

Gesture, *Haltung*, Ethos: The Politics of Rehearsal

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Abstract

Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida and Samuel Weber, the thesis discerns a theoretical description and demonstrative performance of theatrical iterability as the structural crisis of meaning and mastery in mediated self-relation. In this context, the concept of a politics of rehearsal imposes itself as a modality of acting, which demonstratively affirms, exposes and aggravates a constitutive breach in self-presence qua mediation. The thesis links this modality of rehearsal to a concern with the political effectiveness of bearing certain effects of virtuality, possibility and potentiality. As a repetition that maintains a simultaneous reference to the future and the past, the rehearsal is further associated with an attitude of ex-appropriation that follows the task of inheritance as a perpetual re-work of mourning. In actively resisting all limited tendencies towards closure and non-sharing in the transmission of cultural history, the politics of rehearsal becomes the model attitude of an amateur's participatory desire. With brief recourse to Bernard Stiegler the thesis develops the figure of an "amateur" who perpetually seeks for renewed possibilities of a transforming and transformative participation in the socio-individual de-construction of a precarious ethos from within an affirmed position of limited security. It finds amateurs at work and play in the context of Benjamin's writings on Bertolt Brecht, Franz Kafka and the German Baroque *Trauerspiel*, as well as the performance practices of Yvonne Rainer, Goat Island and Every house has a door. In their overt exposure of a body's inextricable relation to the archive, these experimental theatre and dance practitioners are found to employ a method and style of appropriative restrained, which seeks to demonstratively re-launch a cultural inheritance by aggravating its future response-ability. The thesis analyses their compositional strategies of interruption, citation and virtualisation as an amateur's appeal to the participatory coming of the negative infinity of justice as infinite perfectibility.

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Gesture, *Vorstellung*, *Schwelle*: Rehearsing the Future To Come

The space of the theatre, of the stage, of the theatrical scene, is defined not just by its physical perimeter but rather by the far less definable, heterogeneous others to which it appeals, and which through their responsiveness retroactively make places into theatrical stages. [...] It is therefore a *Schwelle*, not in the sense of a transition or interval situated between two fixed points or places, but as a zone of indefinite expansion and inflation reaching out to others on whose response it depends. This zone is theatrical in being internally split, divided into spectacle and spectators, stage and audience, inseparable and yet distinct. Such an audience marks the intrusion of the outside on the ostensibly self-contained interior of the place, “swelling” it, as it were, inflating it, making it larger than life, and yet also dislocating it in principle by rendering it dependent on a perimeter that is essentially displaceable, involving not just other places but also other times. For a theatre is always also a place of memory and of anticipation, where what has been is rehearsed and repeated as what is to come.¹

Schwelle

In *Limited Inc* – Jacques Derrida’s elaborate response to John R. Searle’s confrontational “Reply” to his own reading of the speech act theory of J.L. Austin in ‘Signature, Event, Context’ – Derrida expresses at more than one point an uncertainty over the spatio-temporal locatability

¹ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2008), 235-6.

of a “confrontation”, as he puts it always in inverted commas, of which it is difficult to ascertain *if it will or will have been able to take place*. ‘What I like about this “confrontation” is that I don’t know if it is quite taking place,’ he says, ‘if it ever will be able, or will have been able, quite, to take place; or if it does, between whom or what’.² For Derrida, what troubles the place and the taking-place of the “confrontation” is its irreducibility to two identifiable interlocutors or adversaries. Playing on the consequences of a general impossibility to assure the link of an utterance to its source – the structurally necessary drift in the function of every mark cut from its guaranteed arrival at a destined address as well as from its contextual affiliation to a source of “origin” – Derrida repeatedly refers to the author(s) of the *Reply* as *Sarl*, the French abbreviation for a “Society with Limited Responsibility”. Replacing the proper name Searle with the acronym *Sarl*, Derrida seriously pokes fun at a certain, perhaps over-serious legal and narcissistic concern with the copyright of a text. He does so throughout by impeccably explicating as well as playfully demonstrating – beginning with the title of his essay – the necessary limits of all such common phantasms of filiation, ownership and the possibility of a narcissistic re-appropriation of marks that must be able to stand the test of time in order to be legible in the first time.³ For Derrida, it is precisely the implications that follow from the necessary temporal movement of the mark’s survival that links the possibility of its repetition to alterity. Iterability, Derrida’s term for this general structure, is nothing but ‘the irreducible *possibility* of indefinite repetition as

² Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press 1990), 37.

³ Elsewhere, Derrida describes the common illusion of the possibility of narcissistic reappropriation as follows: ‘The infinite paradoxes of what is so calmly called narcissism are outlined here: suppose that X, something or someone (a trace, a work, an institution, a child) bears your name, that is to say your title. The naïve rendering or common illusion [*fantasme courant*] is that you have given your name to X, thus all that returns to X, in a direct or indirect way, in a straight or an oblique line, *returns* to you, as a profit for your narcissism’ [Derrida in Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism. A Case for an Impossible Self Love*. (New York: Fordham University Press 2014), 93].

alteration, as a reproduction that constitutes what it repeats *différance*, both altered and alterable'.⁴ The immediacy with which the mark breaks with any given context of production by the force of the sheer possibility of its graft, citation or counter-signature, haunts it from the beginning. The signature – paradoxically singular yet iterable mark – as much as every text signed, dated and sealed – echoes and calls forth the other time in (stead of) the first, 'the time and place of the *other time* already at work, altering from the start the start itself, the *first time*, the *at once*'.⁵ The limited authorial responsibility of which Derrida therefore speaks springs from an inevitable network between the "same" marks in different contexts that always lies in excess of the limited control of an author's conscious intentions, or indeed any other, more or less institutional efforts at containing its structural over-determination. Put differently, the play of the text, which is always also a (virtual) play of the inter-text – between other times and places, past and to come – can never be fully contained by the copyrighted seal of an author's work or any historical archival or disciplinary schema. Instead, the network of the inter-text subjects it to a multiplication of "authorship" as so many (possible) intrusions of the outside. In the context of Derrida's reading of the 'Reply', the latter *stretches* and *swells*, from taking into account the two people to whom Searle acknowledges a certain debt, as Derrida puts it, to the infinite expanse of 'the entire, more or less anonymous tradition of a code, a heritage, a reservoir of arguments [...] to which both interlocutors of the "confrontation" find themselves indebted.⁶

That the link of an utterance to a source of origin and destined address can never be fully secured is perhaps nowhere better exposed than in the theatre, where the production of speech as the seeming production of life itself is always already *souffled*, as Derrida puts it in an essay on Artaud, that is, 'spirited away', both *prompted* and *stolen*, notwithstanding the most radical efforts to prevent or overcome this

⁴ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 120.

⁵ *ibid*, 62.

⁶ *ibid*, 36.

structural state of affairs.⁷ The speech act theory of J.L. Austin, the initial topic of the “confrontation”, which conceives of an ideal scenario of a fully saturated context that would guarantee the success of a performative speech act without remainder, thus sees itself repeatedly forced to exclude an otherwise acknowledged possibility of a theatrical parasite able to undermine even the most serious intentions by relegating it to the status of the non-serious. Once however taken account of as a structurally necessary possibility and risk for the minimal functioning of the mark, the possibility of theatrical doubling always already threatens to unhinge the securities of the proper from within and the uncertain space of theatre becomes ubiquitous. The risk of the theatrical parasite no longer merely surrounds a place of contextual containment ‘like a kind of ditch or external place of perdition’, but intrudes upon it, like the outside on the ostensibly self-contained, and causes it to *swell* from within.⁸ Theatricality marks this intrusion of the outside on the inside that the split space of the theatre embodies, making of every mark a stage or rather *Schwelle* [rise, swelling, threshold], as Samuel Weber calls it with recourse to the writings of Walter Benjamin and always in proximity to a recasting of the traditional conception of a medium, ‘not in the sense of a transition or interval situated between two

⁷ In ‘La Parole Soufflée’ Derrida gives the following cursory account of a proposed understanding of the semantic field of *soufflé* in the context of his analysis of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty. ‘Spirited [*soufflé*]: let us understand *stolen* by a possible commentator who would acknowledge speech in order to place it in an order, an order of essential truth or of a real structure, psychological or other. The first commentator, here, is the reader or the listener, the receiver which the “public” must no longer be in the theater of cruelty. [...] Spirited [*Soufflé*]: at the same time let us understand *inspired* by an *other* voice that itself reads a text older than the text of my body or than the theater of my gestures. Inspiration is the drama, with several characters, of theft, the structure of the classical theater in which the invisibility of the prompter [*souffleur*] ensures the indispensable *différance* and intermittence between a text already written by another hand and an interpreter already dispossessed of that which he receives. Artaud desired the conflagration of the stage upon which the prompter [*souffleur*] spirited away [*soufflé*], wanted to plunder the structure of theft’. [Jacques Derrida ‘La parole soufflée’ in *Writing and Difference*, 212-245. (London: Routledge 2001), 220-1].

⁸ Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context’, *Limited Inc*, 17.

fixed points or places, but as a zone of indefinite expansion and inflation reaching out to others on whose response it depends'.⁹

Spectres of Bertolt Brecht

Throughout the following reflections on the citability of gesture, the signature of Bertolt Brecht constitutes a kind of privileged blind-spot, the most overtly missing link in any chain of filiation of an inherited debt. Although the concept of the gesture as it is here put to work begins its life as a more or less direct graft from the writings and theatrical experiments of Brecht in the work of Walter Benjamin – before its echo recedes further in Samuel Weber's reading of Benjamin's reading of Brecht – a genealogical account of this chain of filiation is never pursued directly. Instead, the figure of Brecht functions, not as a repressed source of origin, but as a faint or silent call of an always already distorted echo that keeps on returning it otherwise. Marking a displacement within the reference to what has preceded it, the echo returns the spectres of Brecht in what is always a more or less theatrical scenario, namely: staged, cited, orated, appropriated, interpreted, embodied in, through and by the writings of others who are in turn thereby *souffled*. In this scenario, Brecht's "own voice" – a phrase in which one must hear both the limited effects of his intentions as well as the singular ambiguity of his signature – will have always already been countersigned. Without thus taking recourse to Brecht "himself", that is, to a more direct encounter with his signature, I nevertheless want to briefly speculate on the selective movement of inheritance that informs his spectral returning as it is here read and restaged predominantly in the encounter with Walter Benjamin. Before turning to the latter context more directly and by way of its anticipation, I will take recourse to two other contexts that in their own style and scope seek to contribute to and reflect upon the afterlife of Bertolt Brecht.

⁹ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 235.

The *Lehrstück* at the Crossroads of Enlightenment and Uncertainty: Towards a Theatre of Co-production and Response-ability

First up, in a recent, small publication on theatre and ethics that is broad in scope and general in tone, Nicholas Ridout offers a brief yet insightful gloss on what he sees to be the dominant conflicting dimensions of Brecht's work. For Ridout, Brecht is standing at a crossroads, split between an emphatic commitment to Marxism and a theatrical practice put in the service of a rational demystification of illusionism on the one hand, and a laborious effort to practically experiment in open-ended conditions with a less linear, less teleologic and less universalizing potential of socio-political transformation on the other. Whereas the former could be said to 'place[...] his thought and work firmly on the side of progress' and enlightenment, as Ridout goes on to say, the latter embodies 'a deliberate courting of uncertainty'.¹⁰ 'Even in what are frequently viewed as his most doctrinaire, scientific-socialist hardliner works, the *Lehrstücke* ("Teaching Plays"),' Ridout asserts

[t]his uncertainty turns out to be at the core of his practice. Brecht's is at one and the same time a theatre of enlightenment modernity, ideologically committed to progress and to the realisation of universal goals, and a theatre that radically challenges the very structure of enlightenment thought, through an interest in process and openness [...].¹¹

In Ridout's proposed reading of the *Lehrstücke*, what at first sight often looks like a parable designed to teach the virtue of a certain cause of action on the level of content, quickly finds itself troubled by the form of

¹⁰ Nicholas Ridout, *Theatre & Ethics*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 45.

