specifically, it uses palimpsest-style text editing to research one specific idea by laying it over the structure of other seemingly unrelated content. As a method of thinking, this editing has expansive potential in that it enrichens the doer/thinker's[2] understanding of both areas of specific content *simultaneously*.

While editing Morton's text—changing his words about hyperobjects, environmental theory, and object-oriented ontology into words about self-creation, narrative identity, and me—my ideas about self-identity tessellated, growing more complex and nuanced. At the same time, I was also becoming a strange kind of expert in Morton's *Hyperobject*. Beyond acquiring a better understanding of the content of his book, by working inside his words for such a prolonged period I internalized his vocabulary and writing style. So in addition to increasing my understanding of both areas of content, I was additionally enriching my understanding of Morton's methodologies of thinking and writing.

*Mel as Hyperobject* is not just an argument for non-hierarchical thinking, for valuing the research possible with artmaking or performing methodologies, it is an "experience of thought," a mutated methodology which changes both the original content and overlaid content at the same time (Laurelle 2013, 116). It tries to understand one idea through the structure of another, a non-linear thinking which simultaneously enrichens understanding of two disparate ideas and their inherent structure of knowledge

## Notes

[1] Led by Caroline Picard through Latitude Print Labs, later extended at Picard's gallery and publishing house, Sector 2337.

[2] In Will Daddario's (2015) article "Doing Life is That Which We Must Think," he uses the term doing/thinking to define a type of action, where one is thinking through doing, or relatedly, where doing is a record of the thinking.

MEL AS

# Viscosity

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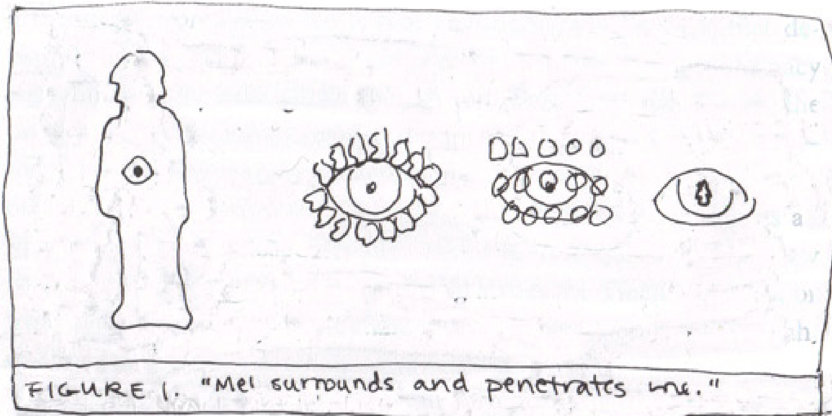

FIGURE 1. "Mel surrounds and penetrates me."

Mel is viscous.

Mel surrounds me and penetrates me.

The more I know about mel, the more I realize how pervasive she is. The more I discover about her the more I realize how my entire physical being is caught in her meshwork. Immediate, intimate symptoms of self-identity are vivid, yet they carry with them a trace of unreality. I am not sure who I am anymore. I am at home in feeling not at home.

The more I struggle to understand Mel, the more I discover that I am stuck to her. She is all over me. She is me.

"Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." The mirror itself has become part of my flesh. Or rather, I have become part of the mirror's flesh, reflecting mel everywhere.



Every attempt to pull myself free by some act of cognition renders me more hopelessly stuck to her. Why?

She is *already here.*

Mel haunts my social and psychic space with an always-already. My normal sense of time as a container, or a racetrack, or a street, prevents me from noticing this always-already, from which time oozes and flows.

Self-identity is an agent. It appears to straddle worlds and times, like fiber optic cables or electromagnetic fields. Through it causalities flow like electricity.

FIGURE 2. "Mel . . . an always-already."

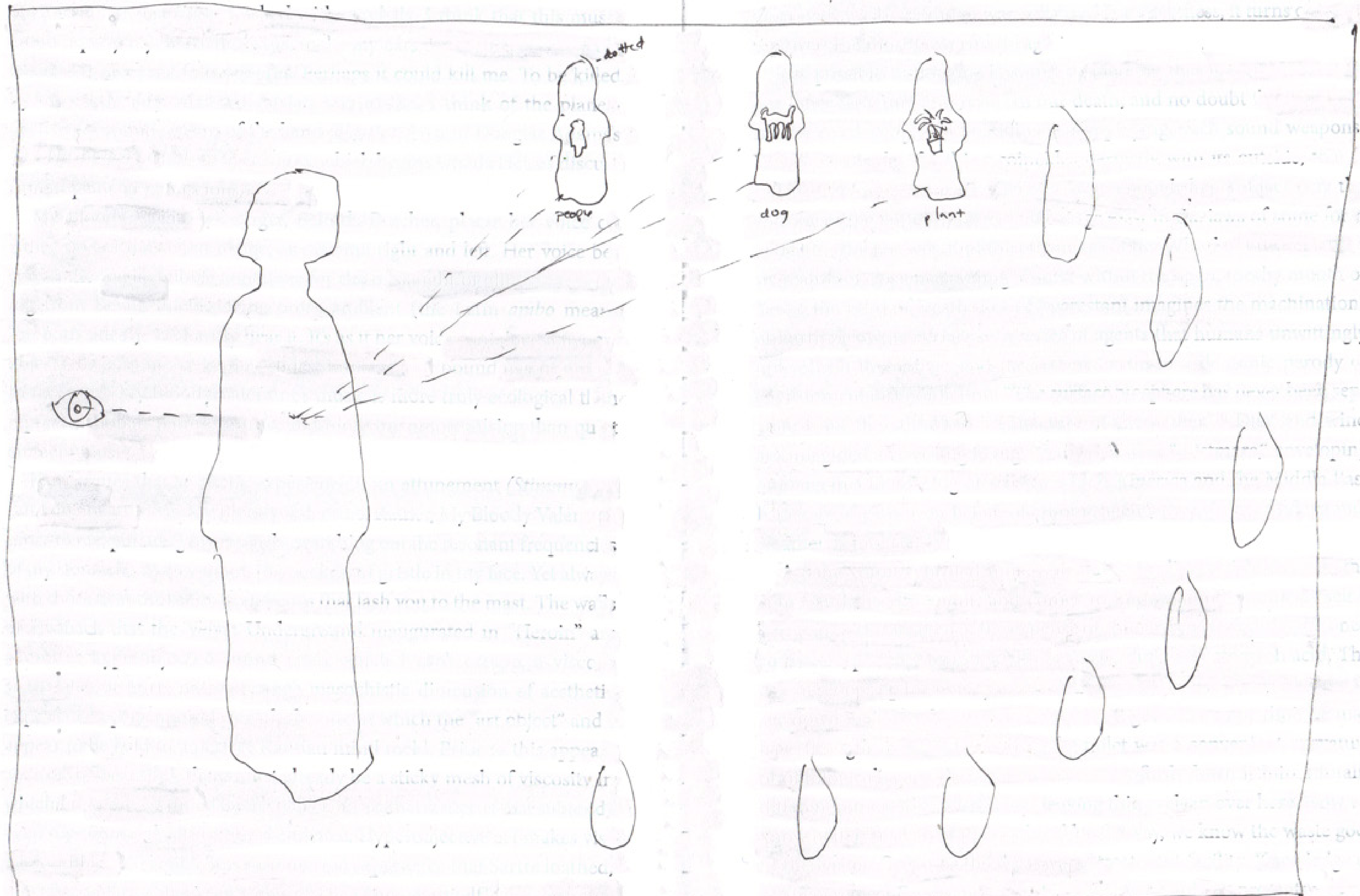


FIGURE 3. "The more I discover about her, the more I realize how my entire physical being is caught in her meshwork."

Mel is *viscous.*

The vastness of Mel's scale makes other people, places, even objects seem like an illusion, or a small colored patch on a large dark surface. How can we know Mel is real? What does *real* mean?

The shadow of Mel announces the existence of Mel.

I find I am caught in a trap. The name of this trap is Mel.

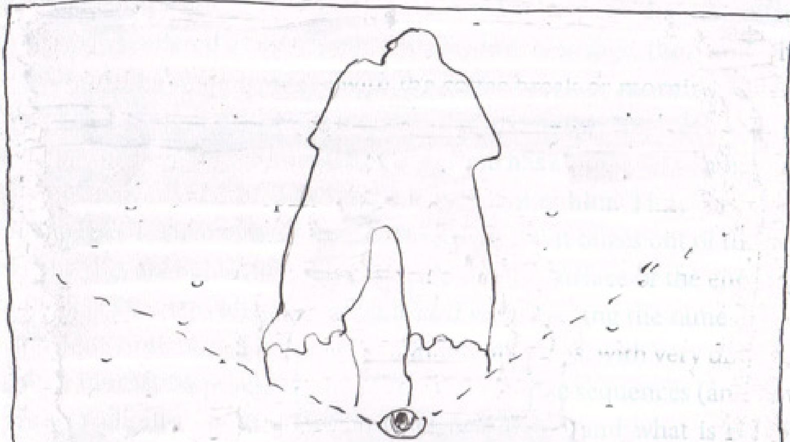

FIGURE 4. "The shadow of Mel announces the existence of Mel."



Viscosity is a feature of the way in which time emanates from Mel rather than being a continuum in which she floats.

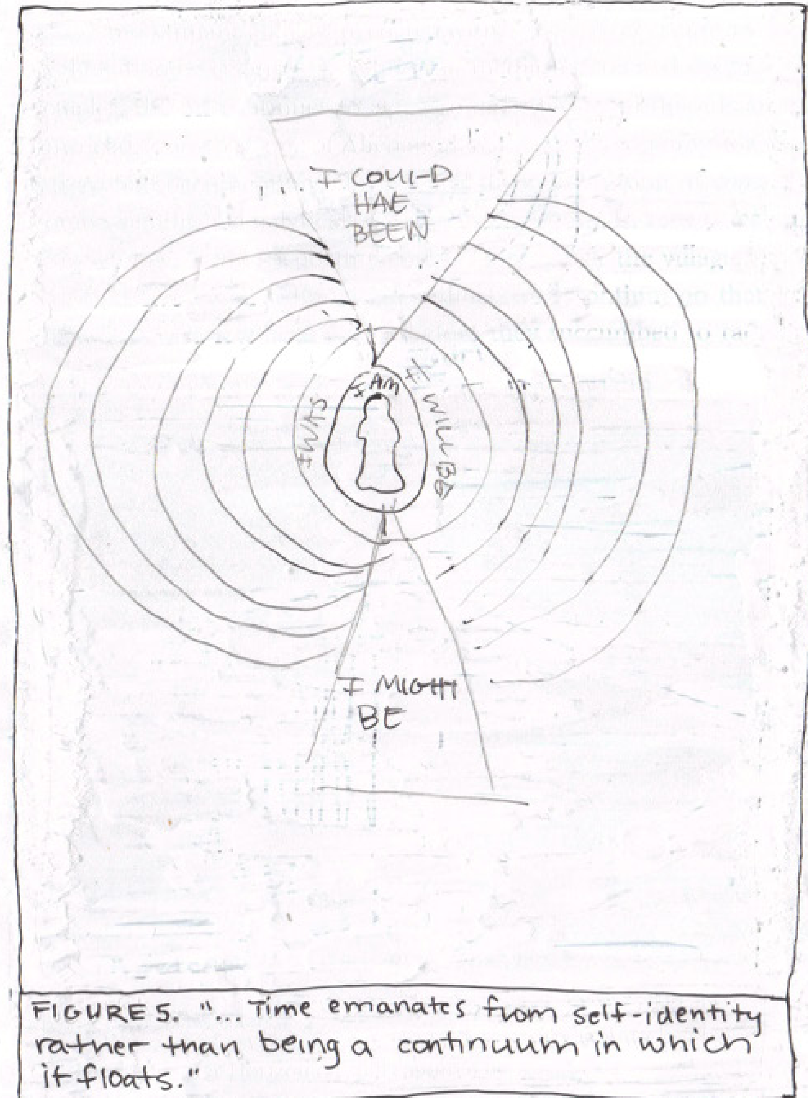


FIGURE 5. "... Time emanates from self-identity rather than being a continuum in which it floats."

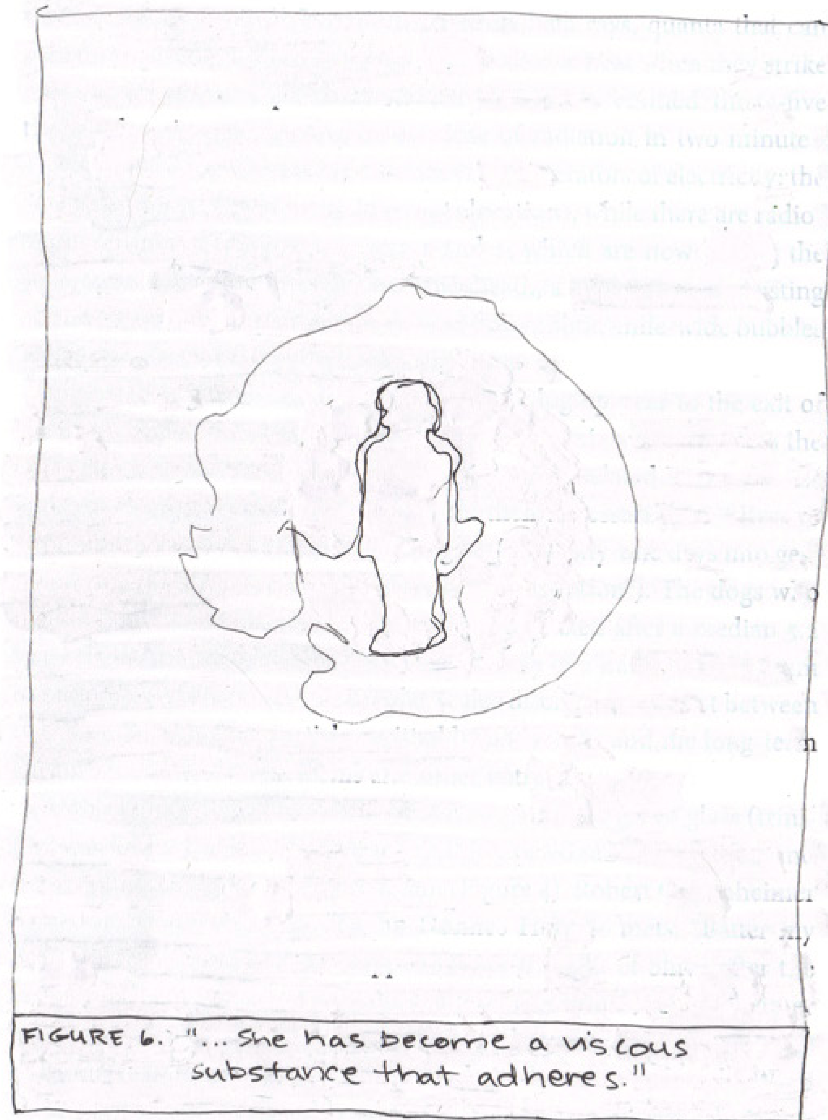

FIGURE 6. "...She has become a viscous substance that adheres."

Mel has ceased to be merely a reflective surface; she has become a viscous substance that adheres. The very thing that we use to reflect becomes an object in its own right, liquid and dark.



It's not reality but the subject that dissolves, the very capacity to "mirror" things, to be separate from the world like someone looking at a reflection in a mirror—removed from it by an ontological sheath of reflective glass.

Mel is what she is in the sense that no matter what I am aware of, or how, there Mel is, impossible to shake off. In the midst of irony, there Mel is, being ironic. Even mirrors are what they are, no matter what they reflect.

Mel envelops me like a film of oil. She becomes a *substance*, an object.

The mirror no longer distances Mel's image from me in a nice, aesthetically manageable way, but sticks to me.