¹¹ *ibid*, 45-6.

its staging. What matters, ethically and politically, for Brecht and his inheritors, as Ridout proclaims, 'is what is done with theatre itself rather than what the theatre is about'.¹² The question that imposes itself on theatrical practice with and in the wake of Brecht 'is how you make it, and what relationships you establish in the making of it (between producers, consumers, actors, spectators, participants), [...] not what message or ideology you are trying to communicate'.¹³ The radical manner in which Brecht begins to experiment with the destabilisation of established relations of production and consumption indicates how the *Lehrstücke* 'were more complex and less didactic than they seem'.

As Reiner Steinweg has argued [...], these plays were actually intended as the basis for a process of ongoing rehearsal, in which all possible decisions and their consequences could be explored. The text is not a finished text but an open field for a process of improvisation, rewriting and discussion. This, rather than public performance, is how Brecht and his collaborators sought to create a theatre for its producers rather than for an audience of consumers. The practice of theatre becomes a collective labour of political and ethical exploration.¹⁴

Yet as part of his radical experiments with the apparatus of theatre under the banner of its 'refunctioning', Brecht not merely sought to interrupt the possibility of consumption by excluding a traditional audience from the event of theatre, but by transforming ordinary spectators into co-producers [*Mitwirkende*]. That, at least, is one of the arguments of Benjamin's famous rechanneling of Brecht in his 1934 lecture 'The Author as Producer'. Ridout too seems to suggest as much when he considers more recent concerns of performance and performance studies to put into play, identify and champion a 're-activation of the spectator'

¹² *ibid*, 49.

¹³ *ibid*.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 48.

that '[...] follows [...] a tradition which can readily be traced back through Brecht'.¹⁵ For Ridout, one such example can be found in Hans-Thies Lehmann's articulation of a theatrical '*politics of perception*' as an '*aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)*'.¹⁶ The fact that Lehmann identifies the latter in the context of theatre's proposed ability to intervene in a 'world' suffering from 'the politically malign consequences of [its] saturation [...] by media information' here furthermore recalls the very context in which Benjamin is often found to take recourse to Brecht or theatre more generally.¹⁷ For Lehman, in any case, as Ridout relates, theatre's ability to *intervene* in this context must not be sought at the level of a direct political effect but can be more adequately identified as an intervention 'at the level of 'perception'', that is, in its ability to '[activate] a capacity to respond (response-ability)'.¹⁸ In doing so it can offer an alternative experience of perception than that mediated by media, as Lehmann puts it, which he associates with a lack of 'connection between the receiving and sending of signs; [...] of a relation between address and answer'. Theatre's potential on the other hand lies precisely in challenging this ostensible disconnection by harnessing its capacity to 'move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre [...]', problematizing thereby the 'deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside'.¹⁹ 'Where the information *flows* of the global media typically preclude any response (other than by means of banal and pre-programmed interactivity),' Ridout sums up,

theatre makes the possibility of response central to the way it functions by placing actors and spectators in the same space as each other and permitting both to understand that the production

¹⁵ *ibid*, 59.

¹⁶ Lehman in *ibid*, 57, (original emphasis).

¹⁷ *ibid*, 57.

¹⁸ *ibid*.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

of images in the theatre is something in which they are collaborating.²⁰

In the context of Benjamin's writings on Brecht, a championing of the latter's experiments with the co-implication of actors and spectators in theatrical production are similarly employed in close proximity to a critical evaluation of a modern media apparatus. Here, a general concern with the means of production over the produced, with the mattering of the *how* over the *what*, splits into two distinct, albeit profoundly interrelated aspects: on the one hand, an active intervention in the institutional, socio-economic aspects of the relations of cultural production, and on the other, a philosophical critique and practical experiment with the formal aspects of representation in different media.²¹ As the previous formulation implies, in both instances it is

²⁰ *ibid*, 57-8, (my emphasis)

²¹ Derrida, in a brief commentary on Benjamin's politico-aesthetic attitude of refusing to merely supply an apparatus with a revolutionary content but to begin by analyzing and transforming it, gives the following sketch of the two aspects of the apparatus as I here seek to describe it: 'The apparatus in question involves not only technical or political powers, procedures of editorial or media appropriations, the structure of a public space (and thus of the supposed addressees one is addressing or whom one should be addressing); it also involves a logic, a rhetoric, an experience of language, and all the sedimentation this presupposes. [...]' [Derrida, 'The Deconstruction Actuality' in *Negotiations. Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*. ed. & trans by Elizabeth Rottenberg, 85-116. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002), 113].

The analysis and transformation of the apparatus that Benjamin calls for and demonstrates – that is, makes himself a model of by bearing 'the established codes of articulation to which one is necessarily submitted, but which are also susceptible to change' – amounts to an effort to expose and put into play the possibility of their de-sedimentation and deconstruction. Echoing Derrida's concerns with identifying a political gesture that is irreducible to the level of content, Samuel Weber distinguishes such 'bearing' – a term that must here recall the terminology of gesture in general and Benjamin's analysis of Brecht's rehearsable *Haltung* in particular – as a certain level of 'being political' from that of propositional statements and elates it to the political effectiveness of 'a certain thinking of virtuality, possibility, potentiality [...] – a certain virtualization of conceptualization itself [and] of "meaning"' [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 355]. A political

partially a matter of *matter*, that is, of exposing the opacity of the bodies of signifiers, institutions and technologies of inscription of all kinds. In his 1934 lecture ‘The Author as Producer’, held before the Paris-based Institute for the Study of Fascism, both of these aspects appear under the heading of Brecht’s concept of ‘refunctioning’ [*Umfunktionierung*], which has as its aim ‘the transformation of the *forms* and *instruments* of production’.²² Whether through the franchising of the means of production or the productive recasting of its forms, Brecht’s concept of *Umfunktionierung*, as Benjamin relates, ‘raises the far-reaching demand on intellectuals to no longer merely supply the apparatus of production, but to transform it as far as possible in accordance with the interests of socialism’.²³ Those interests, according to Benjamin’s text, might be summed up by what he designates with the concept of participation, collaboration or co-production [*mitwirken*]. For the transformation of the apparatus of production, Benjamin states, aims to provide other producers with an improved apparatus, that is, one that directs consumers towards production and is able to turn readers or spectators into participants [*Mitwirkende*].²⁴ The author as producer is thus never merely working on his products, but always and at the same time on the means of production. He does so by accompanying his disposition with a demonstration of the attitude, posture or pose [*Haltung*] by which one is to follow it. It is the model character of the production as demonstration rather than the experience of the work as such that here instructs but also entices others to produce and reproduce in turn, all the while providing them with an improved apparatus to do so.

effectiveness, Weber adds, that does seek to ‘dispense with more conventional forms of “political” analysis and interpretation, much less with “political *action*,” but that calls for the necessity of the latter to ‘affect and possibly transform the grids within which such actions and interpretations must be situated’ [ibid, 355].

²² Walter Benjamin, ‘Der Autor als Produzent’ in *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*, 683-701. edited by Rolf Tiedermann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 691.

²³ ibid, 691. Throughout, translations of Walter Benjamin are mine unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ ibid, 699.

What is at stake, here as elsewhere in Benjamin's inheritance of Brecht, is the becoming opaque of the medium and the production of what Samuel Weber calls in the context of his reading of Benjamin's writings on theatre 'the production of the theatrical process in its distinctive mediality – *Vorstellung* as *representing before* rather than simply as *representation* – [...]', 'the process of *representing* (*Vorstellung*) rather than the alternation of concrete representations'.²⁵ In the context of Benjamin's writings on Brecht's Epic Theatre, to which we will soon turn in more detail, these stakes are raised both in contestation to an Aristotelian tradition of drama that sought to render the medium of theatrical spectacle diaphanous and draw the spectator into and along with the progressive *flow* of narrated events, as well as increasingly to a modern media apparatus that similarly and dangerously, but never necessarily, precludes the capacity to respond to its relentless *flow* of 'information'. Whether thinking of the theatre or the new media, for Benjamin, the possibility of participation as response-ability is to be found in the aftermath of the interruption of a reproduced flow. The interruption of the concatenated structure of synthetic progression exposes the coming between of a spatial interval that begins to swell under the virtual intrusion of the outside, expanding and inflating any given context by reaching out to others on whose response it depends.

Bell-headed Pins of Distanciation: Reading the Noise of Means "Without" Ends

The second context employed here for the task of tracing possible trajectories of Brecht's spectral returning is Roland Barthes' essay 'Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity'. From the outset Barthes' essay perhaps provides us with an alibi for the very enterprise pursued here, namely, of evoking Brecht in the absence of his signature beyond any simple, violent but necessary considerations of

²⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 115.

economy. For, according to Barthes, Brecht ‘never allow[ed] himself the facility of *signing* the origin of his discourse [...]’ in any “first” place and time; neither in his own name, nor in the name of the ‘institution’ or ‘discipline’ of Marxism to which he was otherwise committed.²⁶ For Brechtian Marxism, as Barthes relates, eschews recourse to any Marxist catechism. For Barthes, Brecht is a permanent inventor *in* Marxism, who ‘re-invents quotations, accedes to the inter-text: “He thought in other heads; and in his own, others besides himself thought. This is true thinking.”’²⁷ More or less true to his own reflections on the inter-text elsewhere, Barthes does not here reference the quotation that he nevertheless puts in inverted commas.²⁸ Yet in another context he attributes the very same words to Brecht himself: ‘I would be so happy,’ he claims in an interview with Claude Jannoud from July 27th 1974, ‘if these words of Brecht could be applied to me: “He thought in the heads of others; and in his own, others than he were thinking. That is true thought”’.²⁹ In this somewhat theatrical *mis en scene* of a proliferation of heads thinking inside of other heads, an original source of thought becomes difficult if not impossible to locate. What shielded Brecht from the danger of an apologetic discourse, Barthes fittingly relates, was doubtless the theatrical form, ‘[...] since in the theatre, as in any text, the origin of the speech-act cannot be located: impossible the [...] collusion of subject and signified [...], or the – hoaxing – collusion of sign and referent [...];’³⁰ Theatre therewith comes to figure, not unlike in J.L. Austin’s analysis of speech acts – albeit no longer relegated to the status of a parasitism that it would be possible to ward off or overcome once and for all – as a paradigmatic space or context in which it is difficult, if not

²⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity’ in *Brecht, The Rustle of Language*, 212-222. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1992), 213.

²⁷ *ibid*, 213.

²⁸ See Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’ in *Image Music Text*, 155-164. (London: Fontana Press 1977), 160.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice. Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale. (New York: Hill and Wang 1992), 195.

³⁰ Barthes, ‘Brecht and Discourse’, 212-213.

impossible, to assure the link of an utterance to its source. The theatre turns out a paradigmatic place for the exposure of this structural state of affairs. In turn, where the latter is exposed outside the institution of theatre, theatricality ensues. For if the possibility of theatrical doubling that troubles the effects of (self-)presence can no longer be relegated to the status of an accident, the theatre begins to pervade even the most “serious” contexts of articulation. Barthes himself is quick to abstract a more generalised theatricality from the theatrical form as such, noting that even in his political essays, ‘Brecht never allows himself the facility of *signing* the origin of his discourse’.³¹

³¹ *ibid*, 213. A similar abstraction was already under way in the earlier, elliptical reference to the ‘text’, which – *like the theatre* – renders the collusion of subject and signified, sign and referent impossible. Here, it is perhaps worth conducting a brief detour via Barthes’ more elaborate reflections on the concept of the ‘text’ in his famous essay ‘From Work to Text’ as it further echoes with the absence of an identifiable source of origin of articulation and links it to the necessity of replacing a receptive attitude of consumption with that of production as we have seen it attributed to Brecht’s theatrical experiments above. ‘The intertextual in which every text is held [...],’ Barthes warns the reader there, ‘is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation;’ Instead, the citations, references, echoes, cultural languages from which the text is nevertheless entirely woven, ‘are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas’ [Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’, 160]. Whether or not we want to subscribe fully to Barthes’ professed warning against trying ‘to find the “sources” [and] “influences” of a work,’ Derrida’s more subtle analysis glossed above should have made it clear that any such endeavour cannot possibly reduce the ‘text’ once and for all to a single origin and that the theatrical parasite of a decontextualized repetition is a constitutive possibility of its limited function as ‘work’ in the “first” place. In Barthes’ oppositional schema, the ‘work’ is nevertheless what traditionally, in conjunction with the relatively recent institution of legal copyright, has sought to produce the effect of a strict filiation, demanding respect for an author’s intentions, as well as aiming to assert the legality of the relation of author to work as the condition of copyright law. The Text, on the other hand, as Barthes puts it, ‘reads without the inscription of the Father’ [*ibid*, 160-1]. Although the author may ‘come back’ in the Text, in his text, [...] he [...] does so as a ‘guest’ [*ibid*, 161]. In the encounter with an orphaned text, always already drifting away from the control of its author-Father, the respect paid or hospitality offered to the author’s possible return must thus at all points be negotiated. In other words, the Text necessarily