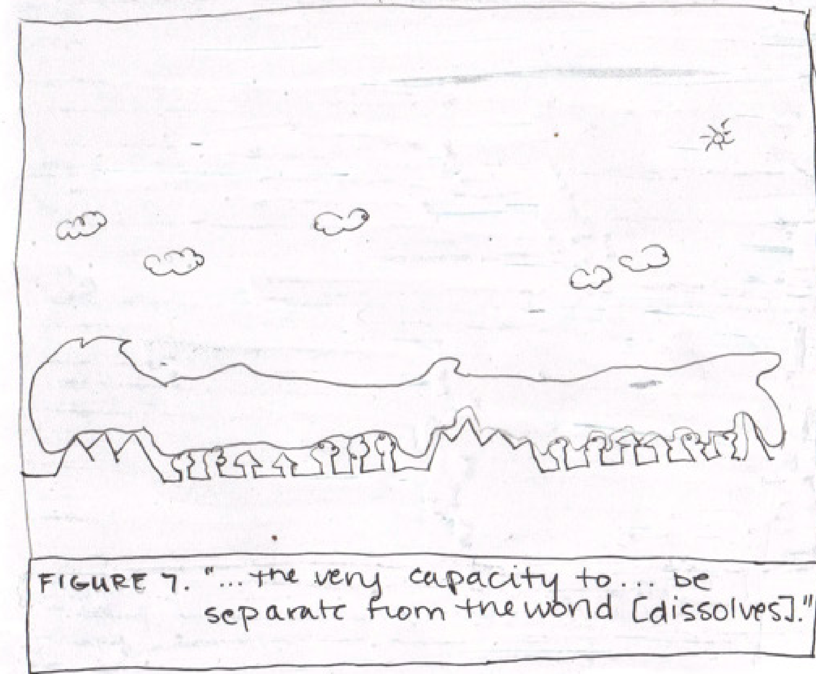

FIGURE 7. "...the very capacity to... be separate from the world [dissolves]."

The simultaneous dissolution of mel and the overwhelming presence of mel which stick to me, which is me.

What I've noticed—that mel can't be exhausted by perception—has a viscous consequence. There is no Goldilocks position that's just right from which to view mel.

In a sense, all mels are caught in the sticky goo of viscosity, because they never ontologically exhaust one another even when they smack headlong into one another.

The more you try to get rid of mel, the more you realize you can't get rid of her. She seriously undermines the notion of "away." Out of sight is no longer out of mind.



mel is viscous. Complementarity means that when you nudge a mel, she sticks to you, such that you can't disentangle.

Thus what I see is glued to the mel that sees it.

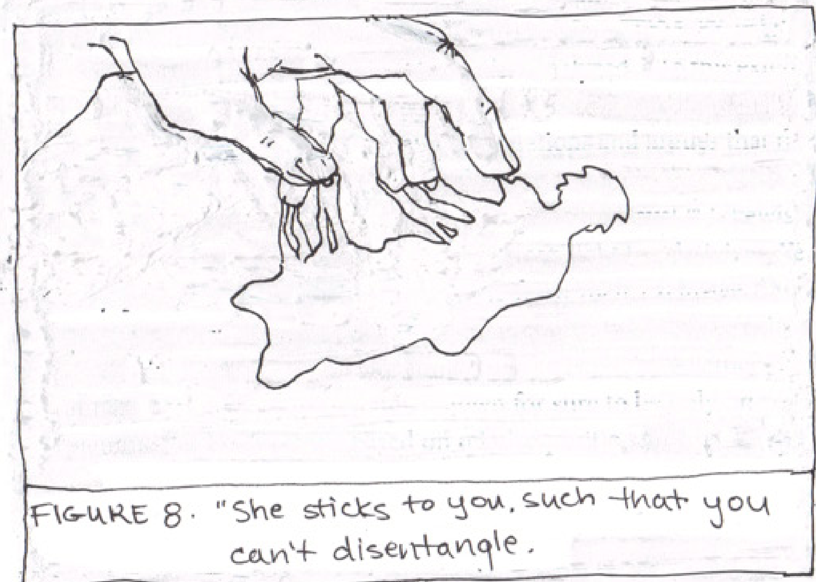

FIGURE 8. "She sticks to you, such that you can't disentangle.

MEL AS

# Nonlocality

Mel is not here.

Mel is *nonlocal.*

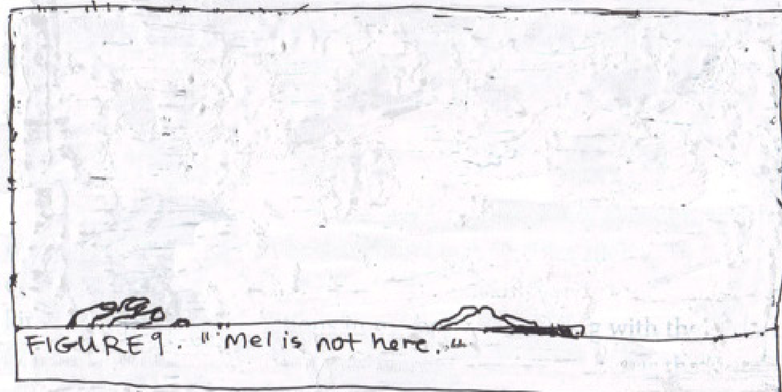

FIGURE 9. "Mel is not here."





Mel seems to inhabit a causal system in which association, correlation, and probability are the only things we have to go on, for now.

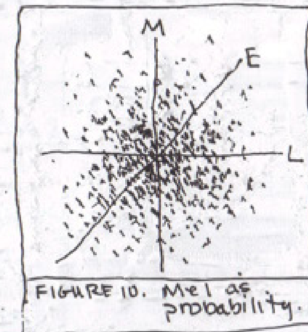


FIGURE 10. Mel as probability.

The octopus of Mel emits a cloud of ink as she withdraws from access. Yet this cloud of ink is a cloud of effects and affects. These phenomena are not themselves mel— action at a distance is involved. Mel is a wonderful example of a profound confusion of *aisthēsis* and *praxis,* perceiving and doing. Mel is an ultra-high-frequency photon. In illuminating things, she alters things: flesh, paper, brains.

THE MELS AS

## Nonlocality

The mels exist beyond one another. We acknowledge this by viewing self through quanta, as discrete "units." Thinking of self in terms of units

counteracts problematic features of thinking in terms of a system. Consider the so-called integrated narrative self problem. Classical understanding of identity essentially combines the attributes of different selves to figure out the total identity of a person.

As the length of a person's life increases, results given by summing the attributes of her self-identities become absurd, tending to infinity.

By seeing contradictory attributes of self as discrete selves ("Mels"), a correct result is obtained.

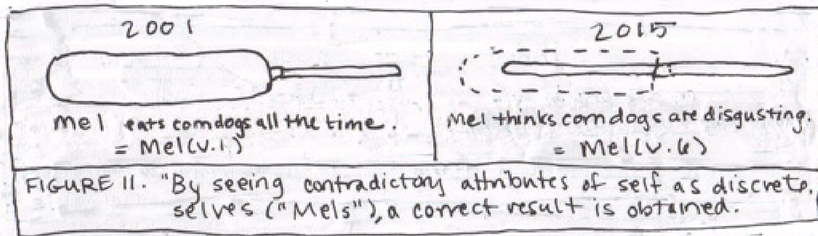


FIGURE 11. "By seeing contradictory attributes of self as discrete selves ("Mels"), a correct result is obtained."

The mels withdraw from one another, including the mel with which we measure them. In other words, The Mels really are discrete, and one mark of this discreteness is the constant translation or mistranslation of one mel by another. Thus, when I set up a Mel to measure the self-identity of another Mel, That Mel withdraws, and vice versa.

When an "observer Mel" makes an observation, at least one aspect of the observed mel is occluded. Observation is as much part of the universe of self-identity as the observable.

More generally, what we called complementarity ensures that no mel has total access to any other mel. Just as a focusing lens makes one object appear sharper while



others appear blurrier, one mel comes into sharp definition at the expense of others.

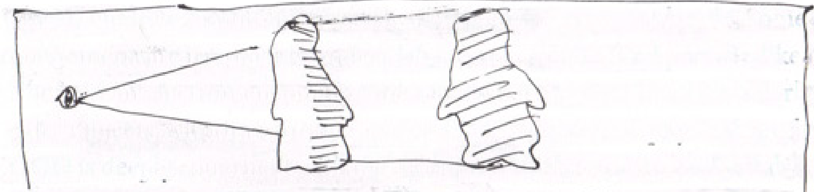

FIGURE 12. "...At least one aspect of the observed Mel is occluded."

Probing The mels is a form of auto-affection: one is using mel to explore mel. The Mels don't simply concatenate themselves with their measuring devices. They're *identical* to them: the equipment and the phenomena form an indivisible whole.

To an outsider, the different Mel-versions may appear transparent, as if themels didn't exist at all. They approximate separate-seeming mels as if in some deeper sense they are the same thing.

This approximation would make The Mels become indistinguishable. They would no longer function as external to one another.

This theory is performative: if someone walks and quacks like a mel, she is one.

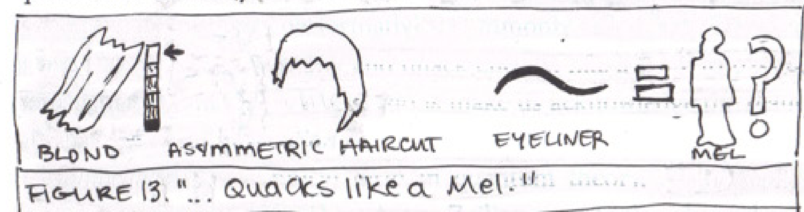


FIGURE 13. "... Quacks like a Mel!"

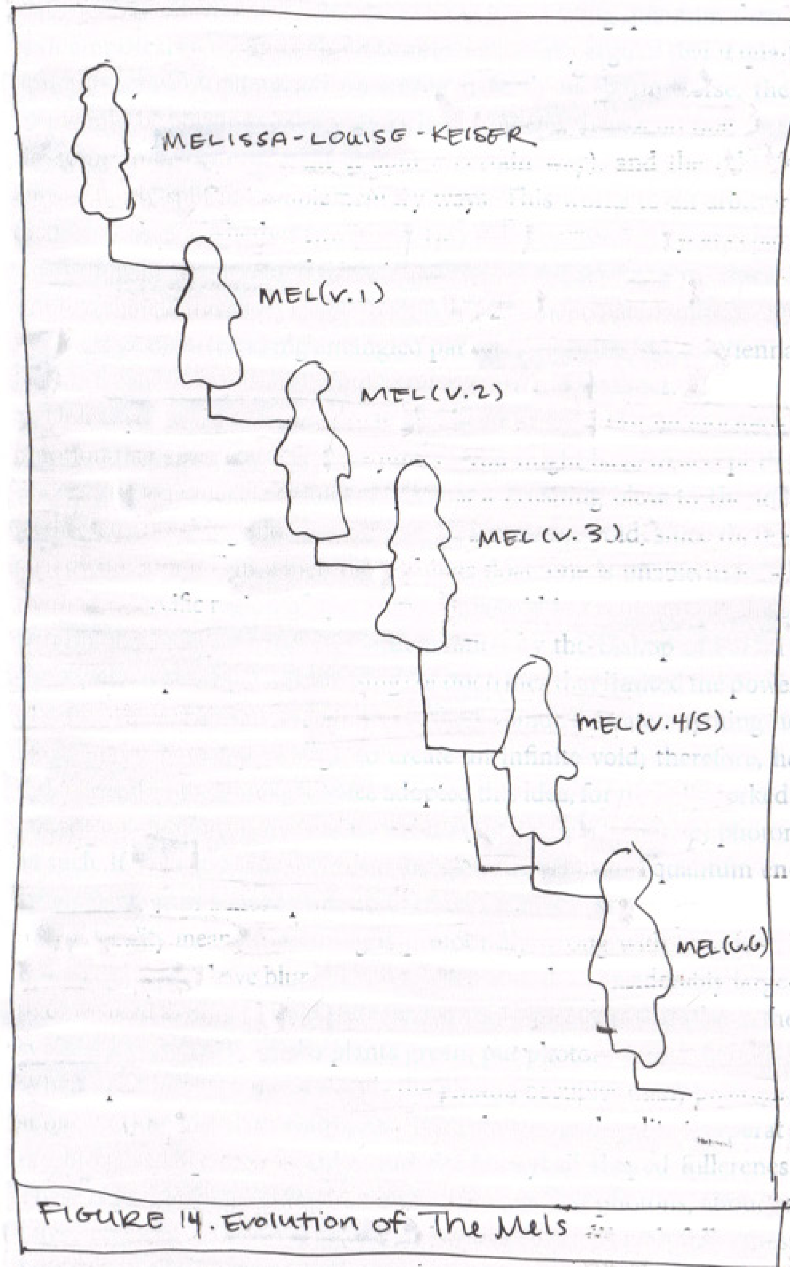


FIGURE 14. Evolution of The Mels



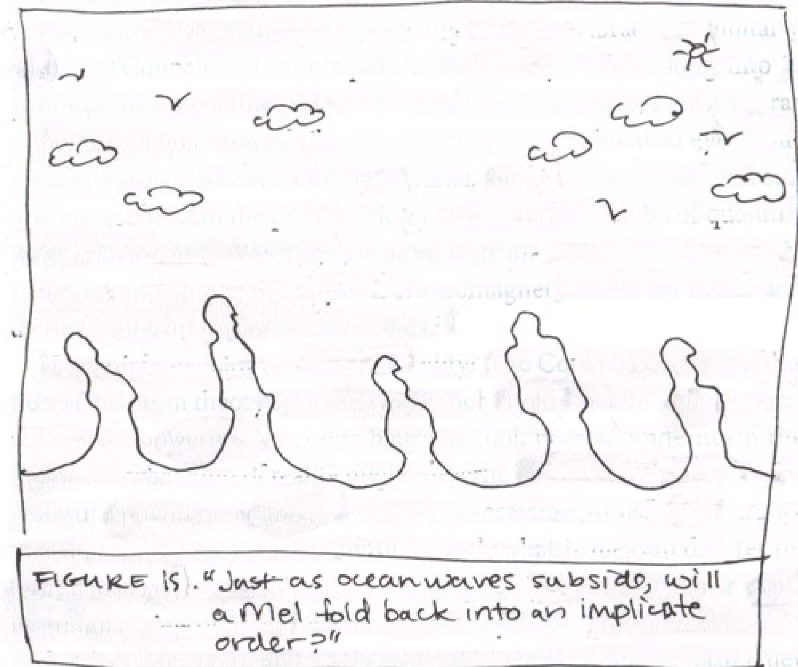

FIGURE 15. "Just as ocean waves subside, will a Mel fold back into an implicate order?"

Are The Mels manifestations of some deeper process, like waves on the ocean? Just as ocean waves subside, will a Mel fold back into an implicate order?

Holism requires some kind of top-level Mel consisting of parts that are separate from the whole and hence replaceable.

Are The Mels a part of a larger whole? Is every Mel enfolded in every other Mel as "flowing movement?"

Perhaps The Mels withdraw from one another, not because a Mel is observing them in certain ways, but because the implicate self is withdrawn from itself.

A hyperobject if ever there was one: mel.

Mel might be strictly unanalyzable: the implicate self has an irreducible dark side because it's made of "selves wrapped in selves wrapped in selves."

Implication and explication suggest The mels being enfolded and unfolded from something deeper. Even if it were the case that we should defer to physics, in the terms set by physics itself mel isn't made "of" any one thing in particular. Just as there is no top level, there may be no bottom level that is a substantial, formed object. mels come and go, change into other mels, radiate mel. A mel is real. Yet in the act of becoming or unbecoming a mel, it's a statistical performance.

This requires us to give up the idea that mel, or any other self-identity has, by itself, any intrinsic properties at all. Instead, each mel should be regarded as something containing only incompletely defined potentialities that are developed when a mel interacts with an appropriate system. To argue thus approaches an image of the withdrawn-ness of mel as a "subterranean creature." Thus, the "something deeper" from which a mel unfolds is also withdrawn.