Following Barthes on Brecht, the threat of theatre and theatricality to the function of constative and performative utterances is critically put to work in a movement of distancing of marks from the elaborate layers of codes on which their contextual reception depends. In his early essay on 'What is Epic Theatre', Benjamin similarly describes such a movement of distancing in contestation to the illusory practice of a naturalistic stage that must repress its own awareness of being theatre to devote itself undistractedly to its goal of representing the real [*das Wirkliche*].³²

demands a labour of reception that cannot be reduced to the passivity of a mere consumption. Barthes drives home this point by asserting 'that the Text requires that one try to abolish (or at least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading [...] by joining them in a single signifying practice' [ibid, 162]. The latter formulation resonates with Derrida's conception of a paradoxical structure of the counter-signature that comes *before* the signature and thus, we might say in a different register, a 'reception' that 'produces' the 'work' out of the 'text', without however fully containing the latter's play. That the role and the force of the Derridian counter-signature also seeks to account for the historical codes of an instituted space of reception here chimes with the force of the 'text' as what John Mowitt, in a reading of Barthes' essay amongst many others, calls an 'anti-disciplinary object'. [John Mowitt, *TEXT. The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1992)]. In exposing the necessity of more or less instituted counter-signatures for the production of works, the Text is at the same time what will always remain in excess of the work, calling for its future reworking qua response-ability. Remaining in excess of its disciplinary capture, the Text works or plays 'afformatively' – a modality of performance that is demonstratively exposed to the coming of time beyond any limited effects of presence – before as well as within every work and thus lends itself to the critique and deconstruction of the fundamental historicity of any given disciplinary schema and is able to undermine all existing legal and linguistic institutions. In any case, abolishing the distance between reading and writing here seeks to contrast a practice of reading (well) in the sense of consumption with a practice of '*playing with the text*' that itself already plays. "Playing", Barthes elaborates, 'must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself *plays* (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and *the reader plays twice over*, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that that practice not be reduced to a passive, inner *mimesis* (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term' [Barthes, 'From Work to Text', 162 - my emphasis].

³² Walter Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (1)', *Versuche Über Brecht*, 7-21. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1966), 10.

Epic theatre's continual, living and productive awareness of itself as theatre, on the other hand, Benjamin suggests, enables it to treat the elements of the real for the purpose of a test-assembly. If its task must lie in depicting conditions [*Zustände*] rather than in developing actions, these conditions *stand* at the end and not at the beginning of such a test [*Versuch*]. 'They are not made accessible [*nahegebracht*, lit. brought near] to the spectator,' Benjamin concludes, 'but are distanced from him. He recognizes them as the true conditions [*die wirklichen Zustände*], not, as in the theatre of naturalism, with self-satisfaction but with astonishment'.³³ Barthes further describes Brecht's critical practice of distanciation as one that seeks to loosen and dissolve the stickiness of the logosphere and similarly links it to the affect and effect of a certain shock. 'Brecht's work seeks to elaborate a shock-practice [...] which opens a crisis: which lacerates, which crackles the smooth surface, which fissures the crust of languages,' he says, by distancing representation through 'a reading which detaches the sign from its effect'.³⁴ By detaching the sign from its effect, we might add, such a reading practice sees itself confronted with the *Schriftbild* [writing-image] of the body of a signifier severed from its present effects of signification. Suspended as a means poised in relation to the possibility of other effects of presence to come, the *Schriftbild*, to evoke a formulation of Weber, begins to dance under a readers' gaze. Brecht's exposition of the opacity of the means of mediation, the signifying body in its non-instrumental purity as a means without a once and for all determinable end, perhaps is able to facilitate such a dance.³⁵ Whether in the context of Brecht's discourse or theatrical

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Barthes, 'Brecht and Discourse', 213.

³⁵ Although the formulation – means without (determinable) end – is, to be sure, neither Benjamin's nor Barthes' on Brecht, it here nevertheless recalls another context of Benjamin's writings that seems closely related to the efforts at exposing the means of representation as both attribute it to Brecht, whether in the theatrical form of his discourse or the *Vorstellung* of his theatrical spectacles. That context is Benjamin's early essay on language, where he evokes a notion of 'pure language' that is not an instrument serving the end of communication, but consists in the ability of language to immediately communicate its own

experiments, the means of representations do not transparently give to view a represented content that could be cognized and consumed once and for all. Instead, the encountered must be read, as Barthes notes, twice over: a reading never of the thing itself but of a first reading that in its turn must be read. A similar demand is expressed in Weber's account of the 'shocks' and 'surprises' by which Epic Theatre paralyses a spectator's readiness to identify with the action by 'depriv[ing] empathy of its essential prerequisite: a well defined, self-contained place *into* which it can *feel* and project itself [...]. The representative, mimetic activity of epic theatre thus splits and turns back on itself,' Weber relates, 'retracing in this *double-take* an interval and a gap between the function of representing and that which is being represented'.³⁶ In doing so, Brecht's theatre and discourse could be said to facilitate what Weber calls elsewhere 'an encounter with language as a medium of excess'.³⁷ Brecht stages such an encounter, as Barthes elegantly relates it, by leaving the bell-headed pins of a Japanese dressmaker in his remaking of the logosphere, 'the signs furbished with their tiny jingle: thus, when we hear a certain language, we never forget where it comes from, how it was

communicability, or, as Weber translates it – stressing the implied movement of a separation from itself – its impartibility or possibility of parting with ("teilen = to part, "mit-" = with). Yet the quasi-transcendental movement of a departure that 'stays "with", as Weber points out, 'that from which it simultaneously departs' here begins to 'establishes a relation to itself as *other*' [Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 197]. Under the constitutive immediacy of its "-ability" to stay *with* that from which it parts, the "purity" of language as medium might thus here also be described as a *Schwelle* [swelling], that 'zone of indefinite expansion and inflation reaching out to others on whose response it depends' [ibid, 235]. As a medium it would be a 'means without end' only insofar, Weber relates 'as the word "without" defines a relation not of simple exclusion or negation, but of *participation* "with" the "out"-side of an irreducible and yet constitutive exteriority' [ibid, 197 - my emphasis].
³⁶ *ibid*, 106. The passage continues as follows: "The latter can never be fully absorbed into, or obscured by, the former, never allowed to become fully identical with it. And this must be seen not as a defect of theater, but as its resource and its reserve" [ibid, 106].

³⁷ Samuel Weber, "The Feel of "Today"", Transcript for talk given at The London Graduate School Summer Academy in the Critical Humanities on 26th of June, 2013.

made: the shock is a *reproduction*: not an imitation, but a production that has been disconnected, displaced: *which makes noise*'.³⁸ The noise of the ringing bell-pin here foregrounds the mediality of language – language *as medium* – and it does so, as Barthes suggests, by interrupting the successive, concatenated, 'pseudo-logic of the discourse – links, transitions, the patina of elocution, in short *the continuity of speech*' and its effect 'of a kind of force, [...] an illusion of assurance'.³⁹ Pushing Barthes' discourse beyond the context of his essay, or else, letting it swell by a certain intrusion of the outside, one might consider its critique of the illusory effects of an assurance caused by the 'continuity of speech' in light of Derrida's deconstructive analysis of the long history of a disavowal of spatiality in the phantasm of auto-affection associated with the transparency of the voice. For the illusory experience of the self-effacement of the signifying body in auto-affection, which 'necessarily *has the form of time and does not borrow from outside of itself*,' evokes similar assurances based on an ideal successive temporal flow.⁴⁰ Thus, Derrida is able to designate the phantasm and effect of pure temporality – the effacement of the signifier in the speaking voice – as 'the condition of the very idea of truth'.⁴¹ Although Barthes' reflections on error's mendacious production of an illusion of truth seems to want to hold on to an oppositional logic that is irreconcilable with Derrida's more paradoxical effort at exposing the necessarily illusory structure of the limited effects of truth itself, his description of the process of the truth's "unveiling" is perhaps nevertheless fitting in this context if applied beyond the opposition of fiction and non-fiction, truth and lie. "To unveil", Barthes says, 'is not so much to draw back the veil as to cut it to pieces'.⁴² For Barthes, the image of the veil is thus not primarily associated with an act of concealment, but with the *smooth*, the *sustained*,

³⁸ Barthes, 'Brecht and Discourse', 214 (original emphasis).

³⁹ *ibid*, 216 (my emphasis).

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1998), 20.

⁴¹ *ibid*.

⁴² Barthes, 'Brecht and Discourse', 216.

the *successive*. To attack the latter, Barthes notes, 'is to separate the fabric, to tear apart the folds of the veil'.⁴³ If what is revealed by such perforations, is the error of the ideal of truth itself, Barthes' rhetoric could be said to find an echo in Derrida's widespread considerations of the breach, crack, rupture, fissure, split, hole and opening in all that is ostensibly self-contained. In any case, '[t]he critique of the *continuum* (here applied to discourse),' Barthes relates, 'is a constant one in Brecht'.⁴⁴ 'Brecht's theatre,' he goes on to explain,

is a series (not a consequence) of cut-up fragments deprived of what in music is called the Zeigarnik effect (when the final resolution of a musical sequence retroactively gives it its meaning). Discontinuity of discourse keeps the final meaning from "taking": critical production does not wait – it will be instantaneous and repeated: this is the very definition of epic theatre according to Brecht.⁴⁵

The *Ausfall* [failure] of a Zeigarnik Effect and the *Einfall* [intrusion] of the Beyond

In Barthes' account, the discontinuity of discourse prevents a final meaning from "taking", that is, to be sure, from taking place, once and for all, but also from being 'taken in', or else, from being consumed, appropriated, remembered-digested [*erinnert*] or read well, understood or grasped [*begriffen*] once and for all. One cannot simply, passively take it in [*ein-nehmen*] by merely perceiving it [*wahr-nehmen*] as a (represented) reality or truth [*Wahrheit*], an objective identity or a transcendental meaning that is at all times present and to which a

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

cognitive subject has merely to arrive there where it has always been.⁴⁶ Nor is it possible, as Benjamin points out with regards to the disturbances of discontinuity in Epic Theatre, to evoke a reader's readiness of empathetic identification. Brecht disturbs the possibility of identification, understanding or consumption, as we have seen, by employing a double-take – the retracing of an interval and a gap between the function of representing and that which is being represented – demanding that every sign be read twice over, 'giv[ing] us to read [...], by a kind of disengagement,' as Barthes puts it, 'the reader's gaze, not directly the object of his reading; for this object reaches us only by the act of intellection (an alienated act) of a first reader who is already on the stage'.⁴⁷ Although Brecht, as Benjamin relates, often considered accompanying the occurrences on the stage with the presence of a detached third party as a sober observer or "thinker", the first reader of his theatre is always already the body of the actor distancing himself from his role, speech and action by his 'play-acting' [*Theaterspielen*].⁴⁸ Thus despite Benjamin's own didactic example of an onstage intrusion of a stranger upon the familiar bourgeois family scene as the cause for the effect of alienation and the concomitant exposition, doubling, splitting and troubling of the gaze of the spectator, it does not necessarily depend on such a device. Instead, it is the '*Vorstellung* [representing-before] of *Theaterspielen* [lit. playing theatre]' itself, in other words, the exposition of the language of theatre in its distinctive mediality, which gives reading to be read.⁴⁹ '[T]he actor', Benjamin states, 'must reserve for himself the possibility to skilfully *fall* out of the role' and 'insist at a given moment to play [himself] the thinker (about his part)'.⁵⁰ What facilitates this fall, is the (self-)interruption of an (intentional) act.

⁴⁶ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 298-9.

⁴⁷ Barthes, 'Brecht and Discourse', 219.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (2)' in *Versuche über Brecht*, 22-30. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1966), 24.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 29 & Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 115.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 29 (my emphasis).

For Benjamin, it is precisely such an interruption of an agent in his ostensible autonomous agency that produces the gesture as the defining aspect of Brecht's theatre, the coming between of an immediate mediacy of a pose and attitude [*Haltung*] as a spatial form of retention. '[...] Epic theatre is by definition gestural. For the more we interrupt an agent, the more gestures we obtain'.⁵¹ Here as elsewhere, Benjamin's concept of 'interruption', as Samuel Weber has pointed out, finds its filial link in the Hölderlinian notion of "caesura". Benjamin defines the latter elsewhere as a counter-rhythmical interruption that becomes noticeable in the *falling* silent of the hero in tragedy, the contestation in the rhythm of a hymn and finally and most accurately as the invasion [*einfallen*] of *something beyond* the writer into the writing.⁵² In the theatre, such an invasion or intrusion [*Hereinfallen*] of a beyond as the result of an interruption of continuity finds itself temporarily embodied by an audience asked to participate in the production of singularly discontinuous fragments in their contextual relationality. If the interruption of acting agents produces Epic Theatre's gestures, it is what Benjamin with Brecht calls the 'citability of gesture' that immediately exposes their structural non-identity and appeal to the relational matrix of response-ability. As the singularity of this contextual relation, however, paradoxically depends on the possibility of the gesture's altered repetition in other contexts to come, the *-ability* of a response never merely lies with any one present audience. Instead, the intrusion of the beyond on the ostensibly self-contained, of the outside on the inside, constitutes an immediate (virtual) intrusion of the future on any given present that finds "itself" exposed in its structural non-identity to the possibility of an open-ended transformation. The theatrical scene begins to swell and stretch under the appeal [*Einspruch*] to the coming of other respondents, the virtual possibility of its graft in a 'space of alterity'. Although '[i]n the theatre', as Weber relates, 'such a space of alterity is

⁵¹ *ibid*, 27.

⁵² Walter Benjamin, 'Goethes Wahverwandtschaften' in *Gesammelte Schriften Band I*, 125-201. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 182 (my emphasis).

always *provisionally* embodied in and, even more, *exposed* as an “audience” – singular noun for an irreducibly heteroclitite stand-in, [t]he “audience” [merely] stands in, for the others, those who were and those who will be – and perhaps even more for those who will never come to be’.⁵³

Gesture, Interruption, Citability: Walter Benjamin’s Writings on Epic Theatre and the Virtuality of Media

If the signature of Brecht here encounters us exclusively through its more or less distorted echo in the counter-signature of others – from Ridout to Barthes to Benjamin – the encounter with Benjamin’s writings on Brecht will in turn already be inextricably caught up with their own echo in the writings of one of their most admirable contemporary readers: Samuel Weber. Following what we might call with Benjamin himself the afterlife or living-on of an ‘original’ text is perhaps not altogether unjustified in a context – namely, the *citability of gesture* – which pursues a logic of repeatability that accounts for the possibility of the gesture’s repetition in a coming space of alterity from “its” beginning. What is more, as Weber points out, the ‘history of Benjamin’s attempt to pose the question “What is Epic Theatre?” is itself marked by the very traits that constitute his response to it: *gesture, interruption, and citability*. The two essays with the same title written eight years apart, as well as the citations and reworkings of parts of the original text for other occasions in the intervening period, already make for a history of citation and recitation, re-inscription and transformation that can be read as a *demonstration* of that of which Benjamin is writing. A demonstration that follow Benjamin’s own appeal in ‘The Author as Producer’ – one of the most famous occasions for ‘What is Epic Theatre?’s intermediate reworking – namely, that the producer must not work merely on his product but simultaneously on the means and modes of production. For

⁵³ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341,

Benjamin, the work *on* rather than *for* a given apparatus, begins to expose the latter's mediacy by divorcing it from the instrumental grip of a determining relation to an end. Contesting a tradition that seeks to conceive of an ostensible transparency of media, Benjamin both describes and demonstrates the stakes of the latter's fundamental opaqueness and spatiality. Here, the medium is what 'comes between,' as Weber describes it, 'everything that would be present to itself,' interrupting and bringing to a standstill 'what we commonly think of as the "flow" of "life"'.⁵⁴ Such a conception of the still-standing opacity of the medium interrupting the flow of life perhaps finds its distorted echo in Jacques Derrida's description of the *spacing* of time and life's precarious structure of 'survival'. The fact that Derrida himself sought not merely to describe but also to demonstrate the effects of spacing in his own writings furthermore warrants the following of their loose link with Benjamin's work as it is here pursued.⁵⁵ Following this link, the double movement of Derrida's logic of spacing begins to resonate with a similar dynamic inscribed in Benjamin's concept of the 'citability of gesture'. For if the movement of 'time becoming space' seems to find its correlate in the suspended standstill of life's interrupted flow, the immediate counter-rhythm of 'space becoming time' as the result of a structural iterability that 'disrupts 'the classical oppositions of [...] the factual and the possible (or the virtual), necessity and possibility,' as Derrida puts it, begins to resonate with 'what, for Benjamin,' as Weber states, 'from his very earliest writings to his last, can be designated as the *virtuality of media*, *media as virtuality*,' of which the citable gesture is a crucial articulation.⁵⁶ For Benjamin, as Weber explains, '[t]he medium is

⁵⁴ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 113.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 113.

⁵⁶ *ibid* & Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 48. In terms that strongly echo Benjamin's discussion of the citability of gesture, in 'Signature, Event, Context', Derrida says of the written sign that it 'carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organising the moment of its inscription' [Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context' in *Limited Inc*, 1-23. (Illinois: Northwestern University Press 1990), 9]. 'This breaking force,' he continues, 'is not an accidental predicate but the very

never simply actual, never simply real or present, much less “the message” that it seems to convey. Rather, it consists in the suspension of all messaging and in the virtuality that ensues’. [...] This is why the medium’, Weber continues with a formulation that recalls Derrida’s uncertainties with regards to his “confrontation” with John R. Searl with which these reflections began, ‘in this sense, is never an *element* in which things would take place, would take *their* place’.⁵⁷ Yet if the flow of life, whether in Benjamin’s or Derrida’s constative accounts, is necessarily interrupted by the coming between of media, the latter nevertheless seemingly lend themselves to be put to work in the illusory reproduction of this ostensible flow, whether in the form of old media – qua ‘continuity of speech’, the concatenated structure of discourse, the incessant flow of information of the press apparatus, as well as, as we will soon see, the dramatic tradition of representational arrangements of actions into a plot – or indeed the more sophisticated reproduction technologies of the new media: film, phonography and their most potent application in the (re)production of an ostensible flow of radio and tele-vision. In light of

structure of the written text’. It concerns both a “real” context – a certain “present” of the inscription that must abandon the mark to its essential drift – as well as any internal semiotic context that limits the determination of the mark. As ‘a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted [...] without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning,’ Derrida says, ‘[o]ne can perhaps further *come to recognise other possibilities in it* by inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains’ [ibid, my emphasis]. What is more, Derrida describes the force with which the mark ruptures any “originary” context in terms that here must recall the typographic discreteness of the gesture’s of Epic theatre, that is, the clearly framed pose [*Haltung*] with a discernible beginning and end that the actor must be able to block out like a typesetter the words [Benjamin, *Versuche Über Brecht*, 27]. For Derrida, in any case, contextual rupture is ‘tied to the spacing that constitutes the written sign: spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its disengagement and graft) but also from all forms of present reference (whether past or future in the modified form of the present that is past or to come), objective or subjective’ [Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context’, 9-10]. In its structural ability to separate from its context, the mark necessarily departs from itself, that is, the possibility of its drift undermines from the start any claims to its self-identity.

⁵⁷ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 113.

the powerful effects of presence intrinsic to the reproduced flows of different forms of mediation, it is thus never enough to expose a medium's opacity on a mere descriptive level, but equally necessary to practically intervene on the level of its operation, in other words, to perforate the smoothness of its flow and expose the phantasm of its ostensible transparency. In this vain, Benjamin's writings on Epic Theatre are largely concerned with Brecht's insight into the political necessity of interrupting the constructed flow of an action and its narrative representation in order to expose the coming between of a scenic medium in its non-transparent spatiality. However, before elaborating on Epic Theatre's complex relation to the dramatic tradition from which it seeks to set itself apart – evoking therewith the possible analysis of different traditions of interpreting theatre itself as medium – I want to briefly reflect on Benjamin's insistent transfer of the very same terms of the debate to the context of the new media of his time, most notably, here, in the context of a discussion of the necessity of interrupting the medial flow, by looking at his work for and on the radio.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Benjamin's engagement with film and its technique of montage, on the other hand, is indeed not so much concerned with the possibility of employing the latter in the production of continuity but, to the contrary, focus on its effects of discontinuity and the clashing of heterogeneities. Indeed, Benjamin's reflections on Epic Theatre's stop-starting discontinuous series of clearly defined spatio-temporal fragments, likens its movement to that of the images of a filmstrip. In parts this may have to do with the rudimentary development of the technological apparatus available at the time, as well as a particular focus on a specific potential use of film over another. Yet it may also largely have been applied with respect to examples of film that were not yet fully able to harness the unique effects of presence that come from combining the reproduced continuities of image and sound in the service of a constructed phantasm of the flow of life. A flow as it has perhaps become prevalent in today's commercial narrative cinema, and as it has been applied most potently in today's "live" televisual broadcasting.

A Racket About Kasperl: Exposing the Noise of Mediacy

Benjamin's reflections on the "new media" themselves often take place in close proximity to his analysis of Epic Theatre and are generally keen to establish a series of trans-medial links that identify the return and transformation of the "same" conflictual dynamics at work across medial forms of different periods of technological development. In this context, Brecht's theatre often turns out as a venerable test-site for the notably inter-medial practice of exposing a generalised mediacy of the medial. In any case, the inter-medial aspects of Benjamin's reading of Epic Theatre defy progressive narratives of a decisive break between tradition and its transformation, as Weber insists, but identify the break as always already at work within that tradition itself.⁵⁹ That Benjamin's reflections on Epic Theatre's efforts of interrupting the flow of life would often take place in close proximity to a consideration of radio, may furthermore bespeak a certain awareness that the effects of presence in the reproductions of an ostensible flow of life are perhaps nowhere more palpably felt than in the technological reproduction of the voice.⁶⁰ Theoretically and practically reflecting on the possibilities for what he calls, for instance, 'the mutual control of [theatre and radio's] educational program,' the radio is to become a privileged site for Benjamin's own efforts to follow the model character of Brecht's *Haltung* by playfully 'refunctioning' its means of production through his own work in broadcasting.⁶¹ Critical of the noble standards of education of radio in the Weimar Republic, as Katja Rothe relates, Benjamin's radio play 'Radau um Kasperl' [A racket about Kasperl], for instance, constitutes an

⁵⁹ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 95-96.

⁶⁰ On this latter point, from a deconstructive point of view, see Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media*. (Fordham: Fordham University Press 2011), 139-151.

⁶¹ Benjamin 'Theater and Radio' in *Walter Benjamin, The work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty & Thomas Y. Levin, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone & Howard Eiland, 393-396. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2008), 393.

‘exercise [*Übung*] in the use of the new medium’ that displays a subversive taste for noisy purposelessness and undermines ‘the self-image of radio turned with instructional intent towards a willing mass of learners’.⁶² Kasperl, the play’s central character, who annexes the radio station to deliver a verbal slap to his old friend Seppel, as Rothe puts it: ‘is interference, interruption, “*Zäsur*” [caesura]’. In the very sense of the intrusion [*Hereinfallen*, lit. ‘falling-into’]’ by which Benjamin designates this term, Kasperl counter-rhythmically interrupts the radio program. Like the noise of the bell-headed pins that Barthes identified as disrupting the concatenated assurances of discourse in Brecht, here, interference, noise and static expose the radio ‘as a medium that frees itself from the grip of the symbolic’.⁶³ Instead, it is exposed as non-instrumental means, no longer merely and seemingly communicating [*mitteilen*] an educational content, but imparting [*mitteilen*] itself precisely as a technology of imparting [*Technik der Mitteilung*].⁶⁴ In doing so it comes between, not only the ostensible self-presence of speech of those speaking on the radio, but the illusory assurance of their transparent mediation. The medium of radio – as we might here put it in a register that recalls Derrida’s efforts to displace the conception of another medium, namely, ‘the currently accepted concept of writing’ – is thus ‘no longer comprehensible in terms of [a] communication in the limited sense of a transmission of meaning, [... and can] no longer be reduced to a mere means, however potent, extending enormously, if not infinitely, the domain of oral or gestural communication’.⁶⁵

Having already sought to interrupt radio’s concatenated flow of (educational) information by the intrusion of a noisy purposelessness, Benjamin’s play further troubles its illusory assurance of the link of an utterance to its source with a final twist of its narrative. To his own and

⁶² Katja Rothe, ‘Nicht-Machen. Lassen! Zu Walter Benjamin’s pädagogischem Theater’ in *Ökonomien der Zurückhaltung: Kulturelles Handeln zwischen Askese und Restriktion* ed. by Barbara Gronau, Alice Lagaay 331-349. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2010), 333.