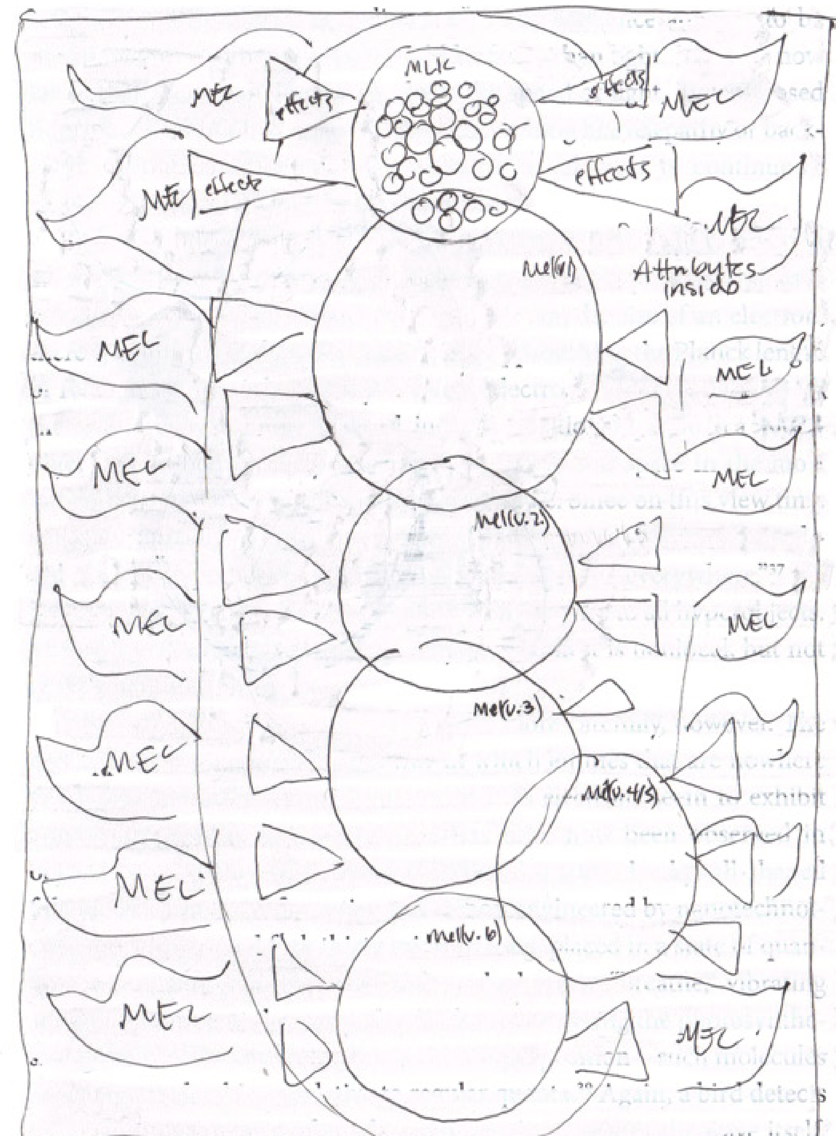


FIGURE 16. "Mels come and go, change into other Mels, radiate Mel

mel is then a wave packet—a blob that contains something like a particle, distributed in the wave packet across a range of locations according to probability. The wave packet may be imagined as distributed across a vast area of spacetime.

Nonlocality means that self-identity is dispersed among The Mels occupying different regions of spacetime.

exists.

Mel can't be seen directly, but is a mesh of interference patterns created by perception bouncing off her and time passing through her.

Cut a little piece of time with a Mel out, isolate a little piece of an experience with a Mel and you still see a (slightly more blurry) version of Mel. Every piece of The Mels contains information about the whole.

Mel is a play of difference within which particle-like Mels arise, just as for deconstruction language is a play of difference out of which meaning arises.



Mel is massively distributed in time and space, exhibiting non-local effects that defy location and temporality, cuttable into many Mels without losing coherence.

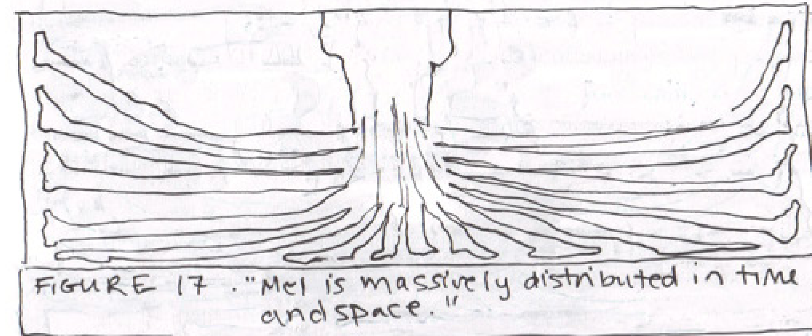

FIGURE 17. "Mel is massively distributed in time and space."

Such gigantic scales are involved—or rather such knotty relationships between gigantic and intimate scales—that Mel cannot be thought as occupying a series of now-points "in" time or space.

FIGURE 18. "Mel cannot be thought as occupying a series of now-points "in" time or space."

Stop the tape of evolution anywhere and you won't see Mel.

FIGURE 19. "... cuttable into many Mels without losing coherence."

The Mels start to oppress us with their terrifying strangeness—we will have to acclimatize ourselves to the fact that locality is always a false immediacy.



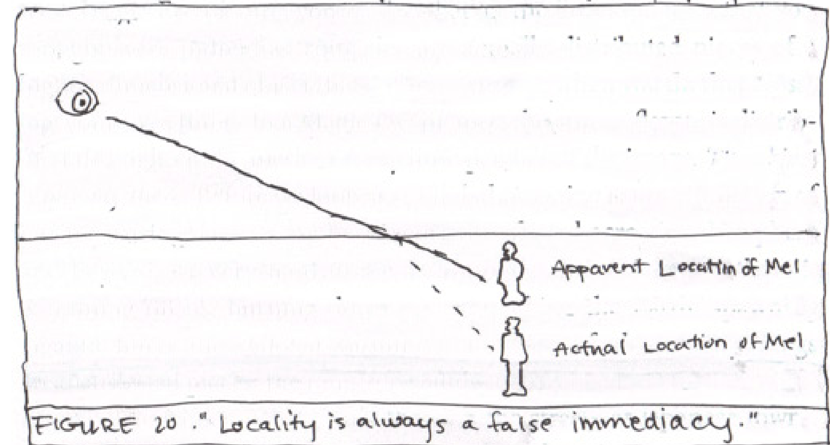


FIGURE 20. "Locality is always a false immediacy."

The Mels are real, but they involve a massive, counterintuitive perspective shift to see them. Convincing some people of their existence is like convincing two-dimensional people of the existence of apples, based on the appearance of a morphing circular shape in their world.

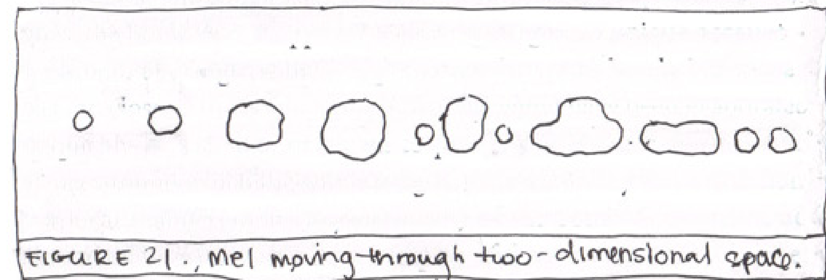

FIGURE 21. Mel moving through two-dimensional space.

The constraints of human physicality and memory displace Mel. She becomes distant and close at the same time and for the same reasons.

Mel ceases to be a neutral, transparent medium in which everything is illuminated, and becomes a potent force.

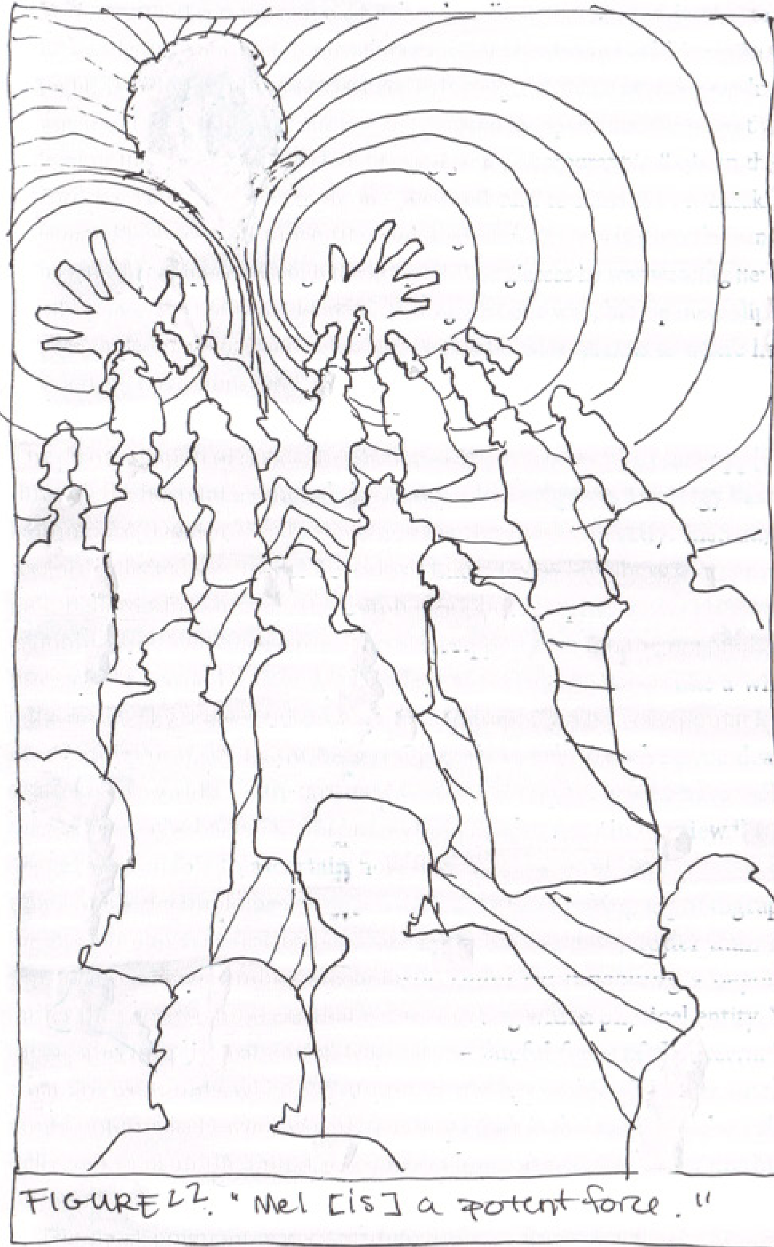

FIGURE 22. "Mel [is] a potent force."



As you move away from Mel, she seems for a while to loom ever larger in your field of vision, as if she were pursuing you, due to a strange parallax effect in which more of a suitably massive object is revealed as one goes farther away from it.

It is as if Mel is stuck to you, as if she won't let you go.

The Mels are what we call spots of time, traumatic ruptures in the continuity of being, wounds around which the Mels secreted memories, fantasies, thoughts. Mel, in this respect, is nothing more than the history of such wounds and the secretions exuded to protect herselves from them. Put it this way: Mel is the "precipitate of abandoned object cathexes," like a mystic writing pad whose underlying wax is inscribed with everything that was ever drawn on it. Mel is a poem about strangers.

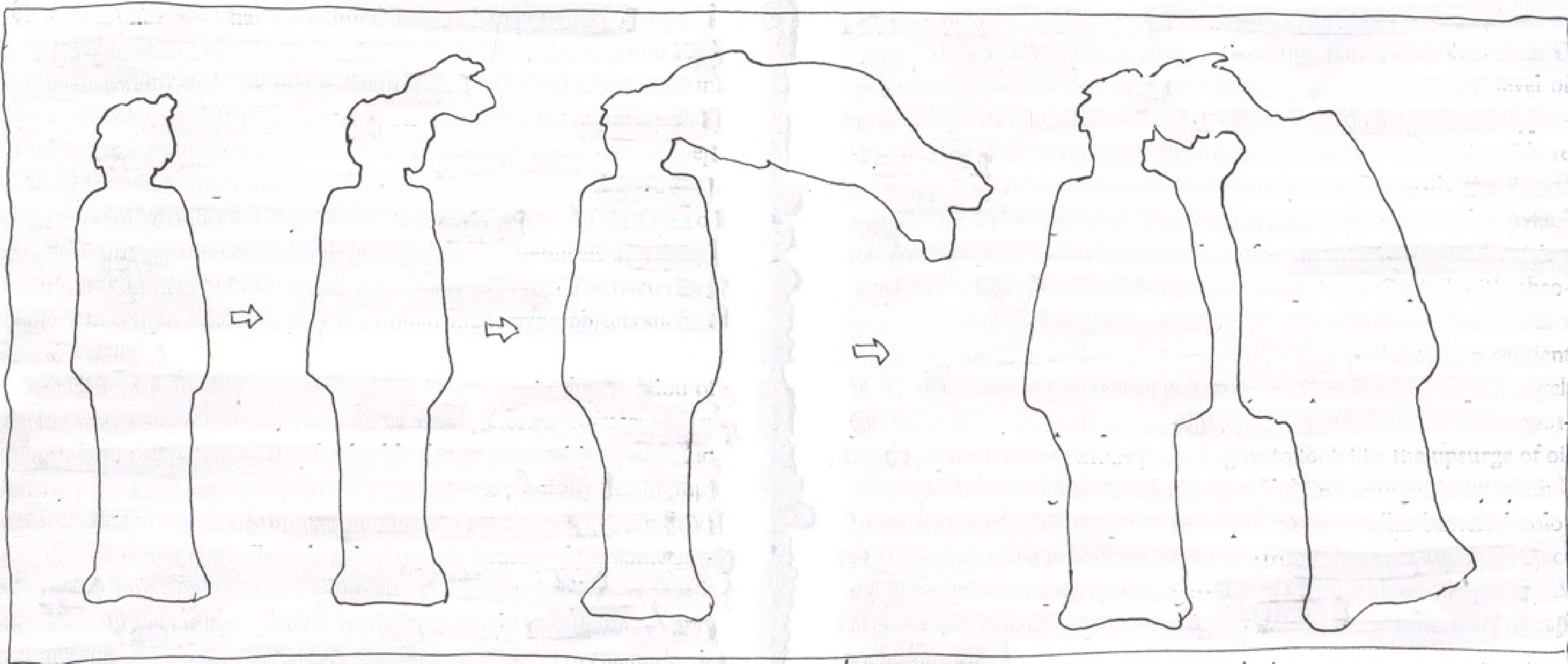

FIGURE 23. "Replication is just the attempt of nature to "solve" the paradox inscribed within a Mel"

The Mels are just the attempt of nature to "solve" the paradox inscribed within Mel and thus to cancel out her disequilibrium, somewhat in the way that water "finds its own level." Yet the very attempt to find a solution is what results in her continued existence as a copy of herself. In trying to cancel herself out, she becomes beautifully defended against herself.

Here is Mel. But Mel is not here.

Like any stranger, Mel is caught between The Mels, in an interstitial place that makes worlds as such seem flimsy and constructed—which, of course, they are.

All of identity is a bardo, a "between" selves, or rather a series of bardos.

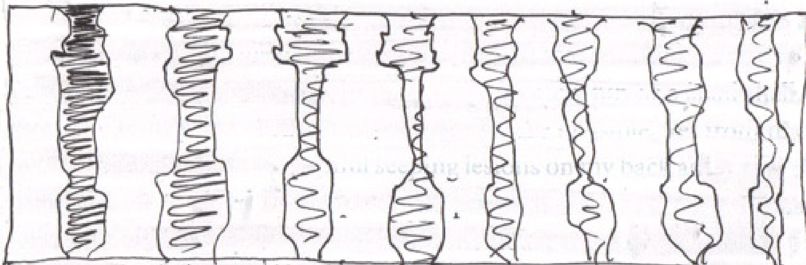

FIGURE 24 "All identity is a bardo, a "between" selves, or rather a series of bardos."