⁶³ *ibid*, 334.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 336.

⁶⁵ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 3.

the listeners surprise, at the end of the play, Kasperl awakes in his bed to find that in his absence radio employees had installed a microphone, undetected, in his house and recorded his telling of tales to his wife, now pressed onto forever repeatable records. The play ends with a demonstration of this very feat by repeating a passage previously heard under the assumption of its “liveness”. Here, the dramaturgical device of a repetition, not unlike that employed in Brecht’s theatre, exposes the spectacle of Kasperl’s racket and interference as an effect of transfer and retention, or what Rothe calls ‘the live-effect of radio’.

The radiophonic Kasperl-theatre reveals itself in its mediacy [Mittelbarkeit], in its medial conditions and abysses. For in the end it becomes unclear what it is, after all, that one hears. Something appears on the stage of the local radio station that is not there, that is elsewhere, of which no one knows, if it is now or past, immediate experience of the live [*Live-Erlebnis*] or stored recordings. Instead of ontological security, what appears [*tritt auf*] in the radio is the recording as recording. The radio-play presents itself [*stellt sich [...] vor*] as radio-play.⁶⁶

Affirmative Exappropriation

Exposing a process of *representing-before* (*vor-stellen*) that eschews the assured alternation of concrete representations taking place in the element of a transparent medium, the double-take of the *Vorstellung* of the radio-play as radio-play demands of its listeners to ‘read’ twice over, compelling her or him to take up an attitude, not only to the reproduced content, but to the excess of a self-imparting mediacy. Following a pedagogical concept that aims, in opposition to Weimar radio’s alignment with classical educational contents, as Rothe suggests, ‘at practicing [*Einüben*] a “new attitude”’, it purports the performative

⁶⁶ Rothe, 339.

appropriation of a new medium in the medium'.⁶⁷ In doing so, it follows a didactic program that Benjamin discerned in the theatrical experiments of Brecht and himself developed in his essay on a proletarian children's theatre. Yet the 'performative appropriation' of a medium that can no longer be construed as a means to an end must necessarily be accompanied by a simultaneous attitude [*Haltung*] of what we might designate as an 'afformative' 'exappropriation'. Whereas the latter term, borrowed from Derrida, describes 'the necessary failure in the movement of appropriation to interiorize that which remains outside, over there, always out of reach,'⁶⁸ the former comes close to the order of an attitude and describes a certain performativity before or beyond the performative, the 'pre-positional, pre-performative – and, in this sense, afformative [mediality]' of technologies of imparting that Werner Hamacher identifies and locates with recourse to Benjamin's theory of language and violence 'as prior to and in instrumentality'. '[N]ever primarily or exclusively the means to projected ends or the imposition of such ends [...],' Hamacher relates with a formulation that rings with a politics of bell-headed pins of distanciation, 'imparting is a means which has no need of positings and *which may undermine any established linguistic, political or legal institution at any time*'.⁶⁹ Benjamin develops his theory of an irreducible mediality qua impart-ability in his early essay 'On language as such and the language of Man' from 1916. It is here, as Samuel Weber relates, in his efforts to elaborate a noninstrumental conception of language rather than in his later studies of radio, film and photography that his concern with the "media" originates.⁷⁰ The early study on language, as Weber suggests, 'leads Benjamin to insist on the irreducible immediacy of the medial,' as it has here been pursued in the context of Epic Theatre and the citability of gesture.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 340.

⁶⁸ De Armit, 132.

⁶⁹ Werner Hamacher, 'Afformative Strike: Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' in *Destruction & Experience*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, 108-136. (Manchester: Clinamen Press 2000), 115 (my emphasis).

⁷⁰ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 118.

The “medial” is “immediate” in the sense of not being instrumental. The media must above all be distinguished from the means. This does not, however, make it an *end in itself*, unless “end” is understood not as *goal*, but as *interruption*.⁷¹

Interrupting the Ostensibly Transparent Flow of Mediation: Epic Theatre, Deconstruction and the Aristotelian Heritage

It is precisely under the banner of such an interruption that Benjamin elliptically differentiates Brecht’s theatre from Aristotle’s conception of drama and links it to the practice of exposing the non-instrumental immediacy of the medial aspects of theatrical spectacle. Brecht’s non-Aristotelian dramaturgy does not however simply contest its Aristotelian heritage, but repeats it otherwise – following a strategy of ‘transformational citation’, as Weber relates, that performs one of the central themes of the essays themselves. It does so by severing the interruption of the “reversal” [*parapeteia*] from its end in catharsis, ‘the discharge of affects through empathy with the moving fate of the hero’.⁷² Such an end simply ‘fell off and away’ [*fiel fort, fiel weg*], Benjamin says with an expression that links the *Einfall* of the caesura – both interruption (of the flow) and intrusion of the outside on the ostensibly self-contained – with a constitutive *Ausfall* [failure] of eschatology, the absence, so to speak, of a Zeigarnik effect of a plot that fails to unfold itself as ‘a sequence of events with beginning, middle, and end, adding up to an integrated, meaningful whole’.⁷³ The gesture, as the definitive trait of Epic Theatre, is what is constituted by and as this very interruption. What it interrupts, Weber relates, is that ‘which ever since Aristotle has been considered to form the primary object of theatre as a dramatic *genre*: namely, *action*. Or more precisely: *plot*’.⁷⁴ It is precisely such an

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater (2)’, 25.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁴ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 98.

action and its narrative representation that Brecht's Epic Theatre, as a theatre of *gesture, interrupts*.⁷⁵ What is already implicit in Benjamin's text becomes more elaborately explicated in Weber's re-reading of Aristotle and Benjamin in light of the latter's writings on Brecht. In Weber's account, Aristotle's purported convergence of "reversal" [*peripeteia*] and "recognition" [*anagnōrisis*] seeks to imbue tragedy with a meaningful unity that may elevate it from the otherwise contingent medium of theatrical spectacle. Aristotle therewith wants to construe the medium of theatrical spectacle as a mere means to an end, a scenic medium that 'allows mimesis [...] to *take place*, but only to the extent that it fades into pure transparency. [...]'.⁷⁶ Not only is this conception of theatre concomitant with Aristotle's definition of media in general, but also, as Weber points out, 'will [it] become the traditional conception of "media" as such',⁷⁷ namely, as a transparent 'spatial interval between two points, generally an emitter and receiver, or correlatively, a manifestation and its reception [...] bridg[ing] the distance between the two, between origin and end, departure and arrival, and thereby allow[ing] an indirect contact, a transmission or communication, to take place'.⁷⁸ Derrida, as we have already seen, questions the place and the taking place of a communication thus construed and seeks to displace a 'currently accepted concept of writing' that he identifies in precisely the terms of the Aristotelian medium, namely, as a 'communication in the limited sense of a transmission of meaning, [...] a mere means, however potent, extending enormously, if not infinitely, the domain of oral or gestural communication'.⁷⁹ In Derrida's analysis, the medium is construed this way by and rendered more or less acceptable for a phonocentric tradition that seeks to adopt the seeming priority of the voice in its illusory or phantasmatic experience of a pure temporality as the ideal of signification in general, in other words, of the experience of

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 99.

⁷⁶ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 101.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 100.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 101.

⁷⁹ Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', 3.

the effacement of a signifier able to give access to the productive source of signification itself. The deconstruction of phonocentrism can thus be recast as a critique of the seeming transparency of the medium of the voice in its ostensible proximity to the flow of a self-archiving life: 'pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside itself [...]'.⁸⁰ If this phantasm of the purity of temporal self-relation, as Naas summarizes Derrida's argument, 'is radically contradicted by 'time' itself, [and] repetition, space, exteriority, and the other are also essential to the constitution of time [...]', then the phantasmatic experience of life's ostensible flow will have always already been mediated.⁸¹ For Derrida, as Naas relates with recourse to the latter, 'the choice is not between media and presence' [...], because 'the presentation of presence itself supposes a mediatic structure'.⁸² Deconstruction insists on the opacity of all forms of mediation, which, modelled on the ideal conception of a pure temporality, more or less convincingly "pretend" to efface the coming between of a technological apparatus and structure of reproduction in order to present a simulacrum of "real presence".⁸³ Following Samuel Weber's account, the

⁸⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 20.

⁸¹ Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 146.

⁸² *ibid*, 150.

⁸³ Michael Naas, in reflecting on Derrida's expressed fascination with television, traces a spectrum of continuity from the voice to TV as two examples of media with a unique power to seemingly efface the means and modes of their production, or more precisely, of their reproduction. The unique power of television, for Derrida, according to Naas, lies in its ability to present the simulacrum of live presence by linking the image to the voice and the voice to a live event. In doing so, as Derrida puts it, television always involves a protest against television and purports to show the thing itself, "live," directly, effacing the technological apparatus and the structure of reproduction that made it possible [*ibid*, 140]. Here, the technological advancement of writing technologies extends the phantasm of the voice as an auto-affective medium qua sound-recording and, linked to the image, pretends to give access to the productive source of signification itself. The language of a putative transparency, self-effacement and presumed auto-affection applied to the unique power of television, as Naas notes, are precisely those used by Derrida to develop a critique of phonocentrism at the very origin of deconstruction. For the voice, in Derrida's earliest analysis, has always already presented itself

tradition of such a simulated effacement can at least be traced back to Aristotle's efforts to subsume the scenic medium of theatre – *opsis* – to *synopsis*, 'the act of taking in the spectacle "with a single view", or else 'as a means of perception, of vision, and of understanding'.⁸⁴

Dialectic at a Stand-Still: Reading Against the Flow and Grain of Meaning

If Aristotelian drama legitimises the scenic medium of theatre only as synopsis and locates the essence of the 'theatron' in the synthesis of perception that it permits, the gestural form of Epic Theatre, as Benjamin relates it, interrupts the consequent sequence of dramatic events and fixes them into a suspended series of frame-like enclosures or *Haltungen* [stilled poses and/or attitudes]. The ensuing tension between stillness and temporal flux creates a rhythm of discontinuity that moves forward in jolts and jerks, as Benjamin puts it, 'comparable to the images of a filmstrip'. 'The basic form of Epic Theatre,' Benjamin says, 'is that of the shock with which the single contrasting situations of the play clash with one another'.⁸⁵ The fact that the stilled gesture fragment is thus nevertheless caught up within a "living flux," Benjamin calls 'one of the dialectical founding features of the gesture'.⁸⁶ Benjamin's "dialectic," however, as Weber reminds us, 'here as elsewhere, is very different from the more familiar Hegelian category, which always has the synthesis of conceptual comprehension as its informing and ultimate goal'.⁸⁷ Instead, the fixation the gesture establishes through its interruption of an

'in a way that seems to efface its signifying body, that is, its' dead, mechanical body, giving access to the thing itself' [ibid, 145]. In hearing oneself speak the signifier would become perfectly diaphanous due to the absolute proximity to the signified, in a temporal process of signification purified of all exteriority or spatiality.

⁸⁴ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 99 & 101.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (2)', 29.

⁸⁶ ibid, 32.

⁸⁷ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 100.

intentional, goal directed movement remains suspended and ‘singularly extended’ qua citability. For, as Weber continues ‘insofar as it is citable, the gesture interrupts *itself*, and indeed only “is” in its possibility of becoming other, of being transported elsewhere’.⁸⁸ Not only does it interrupt the constructed flow of narrative, suspend the rush to judgement and derange the desire for identification, but also does it *initiate*, as Weber formulates it, a different sort of movement, marked by a virtual possibility not dependent on its actual realisation. Distancing or separating itself from itself, the citable gesture exposes the breach that structures its present and immediately begins to gesture towards its possible transformation in time and space. A possibility that comes between “it-self”, interrupts the gesture’s immediate manifestation, and constitutes it as something, as Weber says, that cannot simply be seen or understood.⁸⁹ In other words, it cannot be captured or seized (*-ceptum*), rendered possessible as an object of cognition in accordance with a model of perception as a ‘moving through (*per-*) something to arrive at what lies behind it’.⁹⁰ Instead, following a demand for a notably different activity, it must be read. Although for one who is reading, Weber says, cognitions are also indispensable, ‘they do not provide anything to hold on to’.⁹¹ In the context of his reflections on his own experience of reading Benjamin, Weber likens the situation of a reader to ‘someone who stares at things until they begin to dance. But instead of disclosing their essence through their dance, they seem to “implode,” collapsing into an endless interior space and becoming “secret signs” (*Geheimzeichen*)’.⁹² The latter term, borrowed from Benjamin, is also employed by the latter in a theatrical context to which I will turn in more detail later on, namely, the essay on a ‘Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre’. There, Benjamin links the secrecy of the signal to the coming of the future with a formulation that itself perhaps begins to

⁸⁸ *ibid*, 103.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 113.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, 298.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 298-9.

⁹² *ibid*, 299.

dance upon being read. When thinking about the child's genius of variation, Benjamin writes of a 'secret signal [*geheimes Signal*] of the to-come [*des Kommenden*] that speaks from the gesture of the child'.⁹³ With reference to the brief passage from 'Short Shadows' under the heading of the *Geheimzeichen*, Weber further links the activity of reading to what we might call a counter-rhythm to the progressive flow of cognitions. 'Not the progress from cognition to cognition is decisive,' he quotes Benjamin, 'but rather the crack and leap – the *Sprung* – in each one individually'.⁹⁴

To negotiate the crack and take the leap is to read. To read then is *not to go with the flow, as one speaks – or believes that one speaks –* but rather groping, stumbling, interrupting oneself, like an older person whose sight has weakened bends over a text, following its movement with her fingers, always stopping anew, but only in order to continue. Such reading goes against the grain of meaning, so that the text does not disappear into it but remains as figure: as writing-image (*Schriftbild*).⁹⁵

The gestures of Epic Theatre, which stand still and suspended in the interrupted flow of the sequence of events do not give passage to a perceptive movement through them that would arrive at what lies behind, for instance at the end of a plot's resolution, but instead are imbued with the spatio-temporal status of a remaining as figure or image that survives, qua citability, the singular space of its staging. In order to render gestures citable, Benjamin says precisely with reference to a certain *Schriftbild*, the actor of Epic Theatre must be able to block out his gestures [*Gebärden*] like a typesetter his words.⁹⁶ One way to accomplish this, he adds, is for the actor to cite his own gestures. Brecht himself has

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, 'Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters', *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*, 763-767. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 769.

⁹⁴ Benjamin cited in Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 299.

⁹⁵ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

⁹⁶ Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (2)', 27.

described the latter device to the role of footnotes in a text, which in the theatre are provided for a relaxed spectator alongside the habit of turning back in order to check a point.⁹⁷ The relaxed audience of Epic Theatre, no longer tensely following the flow of (represented) events, is a reading one. Intervals between discontinuous fragments of the remains of a plot, force an audience to take up a position [*Stellungnahme*] with regards to the interrupted scene and its mode of representation. Caught up in the movement of the immediate mediacy of the clearly framed spatio-temporality of the gesture as theatrical medium, of the virtuality that ensues from its appeal to response-ability beyond any given response, the place of this position or stance [*Stellungnahme*] though turns out anything but secure. For if the audience, like the gesture itself, merely stands-in, as Weber asserts, the positing [*setzen*] of their response immediately finds itself deposited [*entsetzt*]. Theirs is an encounter with the theatrical medium as excess and *Schwelle*. 'The citability of gesture,' Weber says, 'interrupts its immediate manifestation and constitutes it as interruption, which is to say, as something that cannot simply be seen, but that can give rise to *Nachdenken*, to after-thoughts,' for which reading, Weber suggests, is another word.⁹⁸

Such thoughts, Weber states, 'consider the "after," the aftermath, the *citability* of the gesture as disjunctive and discontinuous. Through this disjunction, the essence of the gesture resides in its tendency to always come too late, and yet at the same time never to arrive fully; it belongs to the future, never simply to the present or to the past. The mode of being that characterizes this disjunctive theatre of the future, therefore, is not that of "necessity" or of "probability," as Aristotle insisted, but rather that of "possibility" both as potentiality and as alterity: the possibility of becoming other than what is currently present or presented.

⁹⁷ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched - Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*. (Cambridge: The Mit Press 2008), 63.

⁹⁸ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 105.

But this future is not what one expects, which one hopes to foresee, to calculate or even to bring about. It is unforeseeable, unpredictable, unfathomable. Writing of the indispensable freedom of such theatre to alter “historical processes” in their staging, Benjamin observes that the “accents must be placed not upon those momentous decisions that are located at the vanishing points of expectation [*Fluchtlinien der Erwartung*], but on the incommensurable, the singular. ‘It can happen this way, but it can also come about in an entirely different manner’ – this is the basic attitude of anyone writing epic theatre’. Paradoxically, perhaps, what epic theatre does in bringing a certain history to a standstill, [...] is to keep open the possibility of what is yet *to come*, which in German, as in French, is the name assigned the future: *Zu-kunft, a-venir*.⁹⁹

The Uncertain Place of Theatre and the Theatricality of the Ethos

In Weber’s writings on Benjamin’s ‘abilities and ‘theatricality as medium’ more generally, which in many respects here form the starting point for and are closely interwoven with my own project, the theatre takes on an ambiguous status for its close relation to the concept of theatricality, which, as Weber alerts, ‘is not the same as theatre, although also not separable from it’. The purported inseparability of theatricality from theatre allows Weber to bring certain experiences of working in the theatre to an ostensibly very different context, namely, an analysis of texts, ‘in which the reader is called upon to play an active part’.¹⁰⁰ For the latter, Weber suggests, ‘[...]a transformative involvement of the reader is required in order for the text “itself” to function, just as an “audience” is required for a representation to be “theatrical”’.¹⁰¹ To consider the workings of a text as theatrical, Weber proposes, counters an academic

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, ix.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*.

tendency ‘to be guided by a notion of a long-lasting, if not eternal *truth*’, with the ‘far more ephemeral, more localized, and more singular’ goal of a theatrical production. As the latter can nevertheless be subject to powerful efforts at containing such situated singularities, what stands at the centre of Weber’s concern is ‘the tension between the effort to reduce the *theatrical medium* to a *means* of meaningful representation by enclosing its space within an ostensibly self-contained narrative, and the resistance of this medium to such reduction’.¹⁰² Weber, as we saw, here has in mind the dominant aspect of an Aristotelian conception of drama and its continual hold over contemporary commercial media from theatre and film to television and News production. In the final chapter of the thesis, I will further link this long tradition of seeking to foreclose the situated appeal to the socio-individual co-production of the accustomed place of the ethos to Bernard Stiegler’s account of the ‘symbolic misery’ of our times, portrayed as a mass of isolated consumers barred from participation in the production of cultural history by monopolist memory industries. The theatrical practices under consideration here, as well as the medium of theatre more generally, become a paradigmatic if uncertain place for the demonstrated resistance to the instrumentalisation of media and the passivity of consumption. For Weber, what allows the medium of theatre to resist its reduction to a means in the first place, however, is precisely what associates it with language or media in general, namely, the priority of the signifying function over that of representation. Language’s ability of signifying, which it shares with theatre, Weber notes,

far from reducing the materiality and corporeality of theatre, [...] marks their irreducibility. [...]The process of signifying always leaves something *out* and something *over*: an excess that is also a deficit, or as Derrida has formulated it, a “remainder” – *une reste*.

¹⁰² *ibid*, x.

It is the irreducibility of this remainder that, ultimately, renders language *theatrical*, and theatricality *significant*.¹⁰³

If Weber's project, apart from a fascination with an experience of 'reading [texts] in the strong sense,' finds another source of influence in 'the experience of working as a dramaturg in German productions of theatre and opera during the 1980s and 1990s,' the trajectory of his thought is nevertheless one that harnesses sparsely accounted for experiences of theatrical practice for the close reading of philosophical and dramatic texts in order to draw from them a generalised concept of 'theatricality as medium' in the context of philosophy and literary studies.¹⁰⁴ Yet there are also some indications of the possibility for a reverse movement of application, that is, a harnessing of certain experiences of reading and working with texts that are theatrical to an analysis of theatrical performances that are textual. Whereas my own trajectory has initially also been one that brought practical experiences of working in the theatre to the reading of philosophical texts,¹⁰⁵ it is the aspect of this latter movement that will at least implicitly guide my analysis of theatrical practices under consideration in the later stages of the thesis. In these analyses – a brief engagement with Yvonne Rainer's 1960s experiments in dance and a more prolonged reading of the contemporary theatrical practice of the American performance

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ In brief: From 1999 to 2002 I attended Dartington College Arts to study (Devised) Theatre in a practice-oriented environment rooted in a theatrical tradition indebted to the experiments of the Neo-Avant-Garde. Between 2002 and 2009, before embarking on a part-time MA in Cultural Studies and finally this PhD project, I worked extensively as a theatre practitioner, dramaturg and part-time lecturer in contemporary performance studies. Thus, albeit developing a conceptual force that does not depend on these experiences, the recurrent terms of my analysis – i.e. gesture, *Haltung*, rehearsal – nevertheless resonate with, carry and thus facilitate the survival of situated experiences. In doing so, following a structure that ties singularity to repetition, they allow for the passage between different yet inseparable contexts and become the site of a secret encounter, able to gather together and allow for a sharing across the abyss of absolutely heterogeneous singular experiences.

companies Goat Island and Every house has a door – the textuality of theatre lies at the heart of its very theatricality and must no longer be opposed, as a longstanding tradition within Theatre and Performance Studies perhaps has it, to its ephemeral, localized, singular, corporeal qualities.

In hailing the ephemeral as the hallmark of contemporary theatrical practice in strong opposition to the perceived permanence and authority of “writing,” “recording” and the “archive,” the discipline of Performance Studies has often been seen to lie in pursuit of wresting the study of performance away from the traditions of analysis of the (dramatic) text. Such an endeavour might indeed be justified if the latter is exclusively conceived as guided by a notion of the long-lasting, if not eternal *truth* of representation. Yet if the limited functioning of the medium of language is conditioned on its unconditional opening to the coming of time, the experience of finitude and singularity can no longer be the exclusive (paradoxically elusive) “object” of Performance Studies. What is more, the simple opposition of the experience of the ostensible permanence of writing with the ephemeral singularity of performance tends to overlook the latter’s structural dependence on the ability of performance to remain otherwise in the long aftermath of its response-qua iter-ability. In the dynamic scenario of such a necessarily transformative survival the experience of singularity can only ever be what resists yet nevertheless paradoxically depends on “its” repeatability. As such, the structure as well as the force of theatrical experience finds itself inextricably linked to the textual dynamic of its possibilities of remaining. In emphasising the iterable aspects of theatrical practice, the thesis implicitly follows and further contributes to what Carl Lavery, in a recent article for *Performance Research*, has identified as a shift within Performance Studies from a long-standing infatuation with the disappearing liveness of the event of performance to a concern with its untimeliness, its “present” haunted by both its past and future. What is more, by focusing on Benjamin’s conception of the citability of gesture and the theatre as *Schwellung*, it closely follows

Lavery's call for an emphasis on the haunting of the future that he identifies with recourse to Derrida as an act of *teleiopoiesis* – a telephone call or message transmitted to distant others. Lavery's summary of the possible place for a thought of *teleiopoiesis* in contemporary theatre studies, albeit irreducible to my project at large, may nevertheless help to indicate its position with regards to longstanding and on-going debates of the discipline:

The recent interest in archives and re-enactments by theatre and performance scholars and practitioners in the past decade or so has foreclosed previous debates (perhaps even obsessions) about the authentic status of 'live' versus 'recorded' performance. As Amelia Jones, Adrian Heathfield, Diana Taylor, and Rebecca Schneider have argued so plausibly, performance never comes to an end; its present is always haunted by both its past and future. However, in this dominant attempt to think of performance as ruin, to posit it as a 'dialectical image' or 'specter' that refuses to exit the scene, the onus has been largely placed on the first haunting – the haunting from history. What tends to be forgotten in this alternative approach to theatre historiography is the other side of this anachronistic coin: namely, the extent to which performance is engaged in an act of *teleiopoiesis*, a telephone call or message transmitted to distant others – ghosts from the future. As Derrida explains in his *The Politics of Friendship*, *teleiopoiesis* does not consume the present in the name of an Hegelian *telos*, the result of which is already predetermined; rather it burns itself up for the sake of a future whose meaning can neither be predicted nor foretold, and which might offer new, unexpected ways of being.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Carl Lavery & Lee Hassall, 'A Future for Hashima' in *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 112-125 (2015). 20:3, 112-113.