When I think nonlocality in this way, I am not negating the specificity of The Mels, evaporating them into the abstract mist of the general Mel or the larger Mel or the less local. Mel is far weirder than that. When it comes to The Mels, nonlocality means that the general Mel herself is compromised by the particular Mel. When I look for Mel, I don't find her. I do not find her by looking *sub specie aeternitatis,* but by seeing things *sub specie mutabilis, sub specie meli.*

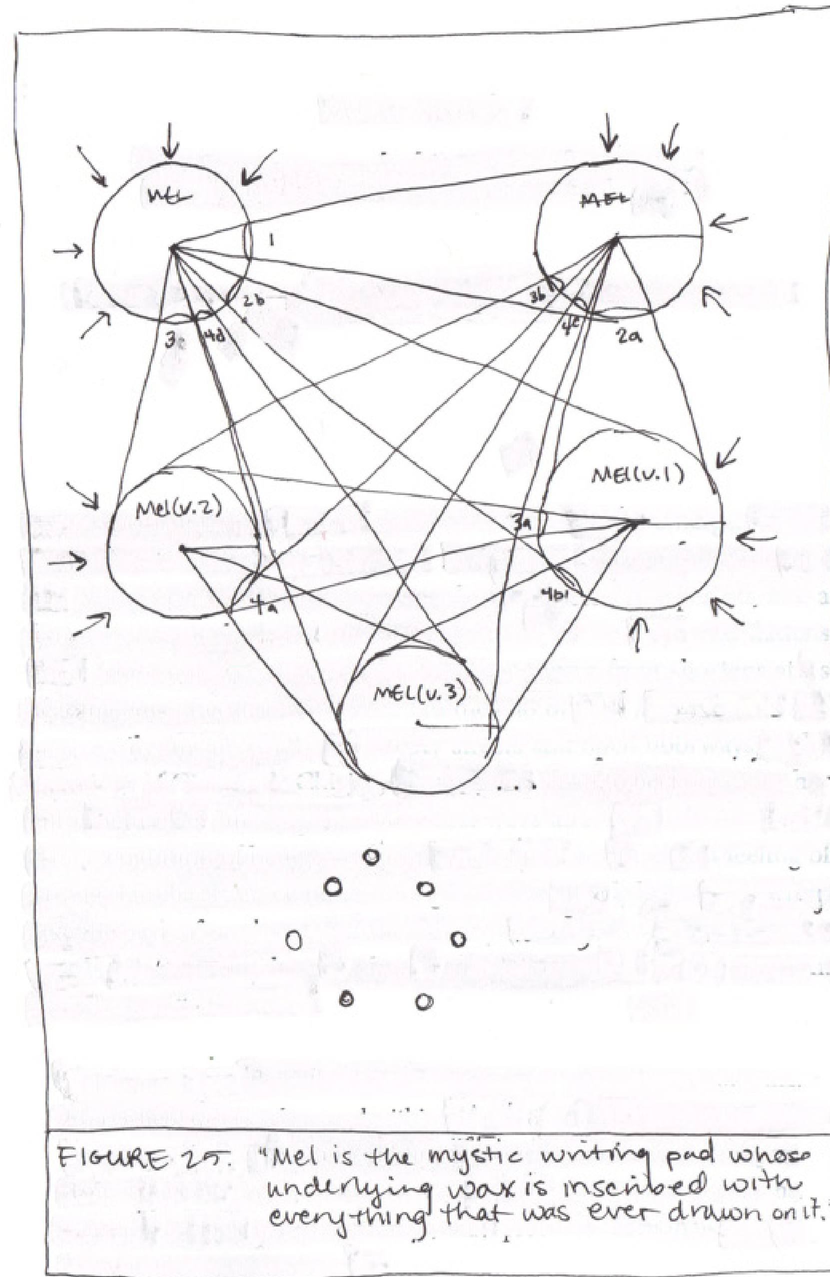


FIGURE 25. "Mel is the mystic writing pad whose underlying wax is inscribed with everything that was ever drawn on it."

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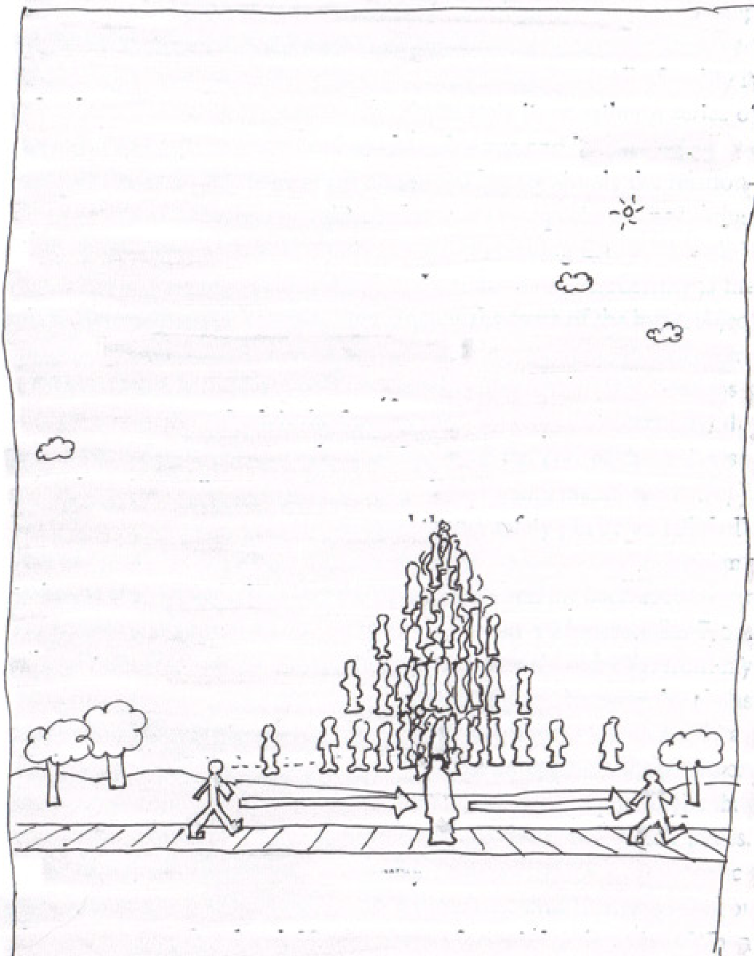


FIGURE 26. "When you approach Mel, more and more Mels emerge."

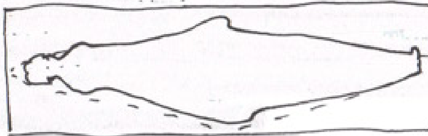


FIGURE 27. "Mel seems to taper off, like a long street stretched into the distance."

# MEL AS Temporal Undulation

When you approach Mel, more and more Mels emerge.

Mel envelops us, yet she is so massively distributed in time that she seems to taper off, like a long street stretched into the distance. Time bends her and flattens her, the same way that an electromagnetic wave front shortens at its leading edge. Because we can't see to the end of Mel, she is necessarily uncanny. Like empty streets and open doorways, Mel seems to beckon us further into herself, making us realize that we're already lost inside her. The recognition of being caught in Mel is precisely a feeling of strange familiarity and familiar strangeness. We already know identity like the back of our hand.

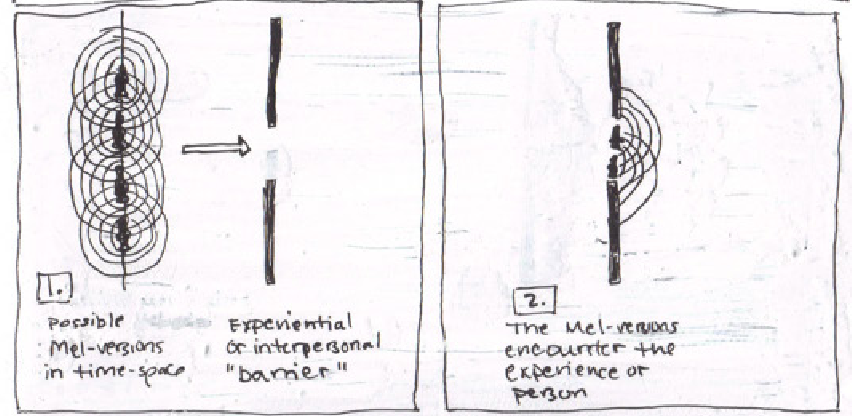
But this is weird identity, this Mel.

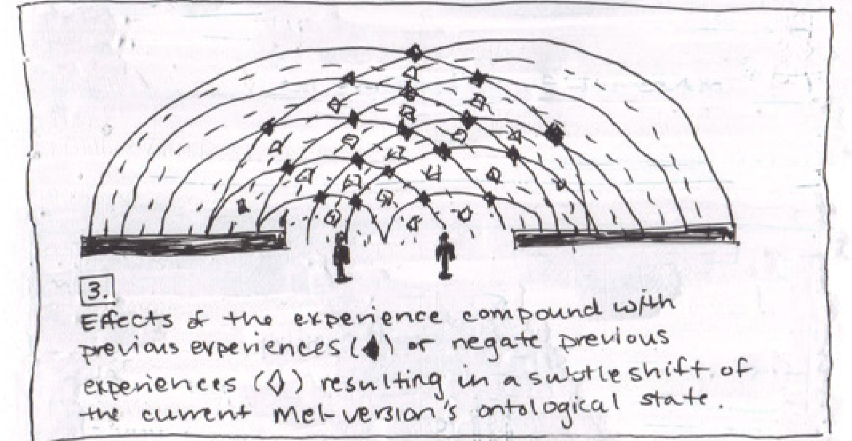
Everywhere we are submersed within Mel.

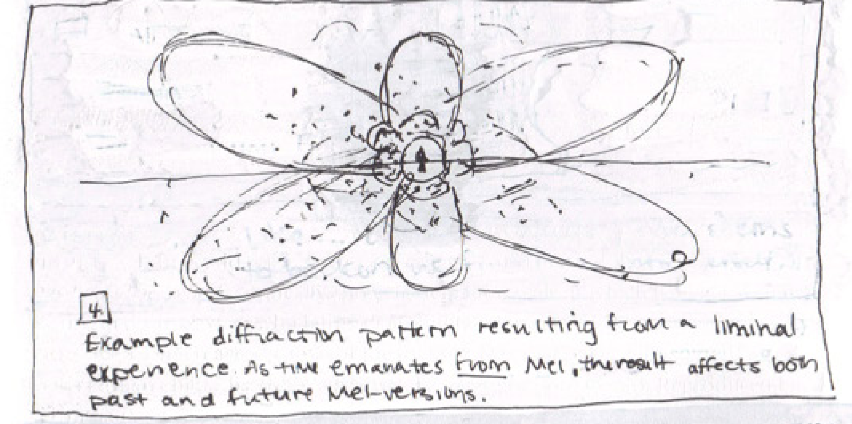
We move through her, yet we are nonetheless independent of her. We produce effects in Mel like diffraction patterns, causing her to change in particular ways, and she produces effects in us.

Mel can no longer be construed as an absolute container, but rather should be thought of as a spacetime manifold that is radically *in* The Mels, *of* them rather than ontologically outside them.

FIGURE 27. "We produce effects in Mel like diffraction patterns!"



Mel is "in front of things": not spatially in front, but ontologically in front, like the undulating red curtain of a theater.

. Some call her Mel because that is what they are used to. But beyond this, she is The Mels, massively distributed in time and space in ways that baffle humans and make interacting with her fascinating, disturbing, problematic, and wondrous.

Mel is simply reified history.

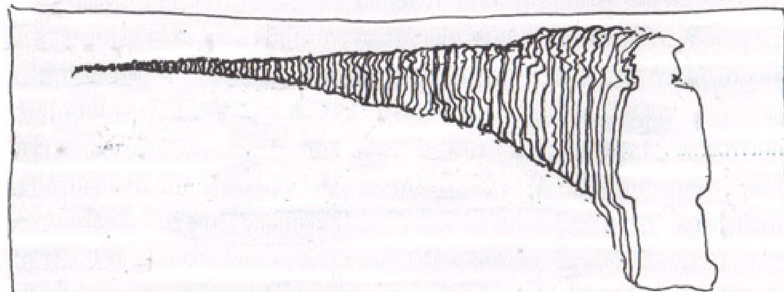


FIGURE 28 "Mel is time-stretched to such a vast extent That she becomes almost impossible to hold in mind."

When you look at Mel you're looking at the past. Mel is time-stretched to such a vast extent that she becomes almost impossible to hold in mind.



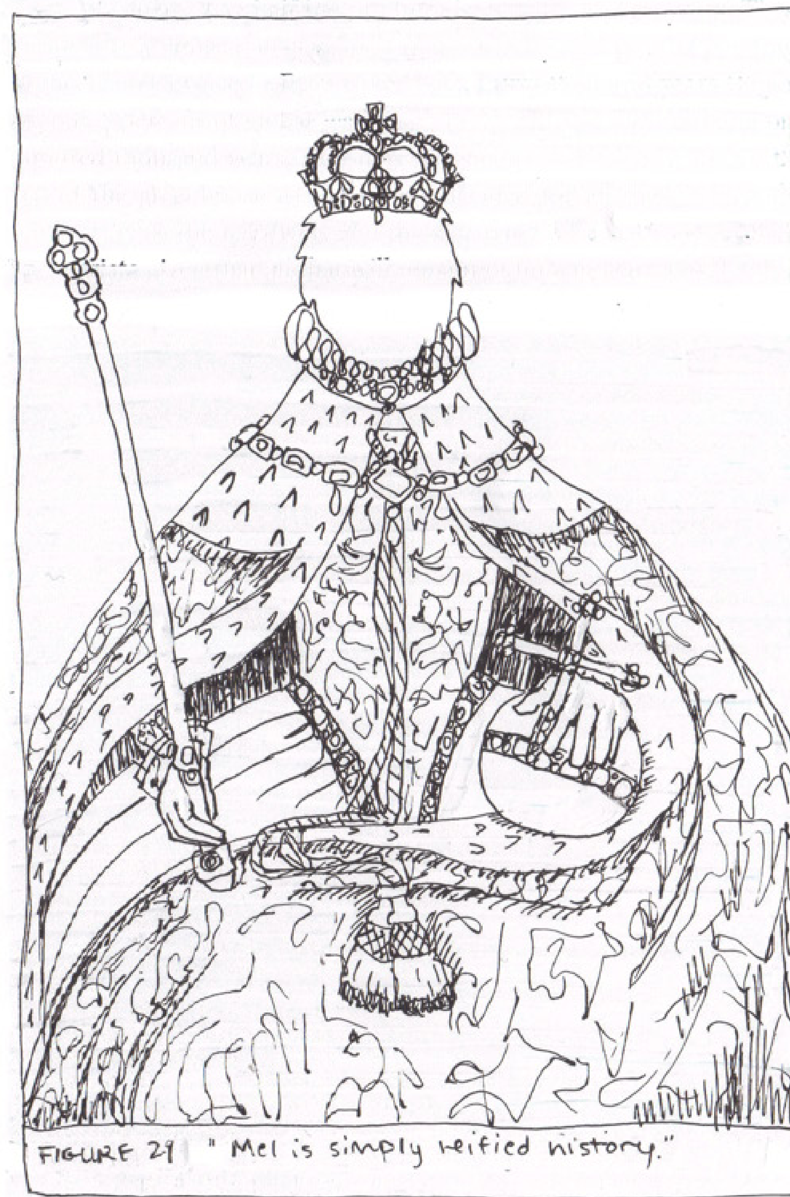


FIGURE 29 " Mel is simply reified history."

The future hollows out the present.

These gigantic timescales are truly humiliating in the sense that they force us to realize how changeable we are. A singular self-identity is far easier to cope with. A singular self-identity brings to mind immortality.

But The Mels are not forever. What they offer instead is *very large finitude.*

There is a real sense in which it is far easier to conceive of "identity" than multiple selves. Identity makes us feel important.



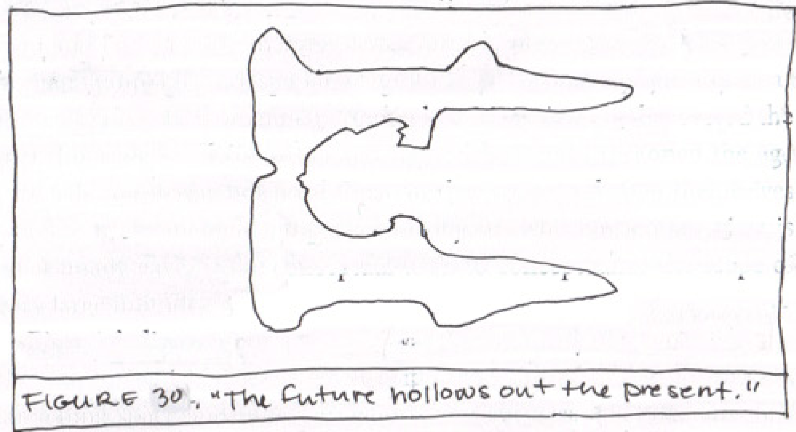


FIGURE 30. "The future hollows out the present."

The Mels stretch and snap our ideas of what an identity is in the first place.