If the emphasis of analysis might indeed shift, as Lavery proposes it, from a concern with the haunting of the past to that of the haunting of the future, this should not detract from the structural inextricability of the two. The thesis emphasises such inextricability with recourse to a conception of theatre as rehearsal, a dynamic process that maintains a simultaneous reference to the past and to the future. In doing so I further seek to employ the concept of rehearsal, as well as of the theatre as rehearsal, as a model *Haltung* for the participatory task of inheritance. As an instance of public rehearsal, the theatre, far from closing the latter's dynamic of re-working the past as the call for its future transformation, further opens this call to the coming of the other's countersignature.

Yet if theatricality – the exposing of a (re-)inscribed present to the unmasterable coming of time and the other's response – results from a general coming between of media of inscription that divides and exposes the ostensible self-presence of individual and collective identities, to rehearse by reworking the socio-individual fund of temporal inscriptions of an inheritance might be said to merely follow the necessarily precarious program of what Derrida has described as the general structure of life as survival. A survival, as we might say, that is precariously theatrical for the uncertainties pertaining to the exact place of its taking-place. Derrida's descriptive and *performative* account of such necessarily theatrical exposure to the other for all limited self-relation qua inscription, always entails a deconstruction of sovereignty and self-mastery, that is, of 'the self's or the subject's ability to return to and assert itself in its freedom' [...], '*automobilic* and *autotelic*, [...] of itself, by itself, giv[ing] itself its own law with its own self in view'.¹⁰⁷ In light of

¹⁰⁷ Michael Naas, "“One Nation...Indivisible”: Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God' in *Research in Phenomenology* 36, 15-44 (2006), 20. The performative or better affirmative aspect of Derrida's writing style, which can often be seen to be overtly involved with itself as style, committed to 'performative gestures' that engage language never simply as a transparent means to an end, but rather as what we might call with Benjamin the setting – *Schauplatz* - for the staging of thought, takes account of and plays with the structural theatricality of language. Hyperaware of the unmasterable

such a generalised account of theatricality as the structure of all limited socio-individual self-relation, the analysis of a politics of rehearsal, although at times rooted to certain practices and experiences of theatre as a privileged realm of its *demonstration*, does not exclusively depend on them. Put differently, in order to develop the thought of a politics of rehearsal it will have not been necessary to go to the theatre in the narrow sense. And indeed, the thesis does not always go there. Instead, it sees the theatre ubiquitously emerge as the uncertain place of a precarious organisation of an ethos in the thralls of autoimmune processes of self-deconstruction. Thus, before and beyond the theatrical practices under consideration here, the irreducibility of the participatory call of non-present remainders that renders inscription in general *theatrical* – arche-writing as arche-stage – makes of the politics of rehearsal a generalised practice of the socio-individual co-production of an essentially precarious ethos. By the exposition of its structural crisis that cannot be relegated to the status of an accident, the ‘accustomed place’ or ‘habitat’ of the ethos, the more or less instituted organisation of (everyday) life, turns into the divided space of theatre. It is along these lines that I read Benjamin’s fascinated engagement with the German baroque and the writings of Franz Kafka as paradigmatic scenes for the threat and chance of a crisis of experience [*Erfahrung*] in the wake of the coming undone of traditional organisations of life during the technological, spatial, industrial and philosophical upheavals of modernity. The *Haltung* of a politics of rehearsal that responds to an

afterlife of the marks of a text in his authorial and authoritative absence, Derrida’s style heeds to an attitude – here closely linked to a conception the *Haltung* of a politics of rehearsal – that Samuel Weber describes as ‘the more or less deliberate attempt of thinking to look over its shoulder, [...] to hold itself open to its heterogeneity, to sensitize itself to the fact that it depends upon an alterity that is neither its property nor simply its negation’ [Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 171]. For Weber, Derrida’s style ‘implies a structure of language and a process of articulation that includes a practical, performative moment which [...]’, as he puts it, ‘is where one has to start – and probably end – if one is to respond to the trace of the other, to that dimension of alterity to which thinking is so profoundly indebted’ [ibid, 171].

exposed structural crisis of meaning, self-mastery and institution without seeking to overcome it, amounts to the demonstrated affirmation of the constitutive limit of sovereignty as the call for the perpetual reworking of an inheritance. It affirms and aggravates the becoming opaque of sedimented, habitual orders of socio-individual self-relation to reveal their fundamental historicity as well as to bear the virtual intrusion of their future possibilities.

The Amateur

The 'accustomed place' and 'habitat' of the ethos, the house and home and the being at home with one-self of a more or less familiar place of dwelling inextricably relates the experience of a familiar space to time. Relative spatial security depends on the temporal possibilities of remaining, repetition and return, of the construction of 'customs' and 'habits' that rely on the limited continuity of identity qua inscription. In other words, the place of the ethos is never given as such, but emerges through and remains deconstructible with the movement of spacing, the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space. 'Without such inscription,' as Martin Hägglund notes, 'there would be nothing to retain or pretend, no mediation between past and future, and consequently no perception or self-awareness at all'.¹⁰⁸ The ethos thus springs from a hetero-affective scene by which 'the subject [or a culture] can constitute itself only through inscription, [...] is dependent on that which is exterior to itself [...][:] arche-writing as "the opening to exteriority in general" since it stems from the impossibility of anything ever being *in itself*'.¹⁰⁹ If arche-writing thus inscribes the movement of identity formation in a scene of necessary exposure, the place of such a more or less precarious taking-place is that of an arche-stage, '[t]his being outside itself of time'

¹⁰⁸ Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism. Derrida and the Time of Life*. (Stanford California: Stanford University Press 2008), 71.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

qua spacing.¹¹⁰ To inhabit the scene of such a spatialised exposure, upon which all limited identity formation depends, entails theatricality, or what Weber calls a ‘theatrical iterability’, that is, a modality of acting, for which

[...] the “act” of an ‘actuality’ [...] must be repeatable in order to be *enacted*. The “en-” of “enactment” is thus inseparable from the implicit “ex-” of an iterability that can never be self-contained. “Theatricality” results when the impossibility of self-containment is exposed by iterability as a ‘scene’ that is inevitably a “stage,” but which, as such, is determined by what we call a “theatre”.¹¹¹

If every house (of being) has a door, the latter’s opening and exposure to the outside (on the inside) makes of it a theatrical stage or podium. On this podium, I hear Benjamin say, one must make oneself a home away from home. In other words, one must cunningly make do with little in the absence of the securities of the proper. What emerges towards the end of the thesis is that the exemplary figure best equipped for such fragile home-making endeavours will have been the amateur. The figure of the amateur perpetually seeks for renewed possibilities of a transforming and transformative participation in the socio-individual construction of a precarious ethos from within an affirmed position of limited security. Albeit not appearing by name until very late on, there are others that here prefigure his or her eventual “arrival” on the scene. In Chapter 1, which reads Benjamin’s account of the historical situation of the German baroque as an aggravated experience of structural processes of self-deconstruction, it is the plotter of the German baroque Mourning Play who turns out best equipped to continue to participate in the construction of the ethos in the wake of an epochal crisis of eschatology and sovereignty. In Chapter 2, it is the film actor that seeks to save his “humanity” in front of an apparatus by his test-performances

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 72.

¹¹¹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

in 'the time of reproducibility,' who is able to find a limited reach of play [*Spielraum*] by working-with rather than for the apparatus. In Chapter 3, Kafka's assistants and the clumsy creatures in the bestiary of Edwina Ashton – including Walter Benjamin – can be found vulnerably exposed but nevertheless at work in high-spirited and cunning pursuits to find pathways everywhere. Chapter 4 brings together the theatrical experiments of Bertolt Brecht, Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance with Benjamin's account of the genius of variation of the child in proletarian children's theatre, from who's testing, exappropriative gestures speaks 'the secret signal of the to-come'.¹¹² In Chapter 5, Echo's ruse of speaking of and for herself under the tight constraint of having to follow the other is also the modality of the restrained appropriative method and style of the 'non-performers' of Goat Island and Every house has a door, demonstratively relaunching an inheritance. Across these diverse contexts of theatrical exposure in the wake of epochal or demonstrative aggravations of auto-immune processes of sovereignty's self-deconstruction, the amateur's high spirited and cunning participation becomes a model of resistance to the stultifying transmission of a sealed inheritance. Revolting against his or her reduction to a passive consumer, the amateur's reworking of an inheritance by a gesture of exappropriation that calls for the coming participation in the perpetual reconstruction of the ethos here constitutes the model *Haltung* of a politics of rehearsal.

¹¹² Walter Benjamin, 'Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters', 769.

**Engaging the Self-Deconstruction of Sovereignty:
Crisis, Finitude, Immanence, Swelling and Allegory in the
German Baroque *Trauerspiel***

Preamble: The Politics of Virtuality in the Context of Ontotheology

To pursue the thought of a politics of rehearsal is to pursue the thought of what Samuel Weber calls the political effectiveness of ‘a certain thinking of virtuality, possibility, potentiality [...] – a certain virtualization of conceptualization itself [and] of “meaning”’.¹¹³ Throughout his reading of Walter Benjamin’s writings on Brecht, Weber identifies and describes the modality of such political bearings with reference to the gestures of Epic Theatre as the modality of being of a ‘disjunctive theatre of the future’. No longer a drama ‘of “necessity” or of “probability,” as Aristotle insisted, but rather that of “possibility” both as potentiality and as alterity: the possibility of becoming other than what is currently present or presented’.¹¹⁴ Interrupting the expressive intentionality of an action, the teleology of a narrative, or the causal necessity or probability of a sequence of events, the gesture’s arrest of time and of history undermines the auto-telos of intentionality to keep open the possibility of what is yet to come. The *possibility* of the gesture’s citation – its *citability* – intrudes upon its event, which begins to swell under the virtualisation of its non-identity, that is, its structural dehiscence as an inscribed possibility of alterity. The discrete gesture of Epic Theatre, a fixed element with a clear beginning and ending, begins to resemble a written syntagma, of which Derrida is to say in terms that

¹¹³ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*. (New York: Fordham University Press 2004), 35.

¹¹⁴ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 105.

strongly echo Benjamin's, that it 'can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted [...] without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning'. 'One can perhaps further come to see other possibilities in it,' Derrida says of the syntagma, 'by inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains'.¹¹⁵ Yet this recognition of *other possibilities* does not depend on a horizon of their deferred realisation. On the contrary, it can be recognized, Derrida asserts, 'even in a mark that *in fact* seems to have occurred only once. [...S]eems, because this one time is in itself divided or multiplied in advance by its structure of repeatability'.¹¹⁶ Weber, an avid reader of Benjamin's persistent and ubiquitous conception of the virtuality of media that ensues from the suspense of all messaging – what Derrida might designate as the 'articulatory break,' 'the interruption of address as address' – alerts to and sketches its resonance with the Derridian conception of iterability thus construed with recourse to the very context that first brought this term to the fore. That privileged context is the two essays that retrospectively make up Derrida's uncertain "confrontation" with the speech act theorist J.R. Searle, *Signature, Event, Context* and *Limited Inc.* Yet the fact that *iterability*, as Weber notes, would remain one of only a few terminological constants throughout Derrida's subsequent writings, together with the evidence of Benjamin's proliferate use of the suffix *-ability* for a great variety of his most important concepts, seems indicative of a structural resonance between these two thinkers that by far exceeds the specificity of these or any other given contexts. In what follows, I briefly want to go in pursuit of this excess, by cursorily indicating how, for both Benjamin and Derrida, an interest in what Weber calls the political effectiveness of a certain thinking of virtuality, possibility and potentiality seems inextricably linked to a shared engagement with the inheritance and perhaps, as we might here put it, *Umfunktionierung* [refunctioning or reworking] of an Abrahamic religious tradition. Michael Naas, for instance, speaks of the later Derrida's 'constant emphasis [...] on the

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 48.

ontotheological origins of so many of our seemingly nontheological and even secular concepts'.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Sigrid Weigel describes what she identifies as one of Benjamin's life long attitudes as a 'commitment to questions that have escaped theology after it lost its privileged claim to interpretation'.¹¹⁸ To further render a shared interest in the structural thought of a politics of virtuality in the context of grappling with the continuous aftereffect of a theological organization of temporal experience and its "secularization,"¹¹⁹ I will begin by outlining in minutia how Derrida's 'radical atheism'¹²⁰ or 'radical secularity'¹²¹ develops in close relation to the deconstruction of the ontotheological origin of the concept of sovereignty.¹²² Here, it will be a matter of indicating how Derrida's critique of the theo-logic of sovereignty – whether of the self, the nation-state, or God – that in essence is thought to be indivisible, unsharable, and unlimited, develops in close relation to a conception of life as autoimmune survival. This unconditional opening to the coming of time and necessary risk of corruptability (as the only chance for perfectibility) prohibits the relegation of the failure of sovereignty to the

¹¹⁷ Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 58.