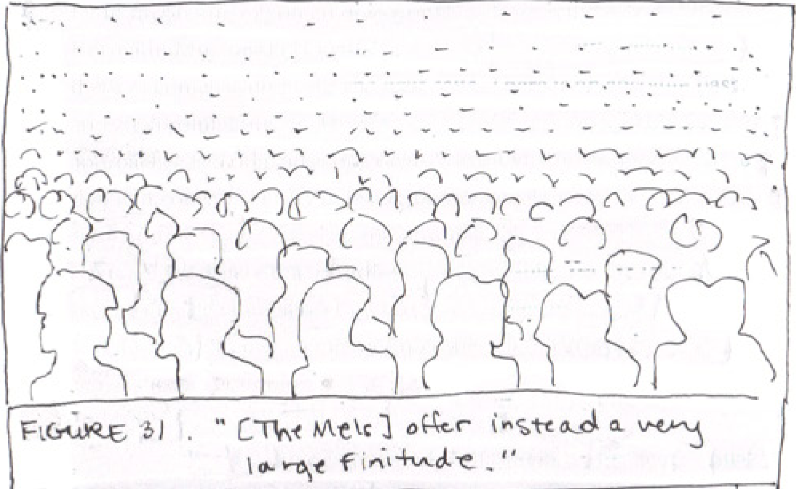
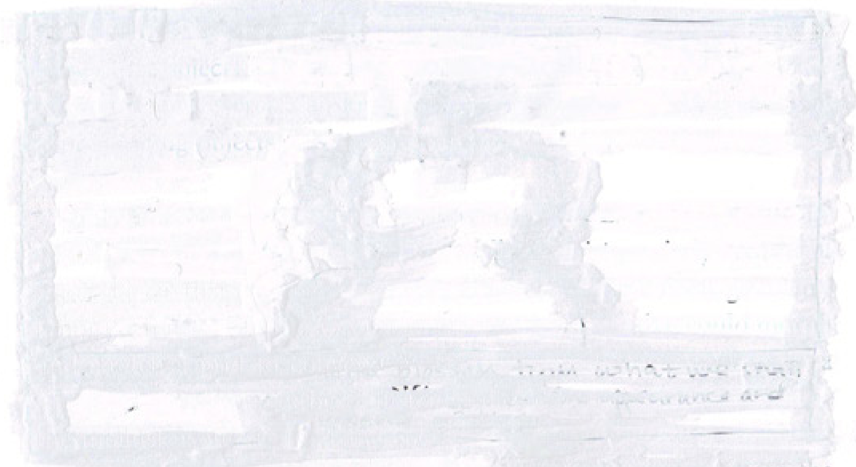


FIGURE 31. "[The Mels] offer instead a very large finitude."

Mel
is n't physically real; rather physical events are real and they contain
Mel in their interior.
Only a Mel in infinitesimally small areas
of space-time may be regarded as rigid and
container-like.

Mel isn't a unity. Thus, it is not possible in relativity to obtain a consistent definition of an extended rigid identity.

Relativity guarantees that ~~the~~ real Mel will be forever withdrawn from any Mels that tries to access her, including that Mel herself. The most obviously withdrawn object of all— Mel.



struggling to solve
inconsistency.

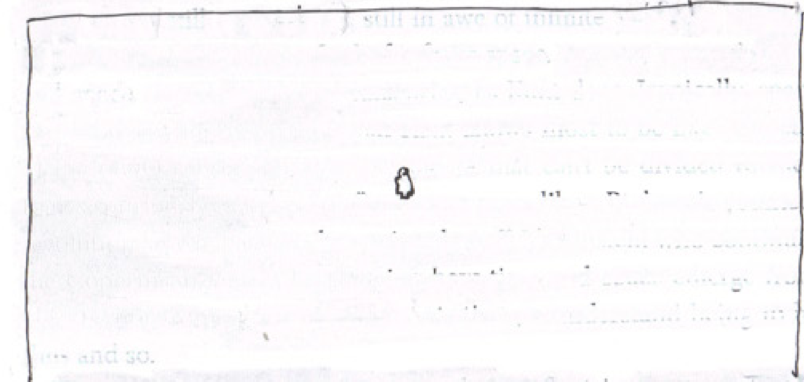


FIGURE 32. "The most obviously withdrawn object of all – Mel."

me| is the very failure of my thought to be the object that it is thinking.

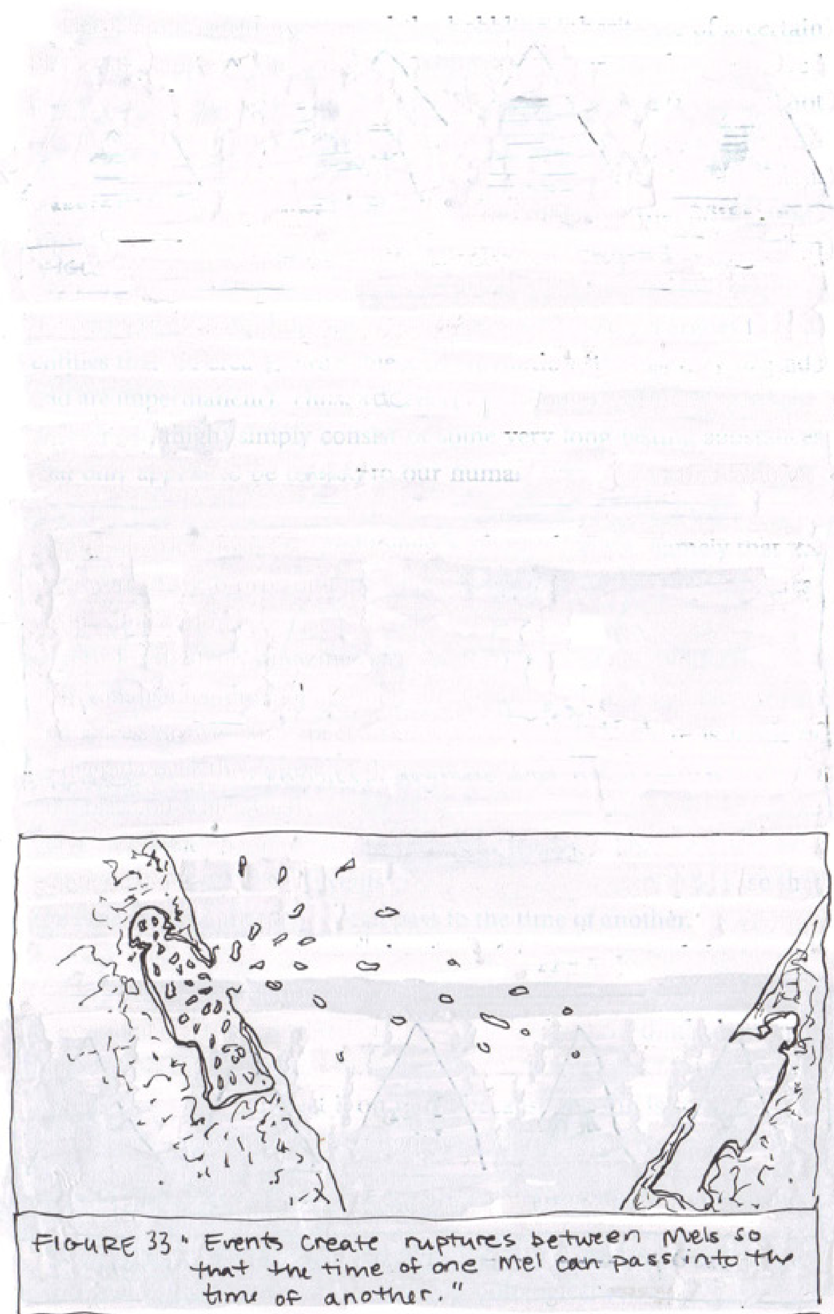
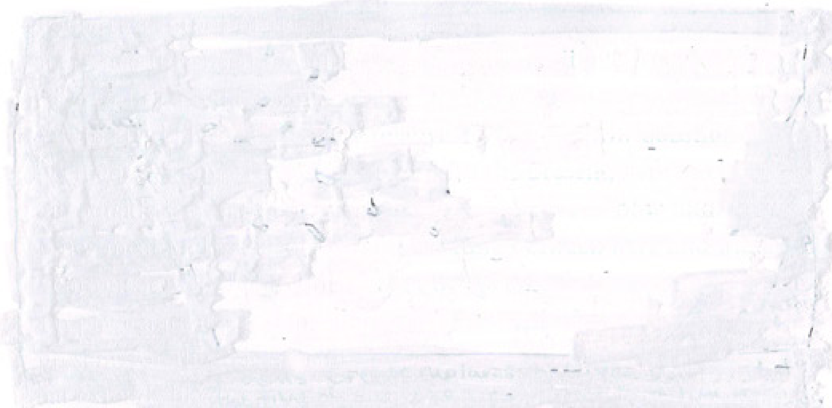


FIGURE 33: Events create ruptures between Mels so that the time of one Mel can pass into the time of another."





Like the *strange stranger,* is there a Mel-Mel? Is there a Mel that is beyond predictability, timing, or any ethical or political calculation? Is there a Mel-Mel? Is there a Mel that is "nowhere" and yet real: not a beyond, but a real entity in the real universe?

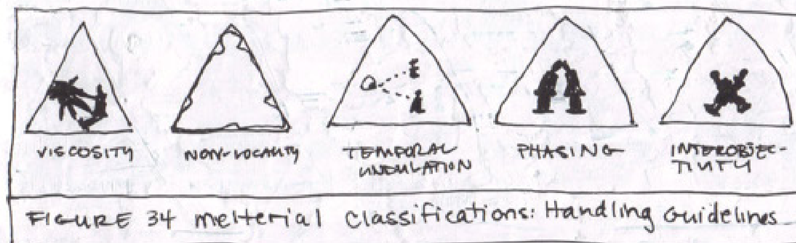



FIGURE 34 Melterial Classifications: Handling Guidelines

The Mels compel us to handle them in certain ways. But because of temporal foreshortening, The Mels are impossible to handle just right. This aporia gives rise to a dilemma: we have no time to learn fully about each Mel. But we have to handle them anyway. This handling causes ripples upon ripples. Thus, one effect has been phenological asynchrony: the way Mel and The Mels go out of sync.

FIGURE 35. "Mel and The Mels go out of sync."

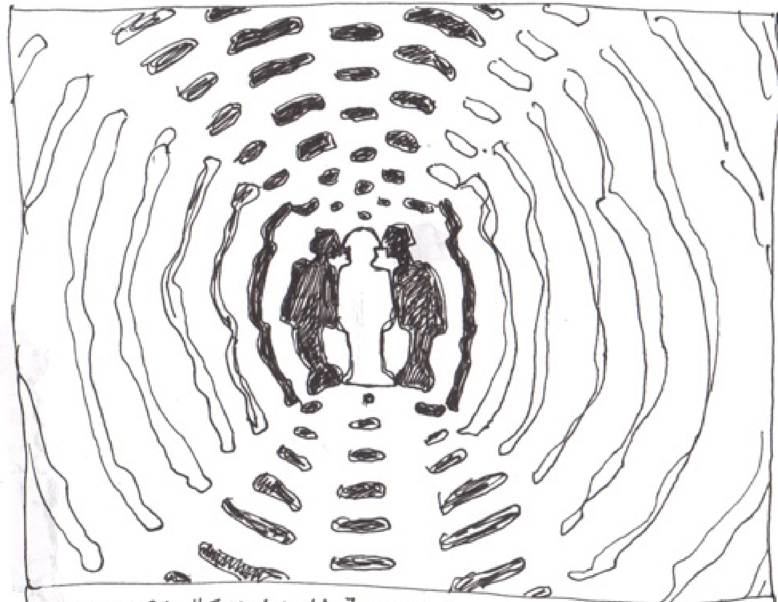


FIGURE 36 "[Mel holds] me in her forcefield. Mel strafes me with layer upon layer of inference patterns"

MEL AS

# Phasing

As I approach Mel, she seems to surge toward me, locking onto me and holding me in her force field. Mel strafes me with layer upon layer of interference patterns.

My sense of being "in" a time and of inhabiting a "place" depends on the proximity of Mel.

Mel seems to phase in and out of the human world. Mel is *phased*: she occupies a high-dimensional *phase space* that makes her impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis.

We can only see pieces of Mel at a time. The reason why she appears nonlocal and temporally foreshortened is precisely because of this transdimensional quality. We only see pieces of her at once.

What we experience as a changing, flowing and oozing identity is precisely a symptom of our less than adequate perception of higher dimensions of self-identity, which is where Mel lives.

That's why you can't see Mel. You would have to occupy some high-dimensional space to see her unfolding explicitly.



As it is, I only see brief patches of Mel as she intersects with my world.

One brief patch I call me.

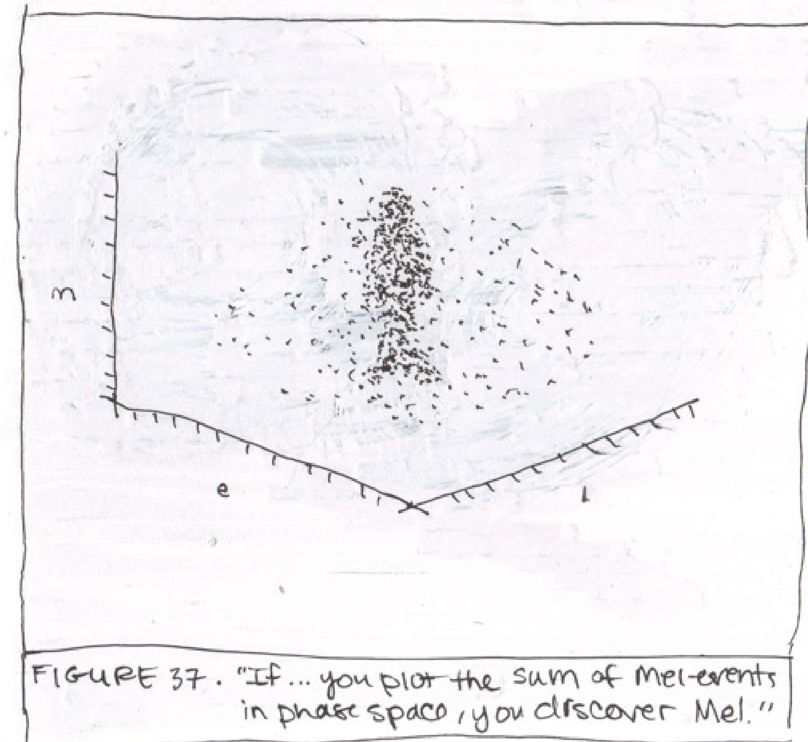
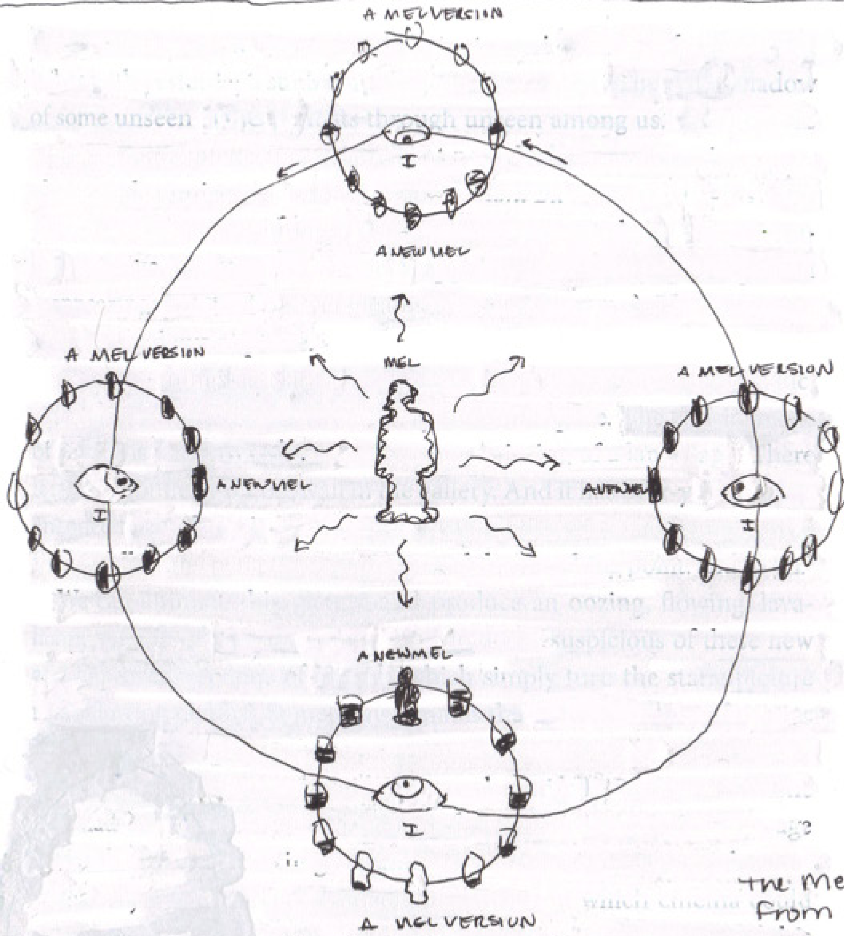
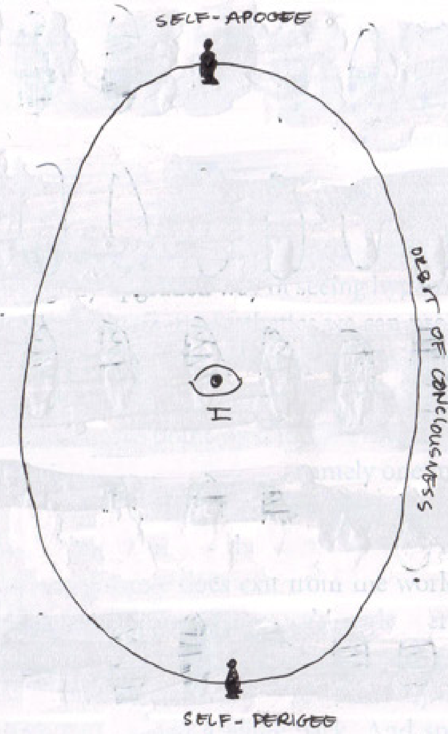


FIGURE 37. "If... you plot the sum of Mel-events in phase space, you discover Mel."



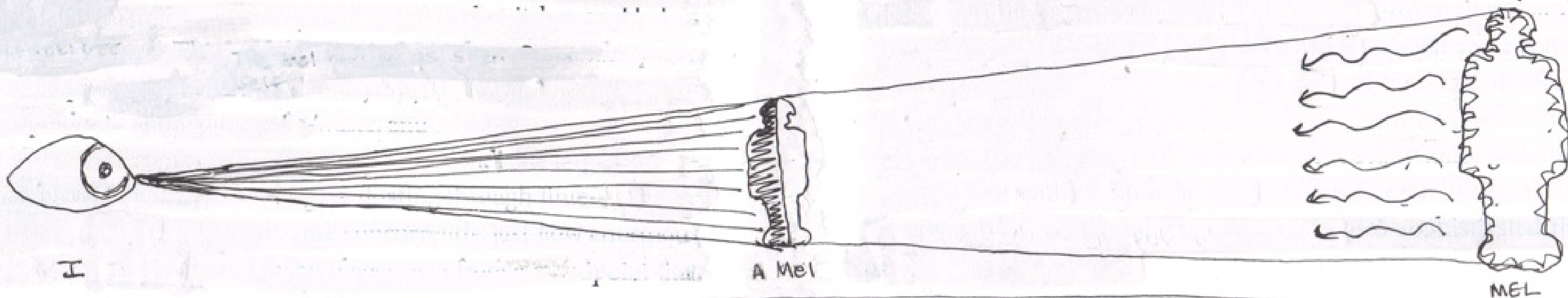




FIGURE 38. Mel Phasing: "what we experience as the slow periodic recurrence of a celestial event such as an eclipse or a comet is a continuous entity whose imprint simply shows up in our social or cognitive space for awhile."

The gaps I perceive between moments at which my mind is aware of Mel and moments at which it isn't, do not inhere in Mel herself. This is not simply a matter of my "subjective" awareness versus an "objective" world. The gaps I experience between being strafed by one Mel-version and another does not mark a gap of nothingness.

The gaps and ruptures are simply the *invisible presence* of Mel herself, which looms around me constantly. On this view,

Mel covers every available surface, leering into my world relentlessly. The notion of "background" and its "foreground" are only phases of a self-identity that doesn't "go anywhere" at all, at least not on a human-sized scale.

When a Mel phases, another Mel is intersecting with her. A transition in Mel-versions happens



when one Mel cancels out part of another Mel. For a transition to occur, there must be 1 + *n* Mels that intersect. Phasing happens because one Mel translates another one.

FIGURE 39. "When Mel phases, anothe Mel intersects with her."

What we are dealing with, with the phenomenon of The Mels, is an indexical sign that is a *metonymy* for Mel. Mel is the mereological figure, the figure that deals with parts and wholes and relationships. What we encounter when we study The Mels is a strange

mereology in which parts do not disappear into wholes. Quite the reverse. Indeed, what we seem to have is a *not-all* set. Selves seem to contain more than themselves. A Mel is a unique entity, yet she is also part of a series of Mels. There is an inevitable dislocation between The Mels and Mel.

But Mel is and is not herself, at the same time, because she has parts that cannot be wholly subsumed into her. Otherwise phasing and The Mels would fail to occur. A phasing object is a sign of a rupture at the heart of being.

The rupture exists at an *ontological* intersection, not a physical one. The intersection is between a self and its appearance-for another thing, or things. Thus, the mesh of relations (The Mels) is on one side of the rupture, the hither side, while the strange stranger (Mel) is on the yonder side— not spatially but ontologically.

A self can be a member of itself, thus giving rise to the set theoretical paradoxes that plague Mel. If a set can be a member of itself, then one can imagine a set of sets that are not members of themselves. In order to cope with this paradox we have to allow for the existence of contradictory entities. This allows for the existence of Mel.



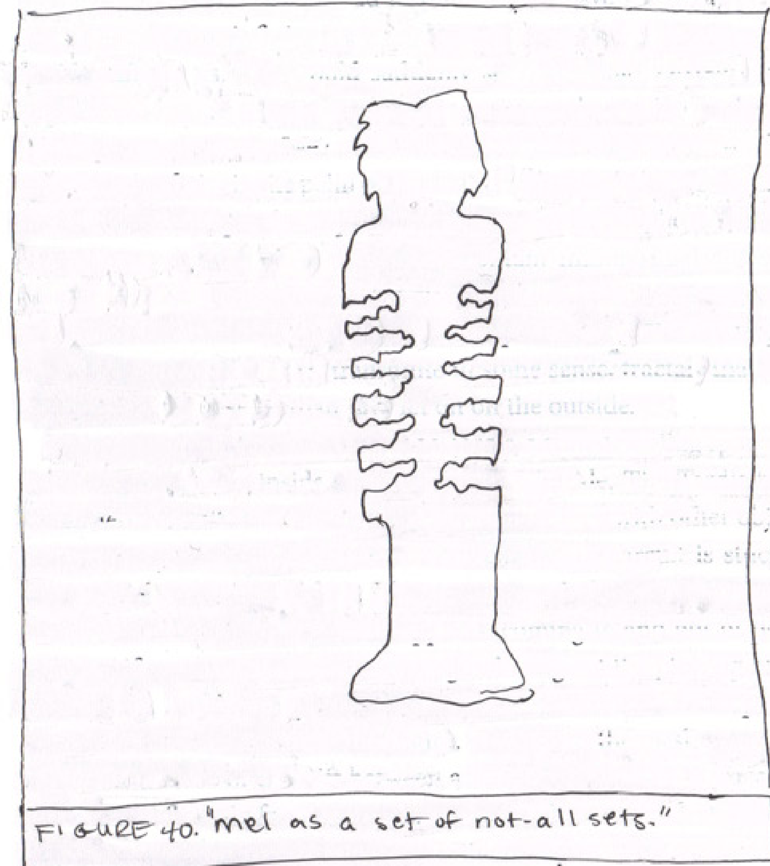


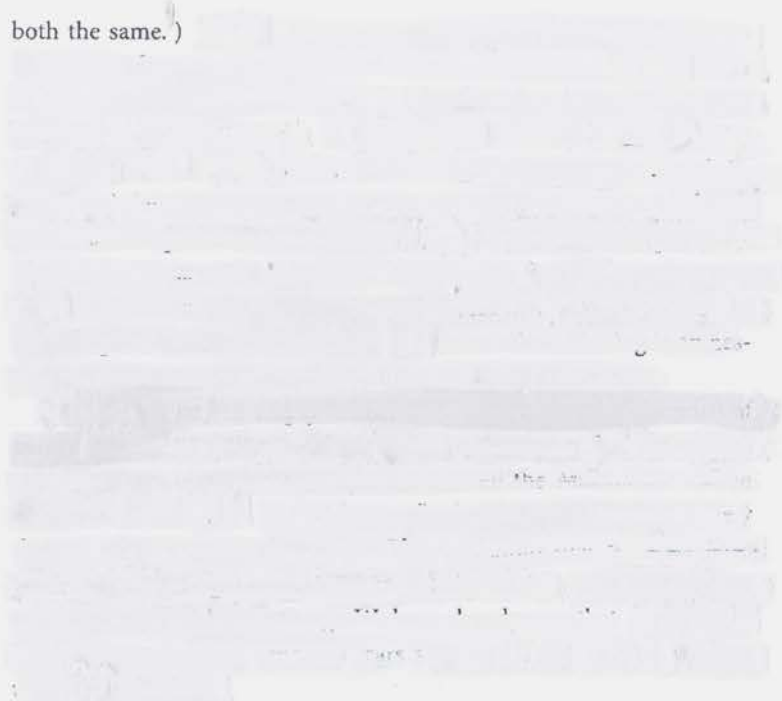
FIGURE 40. "Mel as a set of not-all sets."

Indeed, since selves are inherently inconsistent, an abyss opens up simply because of the fact that a self can "interact with itself" because it is a spacing and a timing, not a given, objectified entity.

Phasing is evidence of some interaction between selves or *between a self*.

(What is the difference between a Mel? One of her legs is

both the same. )



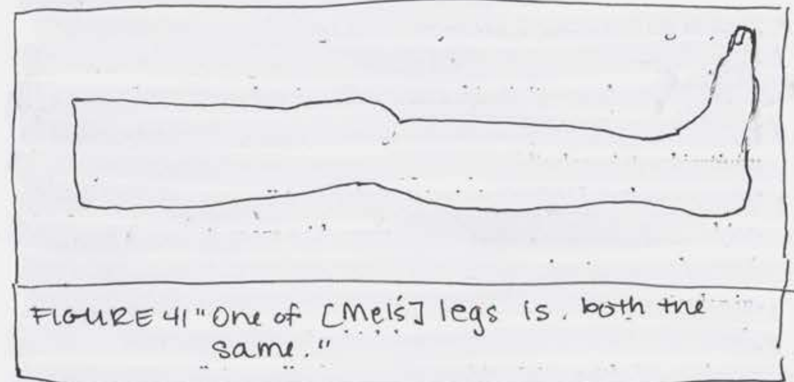


FIGURE 41 "One of [Mel's] legs is both the same."

MEL AS

# Interobjectivity

FIGURE 42. "[MEL] floats among objects, "between" them."

mel is *interobjective.* She floats among objects, "between" them; though this between is not "in" spacetime—it *is* spacetime.

mel discloses *interobjectivity.* The phenomenon we call 'mel' is just a local, anthropocentric instance of a much more widespread phenomenon.

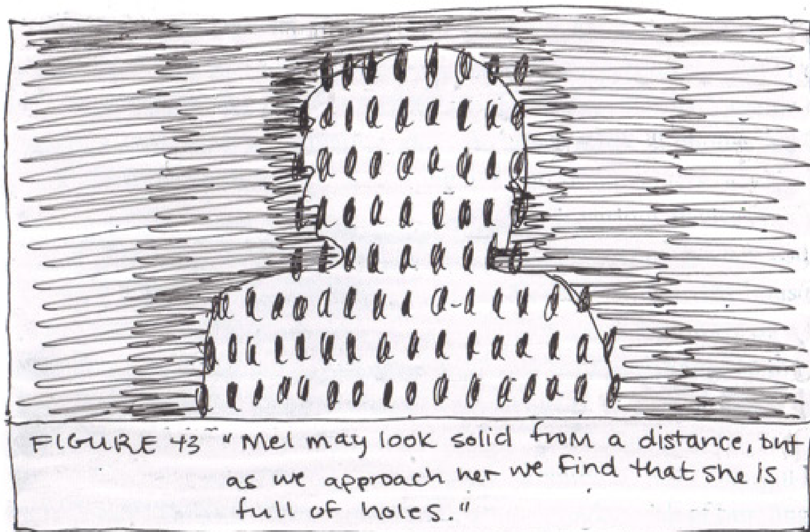


FIGURE 43 "Mel may look solid from a distance, but as we approach her we find that she is full of holes."

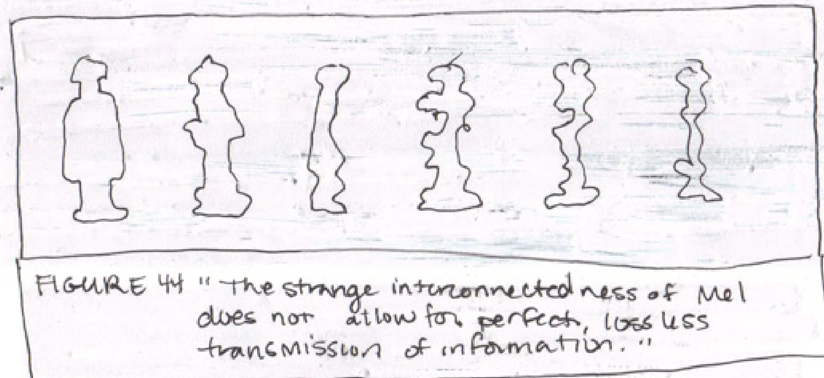


FIGURE 44 "The strange interconnectedness of Mel does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information."



A mesh consists of relationships between crisscrossing strands of metal and gaps between the strands. Meshes are potent metaphors for the strange interconnectedness of Mel, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences. When a Mel is born she is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with others in the mesh.

A mesh consists of links, and also of gaps between links.

It is precisely the gaps between and within Mel that enable entities to grip her.

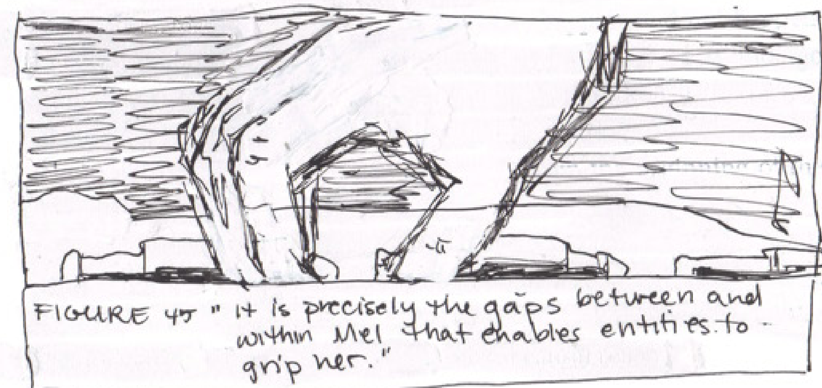


FIGURE 45 "It is precisely the gaps between and within Mel that enables entities to grip her."

mel is an interobjective effect, an emergent property of relationships between enmeshed objects.

FIGURE 47 "[mel] is not "in" anything... but rather an aftereffect of [enmeshed objects."

This means that mel is an effect-for some "observer." She is not "in" anything and she is not prior to objects but is rather an aftereffect of them.



mel is not a picture of reality in the mind, but as an interaction between all kinds of entities that is somewhat "in the eye of the beholder"—including, of course, myself.

Since we only see her shadow, we easily see the "surface" on which her shadow falls as part of a system that she corrals into being.

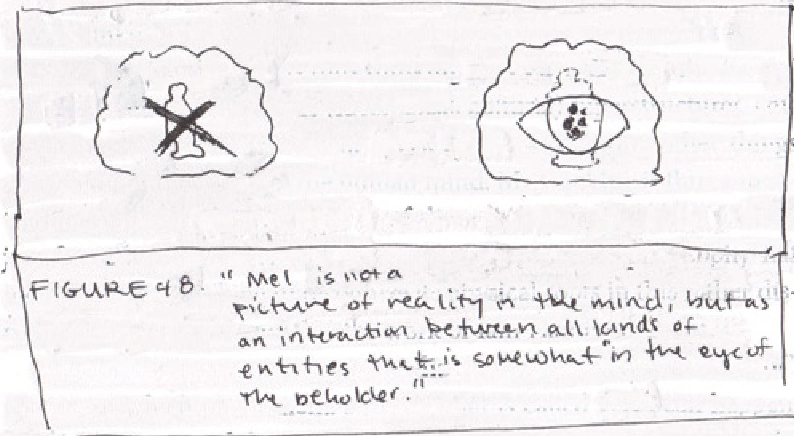


FIGURE 48. " mel is not a picture of reality in the mind, but as an interaction between all kinds of entities that is somewhat "in the eye of the beholder."

A Mel and a non-Mel are hidden from view. They feed an observer answers to questions posed by the observer. If the observer reckons that the answers come from a Mel, then they come from a Mel. Such a form of Mel-hood is quite attenuated: it means that in effect, *I am not a non-Mel*, since no distinction can be made between the answers given by a Mel and answers given by a non-Mel. Mel-hood then is also an effect in the mesh—Mel may look solid from a distance, but as we approach her we find that she is full of holes. If we think Mel is an emergent property of certain kinds of neural and physical organization, we end up with paradoxes: What constitutes a Mel? Exactly where does Mel begin to emerge from non-Mel?



FIGURE 46 "A Mel and a non-Mel are hidden from view.. If no distinction can be made between the answers given by a Mel and the answers of a non-Mel .. [then the answers come from a Mel]."

Mel is never experienced directly, but only as mediated through other entities in some shared sensual space. We never hear the wind in itself, only the wind in the door, the wind in the trees. This means that for every interobjective system, there is at least one entity that is withdrawn.

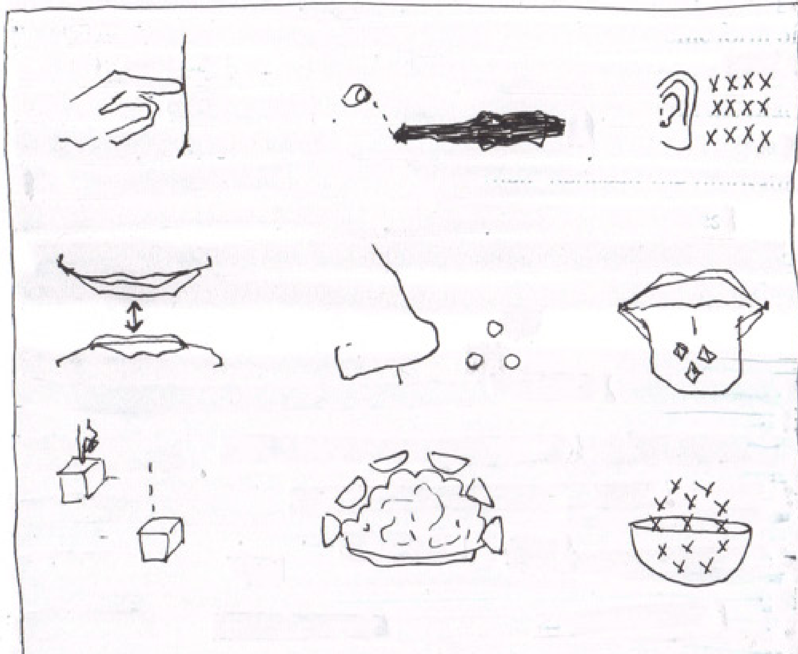


FIGURE 49. "Mel is never experienced directly."



Mel leaves a footprint in some mud. The footprint is not Mel. A fly lands on the Mel's left eyelid. The fly's apprehension of Mel's eyelid is not Mel. Mel blinks. Her blink is not Mel. Mel's brain registers the fly's feet. The registration is not Mel, and so on. Even Mel doesn't know herself entirely, but only in a rough translation that samples and edits her being. A mosquito or an asteroid has their own unique sample of Mel-ness, and these samples are not Mel.

*There is a real* Mel, withdrawn even from herself. The real Mel is a *mystery,* yet not nebulous—just this Mel, this actual one, she who stepped in the mud.

Mel is closed off, secret, unspeakable—even to herself. Whatever happens concerning her—the gyrations of her mind, the imprint of her foot, the delicate tracery of the fly, my thinking about her—occurs in an interobjective space that is ontologically in front of this mystery realm.

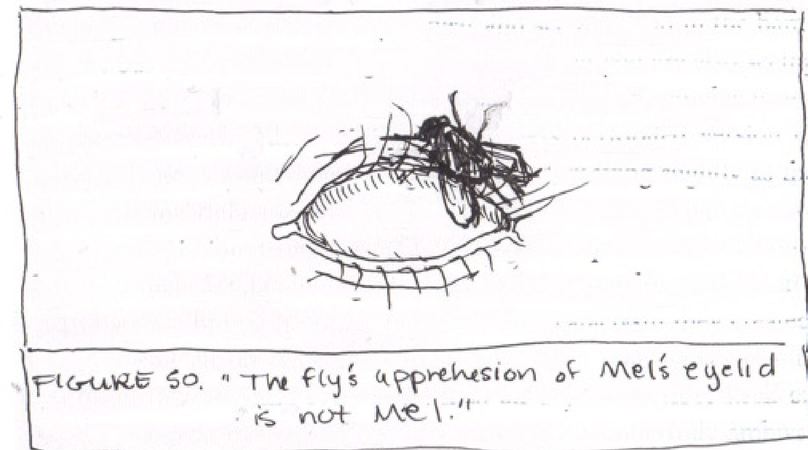


FIGURE 50. "The fly's apprehesion of Mel's eyelid is not Mel."

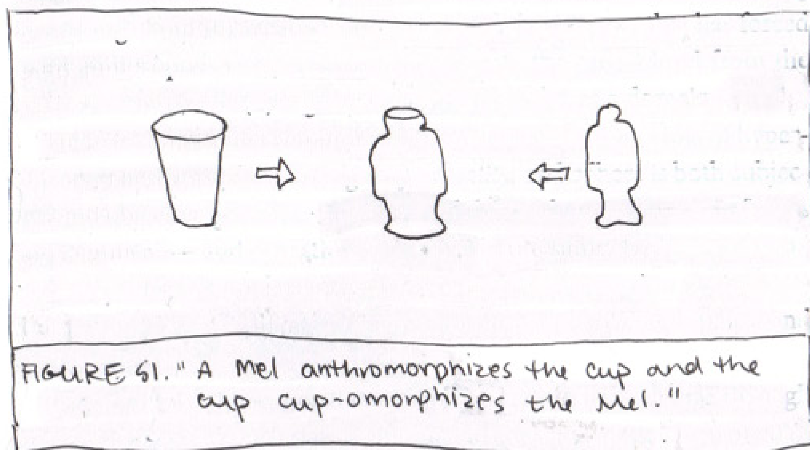



FIGURE 51. "A Mel anthromorphizes the cup and the cup cup-omorphizes the Mel."



For every system of meaning, there must be some opacity for which the system cannot account, which it must include–exclude in order to be itself.

Every interobjective space implies at least one more object in the vicinity: let us call this the 1 + *n*.

A Mel anthropomorphizes the cup and the cup cup-omorphizes the Mel, and so on. In this process there are always 1 + *n* objects that are excluded.

The appearance of Mel, the indexical signs of Mel, is the *past* of Mel. What we commonly take to lie underneath a present Mel, her past state, is her appearance-for Mel.



Mel's history is her form. Form is memory. The form of a Mel is her essence and that "matter" is a perspective trick, a backward glance at the Mel that was appropriated to form the Mel in question. Mel is a photograph of her past.

Appearance is the past. *Essence is the future.* The strange strangeness of Mel, her invisibility—it's the future, somehow beamed into the "present."

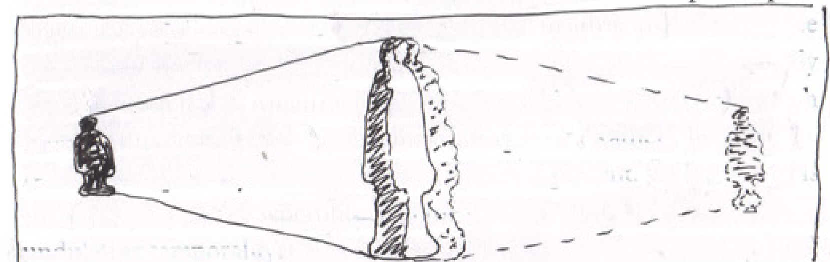


FIGURE 52 "Appearance is the past. Essence is the future. [Mel is] the future, somehow beamed into the "present.""

mel is an *exaggeration* of the lack of a true now.

mel is *nowhere*: mel is *never present.*

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## Biography

Since 2015, Chicago-based artist Mel Keiser has been working on a multifaceted project titled, *The Life and Deaths of The Mels*. In evaluating who she's been over the course of her life, Keiser identified five moments of liminality that resulted in significant self-change and have, arguably, created seven categorically different versions of herself over time: Melissa-Louise-Keiser, Mel(v.1), Mel(v.2), Mel(v.3), Mel(v.4/5), Mel(v.6) and Mel(v.7). In *The Life and Deaths of The Mels*, Keiser rewrites her personal history as the births and deaths of these different versions of herself—as The Mels. Using installation, performance, and writing, Keiser creates material evidence for these versions of herself, exploring the social and psychological impact of treating herself as a stratified series of distinct selves rather than a single person in fluid development. She uses scientific research methodologies alongside artistic praxes, hybridizing disciplines like personality psychology, evolutionary biology, and quantum physics to invent proof of the existence of these self-versions and to explain how and why these segmented versions of herself exist.


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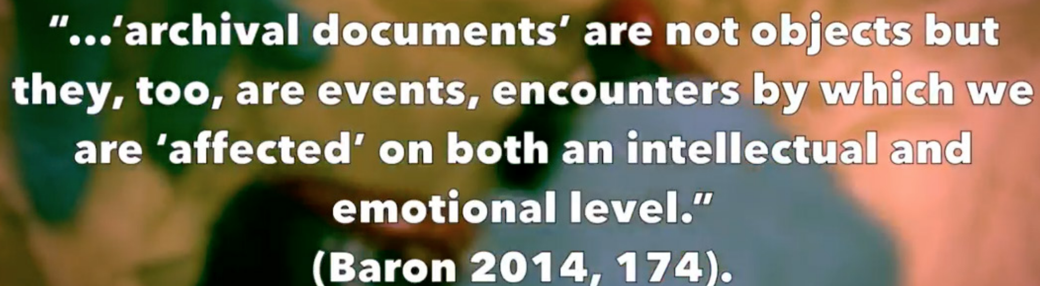
PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# REVIEW BAMBOOZLED: ARCHIVAL AFFECTS

AMMA Y. GHARTEY-TAGOE KOOTIN UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA




Watch this ReView here: https://youtu.be/Anva6TSKtOI

PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY VOL 4, NO 1 (2018):294–296
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ISSN 2057–7176

TIME CODES:

1. A Definition of Affect - 00:00

2. A Bamboozled Affect, Or The First Time the Author Watched Bamboozled - 00:26

3. Capturing Another Affective Moment- 02:25

4. Going to and Encountering the Archive - 03:33

5. The Gift of the Archive - The Lester Glassner African American Experience Collection Arrives - 06:31

6. Opening up Archives / Opening up Affects - 10:03

7. The Story behind the Lester Glassner Collection - 16:20

8. Feelings, Emotions, and Affects in the Archive ("I just feel really sad") - 18:00

9. A Summary of Bamboozled - 24:01

10. Mrs. Drummond - 26:43

11. Going Through the Box, Part I: A Performance of Archival Labor - 27:28

12. Can't I Just Smash This to the Ground?: Archival Affective Tensions - 33:37

13. Of Glassner/Bamboozled's Archival Impulse - 37:03

14. Going Through the Box, Part II: Archival Labors Uninterrupted - -39:52

15. The Archival Laboring Body Affected - 46:31

16. The Last Archival Object in the Box / Conclusions - 49:49

17. Credits / Works Cited - 51:58

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## Biography

Scholartist* Dr. Amma Y. Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin (a.k.a. Dr. Amma) creates artistic works based on archival research for the stage and screen and writes about late-19th-century black performance. An assistant professor with a joint appointment in the Institute for African American Studies and the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Georgia, she bridges the worlds of academia and arts/entertainment having worked for National History Day, Inc. and A&E® Networks/The History Channel. Her current projects are an historical musical about black performers in the 1901 Pan-American Exposition entitled *AT BUFFALO*, and a book about the relation between laughter and the American slave experience, entitled *Laughing after Slavery: The Performances and Times of Laughing Ben Ellington*.

**A term credited to performance studies colleagues Joseph Shahadi and Mila Aponte-Gonzalez.*

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PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

# GALAXIES → EVENTUALLY THERE WILL BE NOTHING

**MATT MARTIN** ARTIST

ReView - Timothy Ferris' *Galaxies* *(eventually there will be nothing)*

→ Matt Martin's *eventually there will be nothing* *(Galaxies)*

In the context of the traditional review, where a critical evaluation is made through an inspection or examination in regards to some criteria, the palimpsest *(a formal device that creates a correspondence between two things)*

could in contrast be used to create this criticality through action *(a critical doing)*

and allow for the rhetoric of evaluation to be substituted for a more dialectical method.

Historically, a palimpsest is a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain; or by analogy, anything reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form. Although this practice was most often done with little regard to the

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original, primarily serving a pragmatic purpose not to waste parchment, it can instead be utilized as methodology for a sort of physical sublation, as it both preserves and changes the original. Or put another way, critically doing a palimpsest allows the physical *(literal)*

alteration to become the dialectic interplay *(function)*

between the original and some other term, concept, or object. If contextualized then as a review, this process retains the basic premise of analysis, but changes it from a form of external evaluation to one of synthesis.

Specifically, I altered *Galaxies*, *(images of space)*

a large coffee-table book from the late 1980s *(a time of only ground-based telescopes)*

into the palimpsest *eventually there will be nothing.* *(spaces of space)*

In this alteration, issues of authority *(authorship)*

and time *(loss)*

are addressed, as in other comparable projects, such as Tom Phillips' *A Humument* or Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning*.

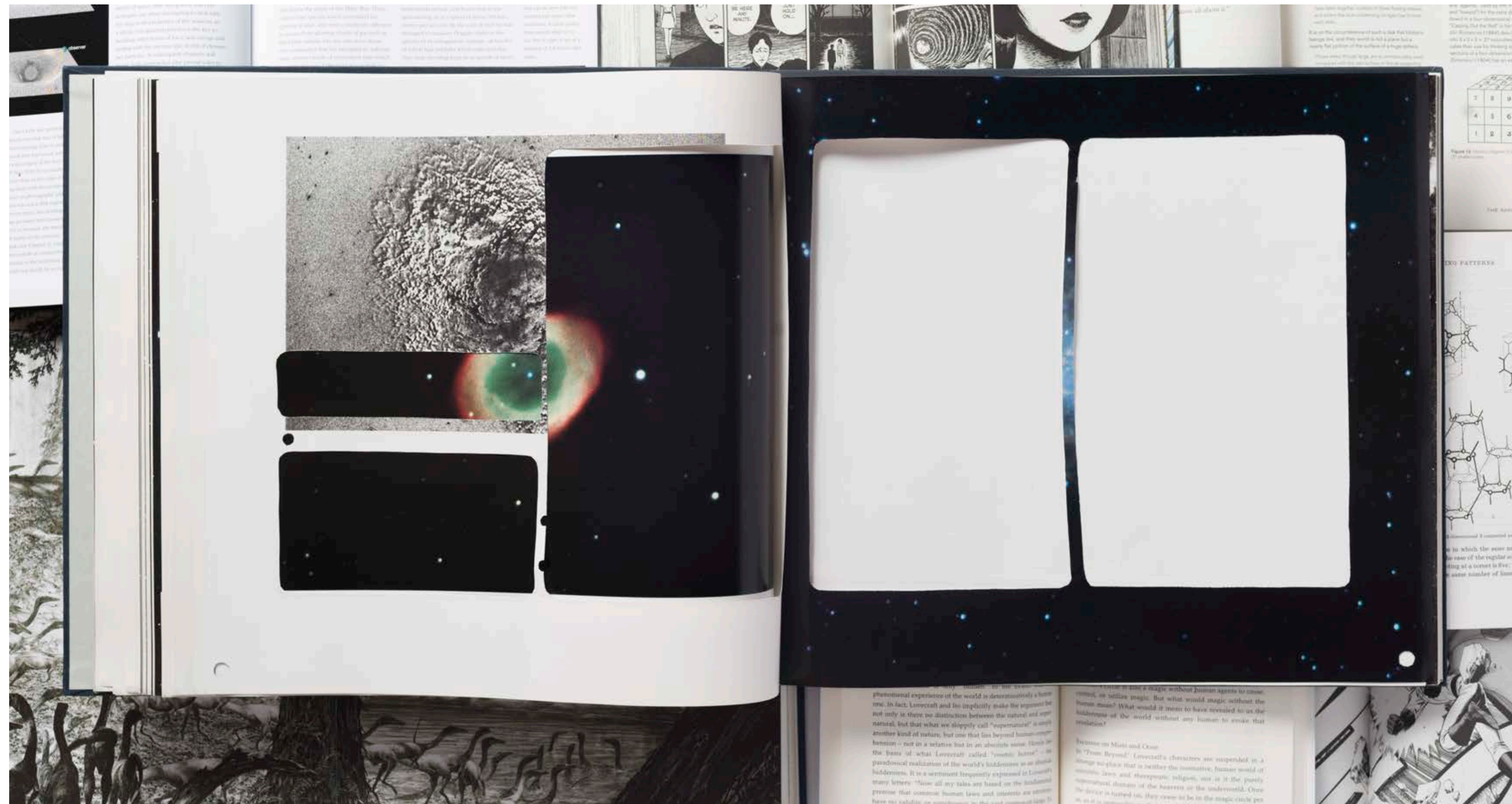
In *eventually there will be nothing*, I start with the figurative raw material of the universe, and remove humanity's explanation of it. *(physically cutting out all the text)*

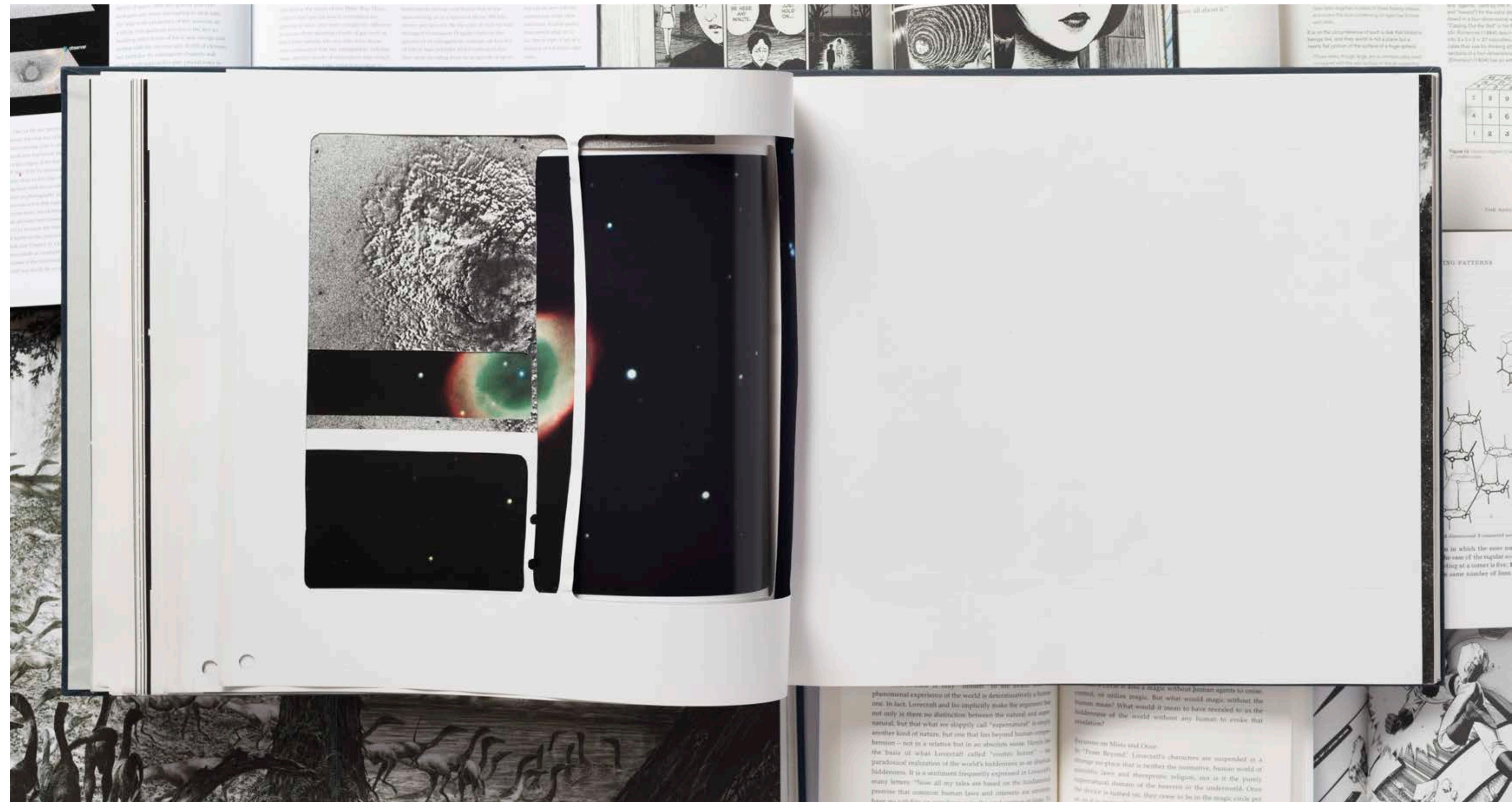
This can be seen as similar to the actions of Phillips and Rauschenberg in that it recontextualizes the authority of what it has removed.

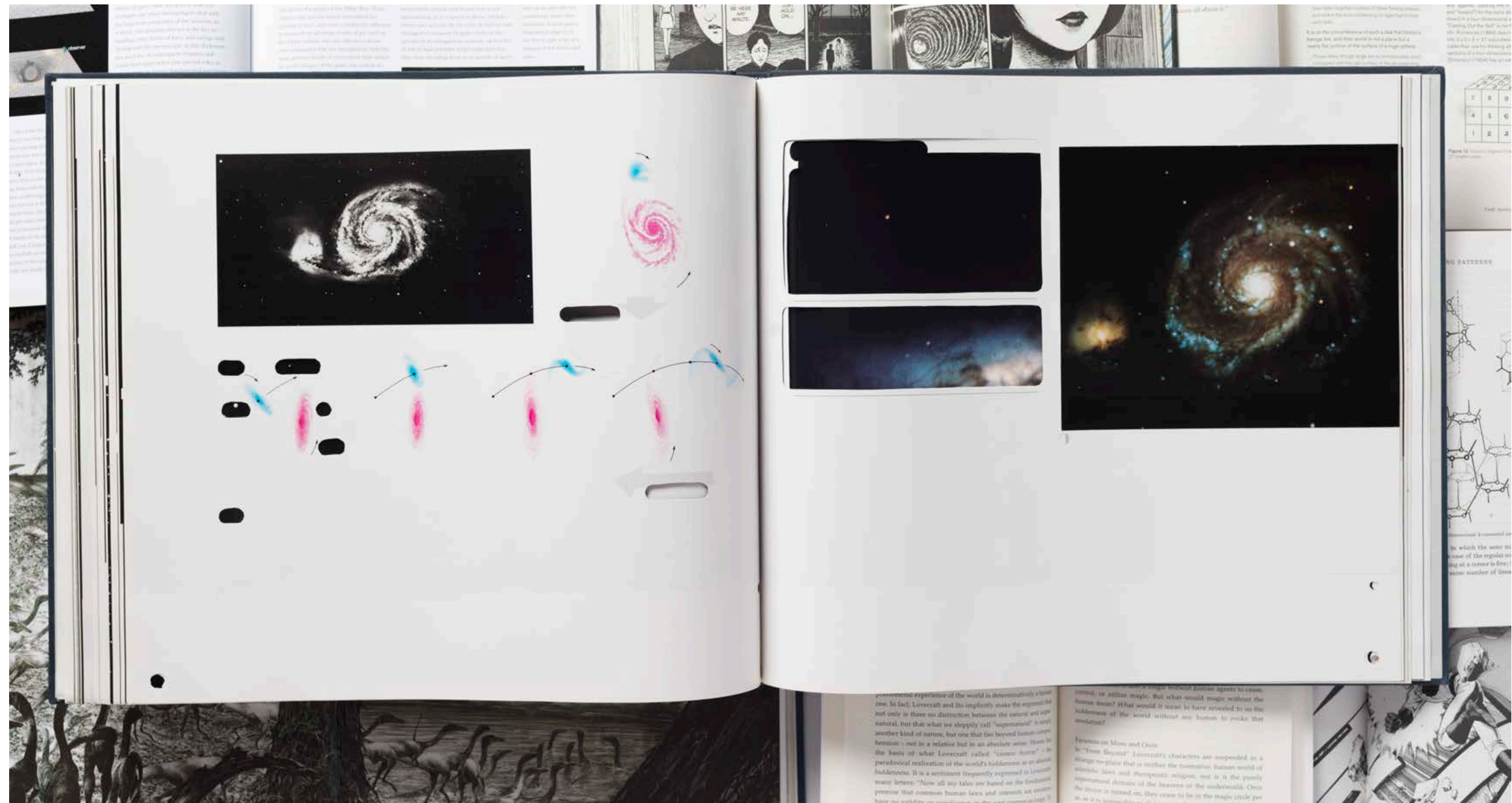
However, where in *A Humument* and *Erased de Kooning* are alterations of literature and art, *eventually there will be nothing* is an alteration of a scientific, albeit non-scholarly, text.

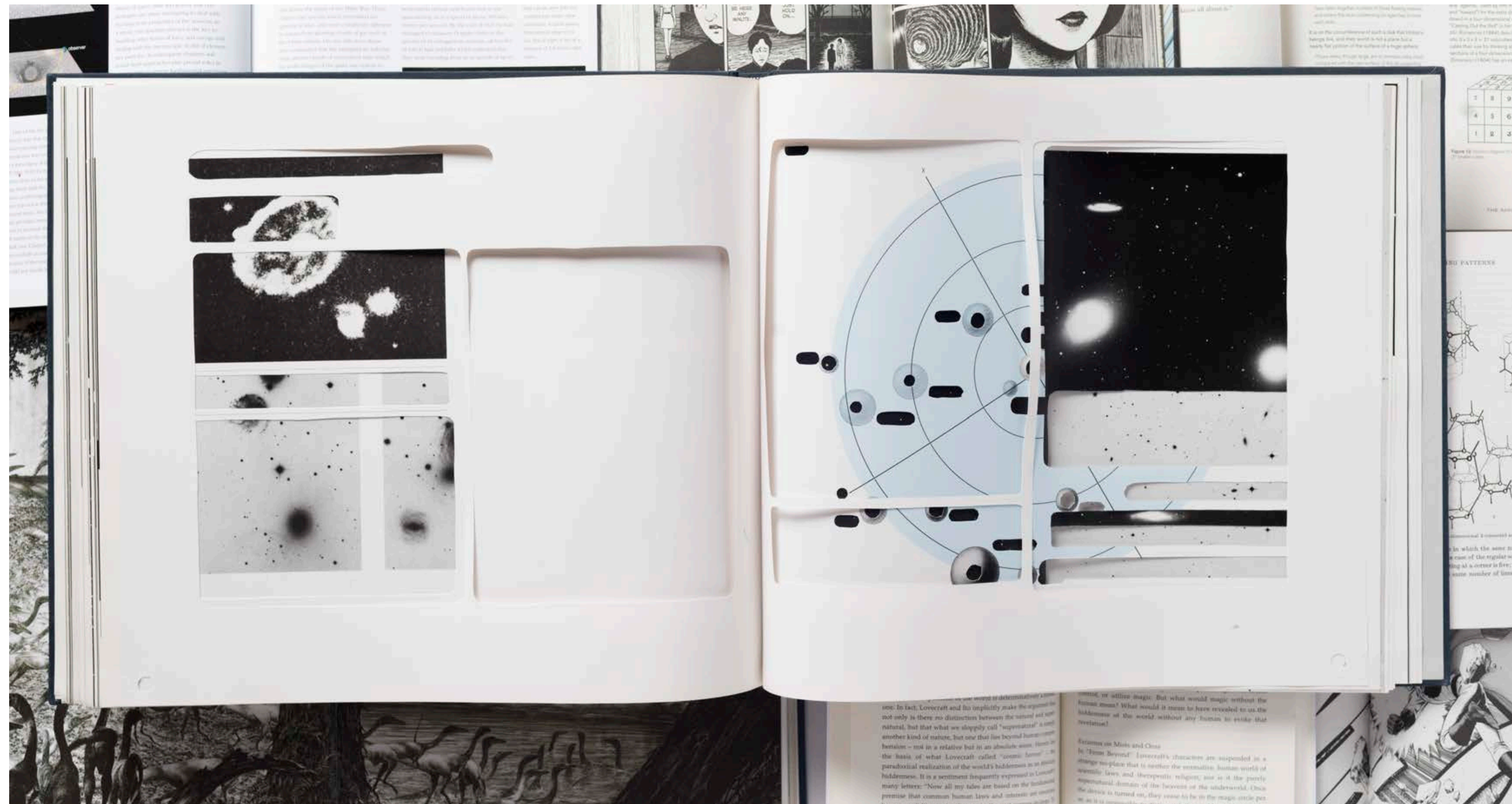
Enacting this kind of process within this context gives it more of a fundamental severity—there are few things that seem more fixed or certain than explanations based on scientific rigor—and it is easy to read the performative act of removal in this case as commenting on the scale of human thought in regard to the grandness, physically and temporally, of the universe, as it lumbers on long after us.

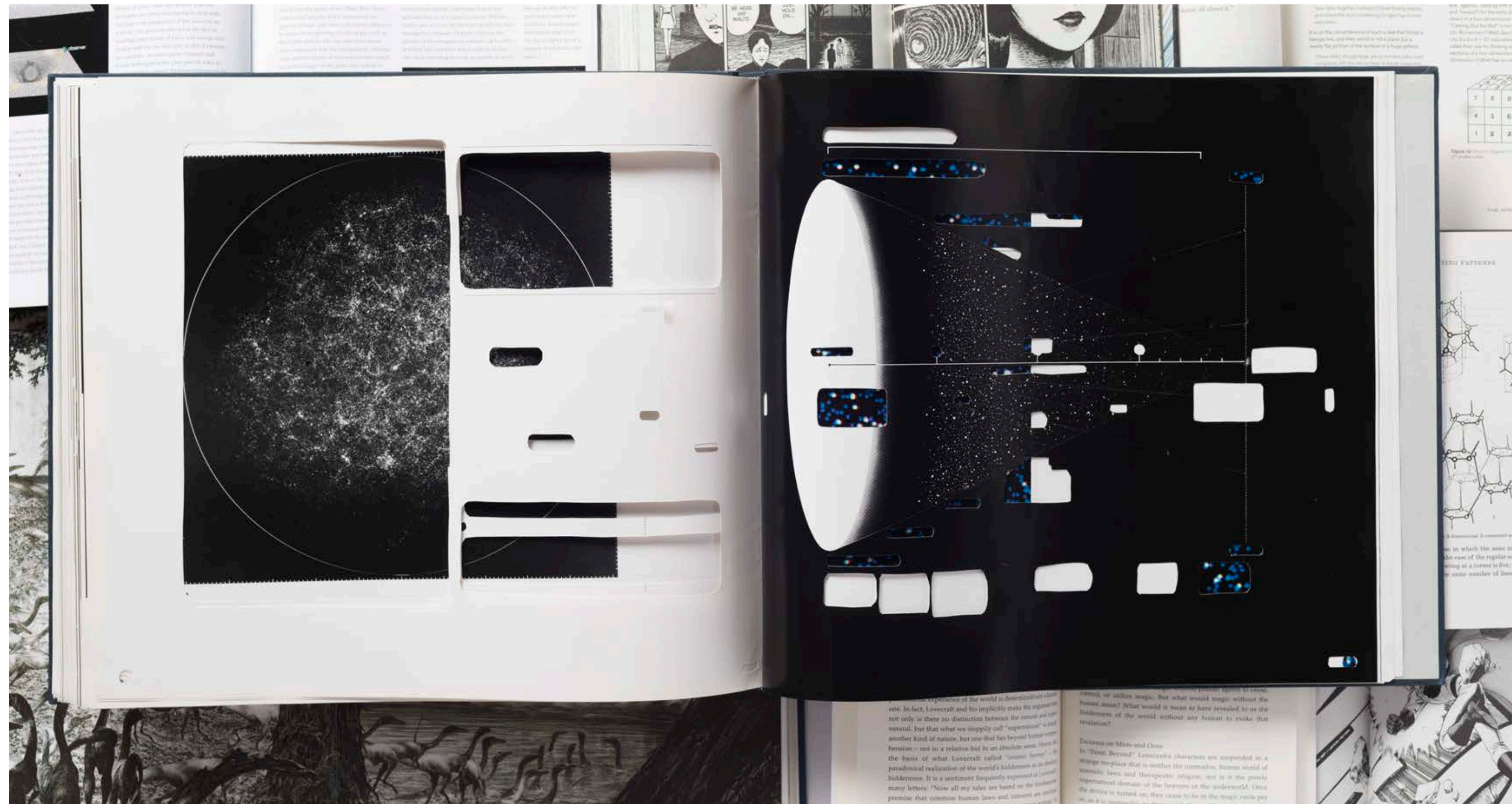
*(long before us)*











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## Biography


Matt Martin is a Chicago-based artist whose projects are generally concerned with metaphysical questions of scale, indeterminacy, and recursive states; and are engaged with material and object intra-relations, primarily through two and three-dimensional assemblages and installations. www.acrylicsuperhero.com



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