¹¹⁸ Sigrid Weigel, *Die Kreatur, das Heilige, die Bilder*. (Berlin: Fischer 2008), 12.

¹¹⁹ For Benjamin, secularization precisely describes the shattering of such temporal organization – i.e. of a notion of history derived from the Christian promise of individual redemption – that involves, as we will see in more detail later on, 'the conversion of originally temporal data into spatial inauthenticity and simultaneity' [Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1978, 56].

¹²⁰ See Hägglund.

¹²¹ See Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

¹²² 'Radical Atheism – Derrida and the Time of Life' is the title of a book by Martin Hägglund. Michael Naas puts forward the notion of a 'radical secularity' in his essay 'Derrida's Lacité'. Whereas I will have recourse to Hägglund's reading of Derrida throughout, Naas's reflections, although crossing but also perhaps exceeding the themes developed here is never broached directly. '[Derrida's] deconstruction of the Abrahamic filiation was carried out,' Naas argues, '[...] in the name of what I will hazard to call an originary or, better, a radical secularity that inscribes faith (though not religion) at the very origin of the sociopolitical and thus, Derrida argues, at the very origin of all sovereignty' [Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On*. (Fordham: Fordham University Press 2008), 63].

status of a mere accident as well as a metaphysical conception of 'history and knowledge [...] as detours *for the purpose of* the reappropriation of presence'.¹²³ Finally, I seek to indicate how Derrida's ultratranscendental description of the autoimmunity of finitude that deconstructs a theological tradition from within may find in Benjamin's account of the epochal crisis of Christian eschatology during the German baroque a paradigmatic context of its experience. Far from seeking to reduce the ultra- or quasi-transcendental status of Derrida's argument to that of an empirical historical condition, I seek to suggest how certain historical conditions might favour its empirical exposure.¹²⁴ Here, the epochal situation of the German baroque, as Benjamin and Weber describe it,

¹²³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 10.

¹²⁴ Häggglund employs the terminology of the ultratranscendental to mark Derrida's insistence on the limitless generality of differance and the structure of the trace that applies to all fields of the living. To think the ultratranscendental condition of spacing, Häggglund notes, 'is thus to think *a constitutive finitude* that is absolutely without exception. From within its very constitution life is threatened by death, memory is threatened by forgetting, identity is threatened by alterity, and so on' [Häggglund, 19, my emphasis]. In describing the ultratranscendental status of the condition of spacing and its relation to the empirical, Häggglund precisely seeks to set it apart from its onto-theological reduction to a Fall, a metaphysical move that responds to the facts of corruption by positing a lost original plenitude as a recoverable telos instead of accounting for its necessary structural possibility: 'If time must be spatially inscribed, then the experience of time is essentially dependent on which material supports and technologies are available to inscribe time. That is why Derrida maintains that inscriptions do not befall an already constituted space but produce the spatiality of space. Derrida can thus think the experience of space and time as constituted by historical and technological conditions, without reducing spacing to an effect of a certain historical or technological epoch. *If spacing were merely an effect of historical conditions, it would supervene on something that precedes it and thus adhere to the metaphysical notion of spacing as a Fall.* Spacing is rather an ultratranscendental condition because there has never been and will never be a self-presence that grounds the passage between past and future. That is why any moment *always* must be recorded in order to be. The ultratranscendental movement of spacing thus accounts for why there is neither a beginning nor an end to historicity and technicity. The inscriptions that trace time are susceptible to all sorts of transformations, and erasures, but the general condition of spacing cannot be eliminated' [ibid, 27, my emphasis].

comes to figure a specific historical context that seems particularly receptive or prone to ‘the *effects* of deconstruction.’ Furthermore, if the context of the German baroque, as I want to suggest, is ‘most vulnerable to certain autoimmune or self-deconstructive processes,’ the *Trauerspiel* perhaps constitutes a model for an attitude of ‘their *thoughtful* engagement’.¹²⁵ Put differently, on the level of experience, the situation of the German baroque as Benjamin conceives it, becomes a paradigmatic scene of an increasing difficulty to disavow a *constitutive* finitude, vulnerability and exposition to the unpredictable coming of time. The response of the German baroque *Trauerspiel* [Mourning Play] to this epochal crisis of eschatology – that Weber will designate as an *allegorical theatricalization* – is one that no longer seeks to overcome this crisis once and for all. As such, it no longer falls within a theological conception of history as a detour for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence, or else, within a narrative of the Fall and a conception and experience of time as the more or less regulated path towards salvation. Instead, it might be said to resemble an attitude [*Haltung*] that no longer disavows the conditional nature of sovereignty in light of a constitutive finitude and the structural status of the crisis of meaning, but begins to affirm the essential play of a structural undecidability. Benjamin’s own interest in

¹²⁵ Naas, *From Now On*, 109. To be sure, the context from which I have here grafted certain formulations of Michael Naas, which are put forwards in relation to more current historico-political settings, has very little to do with ours. Thus, when Naas speaks about a ‘thoughtful engagement’ of the themes of deconstruction as opposed to certain self-deconstructive processes, he is likely to be speaking about an engagement, albeit perhaps irreducible yet nevertheless closely related to the reception of and response to Derrida’s work. In our context, a ‘thoughtful engagement’ with the self-deconstructive process of an epoch might, in the first instance, come down to its mere affirmation. Thus, of an avowal of the limits of sovereignty that constitute an alternative to a paranoid reflex that wants to reclaim and reassert the phantasm of an indivisible and omnitemporal sovereignty in the wake of its historical crisis. As a response to the experience of a crisis of sovereign action, it engages this crisis through the disjunctive gesture of a ‘calculation with the incalculable’. [see Jacques Derrida, ‘Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority’ in *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1989-1990), trans. by Mary Quaintance, 947].

the German baroque is of course anything but merely historico-empirical. Together with his writings on modernity and the application of a general theory of allegory, as Howard Caygill has pointed out, it forms part of ‘a broader “theological” critique of humanism,’ and thus precisely of a theological inheritance that continues to inform an ostensibly secularized concept of freedom as self-mastery and collective historical progress.¹²⁶ Yet for all of Benjamin’s efforts to sharply demarcate his historicist operation ‘from what might generally be considered to be empirical history,’ as Samuel Weber insists, ‘the last is by no means unimportant to the way in which [he] approaches the relationship between allegory and theater, to which his interpretation of modernity will remain indebted’.¹²⁷ That the context in which Benjamin, as I want to argue, accounts of this empirical history as a privileged scene for the exposure of the structural paradigm of the virtuality of media, is the one notable exception to his otherwise widespread employment of the virtualizing suffix of *-ability*, seems at first perhaps counter-intuitive. Yet, as Weber points out, ‘[a]lthough Benjamin does not employ such a formulation in that text [*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*], one such shines in its absence: the notion of “Deutbarkeit,” the ability to signify and/or to be interpreted. “Deutbarkeit,” as Weber puts it with a formulation that returns us to the structural thought of (a politics of) virtuality, ‘is the silent but virtual medium of allegory’.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Howard Caygill, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Cultural History’ *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* ed. by David Ferris, 73-96. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 49.

¹²⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 162.

¹²⁸ Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 331. As Benjamin’s thesis is precisely at pains with dismissing a commonly held view of the *Trauerspiel* as a bad cover version of tragedy by discerning its self-conscious differentiation from the latter, the English translation of *Trauerspiel* with ‘tragic drama’ seems unfortunate at best. A more literal and more potent translation of *Trauerspiel* would be Mourning Play. In what follows I will keep references to the *Trauerspiel* in the German original.

Learning How to Live/Die: Derrida's Radical Atheism and the Aporias of Survival

One must not stray far from the central arguments of *Signature, Event, Context* and *Limited Inc* to find the conception of iterability as the necessarily inscribed virtual possibility of alterity of a written syntagma or mark in general at least implicitly linked to the refutation of a religious desire for absolute immunity. In the context of *Signature, Event, Context* the latter seemingly informs what is there called a certain philosophical tradition that accounts for the failure of communication only at a distant outside from the presupposed simplicity of an original essence that always remains recoverable as *arche* or *telos*. In contrast, Derrida seeks to revise the status of this failure of communication and communion by seeking to account for the possibility of corruption as the very condition for its limited success. For the necessary movement of idealization that guarantees the functioning of the mark beyond the death of its author or addressee is at the same time what must compromise the strict ideality of the mark and the total arrival of a communicated content. Only through the structural opening onto an unmasterable alterity qua iterability do limited effects of presence or meaning become possible in the first place. In the essay, Derrida briefly alerts us to the fact that this general structure must not be limited to any narrowly defined field of communication, but is in fact the law of "experience" in general:

This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say [...] the nonpresent *remainder* [*restance*] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin. And I shall even extend this law to all "experience" in general if it is conceded that there is

no experience consisting of *pure* presence but only of chains of differential marks.¹²⁹

The latter formulation hints at Derrida's conception of life as survival that springs from the necessary movement of the tracing of time.

Hägglund eloquently summarizes this double movement of spacing as follows:

Given that the now can appear only by disappearing – that it passes away as soon as it comes to be – it must be inscribed as a trace in order to be at all. This is the *becoming-space of time*. The trace is necessarily spatial, since spatiality is characterised by the ability to remain in spite of temporal succession. Spatiality is thus the condition for synthesis, since it enables the tracing of relations between past and future. Spatiality, however, can never be in itself; it can never be pure simultaneity. Simultaneity is unthinkable without a temporalisation that relates one spatial juncture to another. This *becoming-time of space* is necessary not only for the trace to be related to other traces, but also for it to be a trace in the first place. A trace can only be read after its inscription and is thus marked by a relation to the future that temporalizes space. This is crucial for Derrida's deconstruction of the logic of identity. If the spatialisation of time makes the synthesis *possible*, the temporalisation of space makes it *impossible* for the synthesis to be grounded in an indivisible presence. The synthesis is always a trace of the past that is left *for the future*. Thus, it can never be in itself but is essentially exposed to that which may erase it.¹³⁰

Against a conception of spacing as Fall, Derrida thus goes on to spell out in *Limited Inc* the necessity to include in any philosophical description –

¹²⁹ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 10.

¹³⁰ Hägglund, 18.

'i.e. in *what* is described, but also in the practical discourse, in the *writing that describes*' – 'not merely the factual reality of corruption and of alteration, but *corruptability* [...] and *dissociability*, traits tied to *iterability*'.¹³¹ With reference to what we might here designate as the performative aspect of a practical discourse or act, Derrida therewith proposes a certain modality of doing, an attitude and style, an ethico-political bearing of the effects of virtualisation in the production of meaning as the necessarily inscribed possibility of iter- as alteration. In the absence of an eschatology of meaning-to-say, that is, 'the telos, which orients and organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfilment, realisation, and actualisation in a plenitude that would be present to and identical with itself,' without foregoing all desire for temporal remaining and however limited effects of presence, one must *bear* a paradoxically essential limit to one's intentionality and the aporias of responsibility that spring from it.¹³² To bear such a constitutive exposure to finitude in the absence of the consoling narratives of a deferred possibility of redemption is to demonstrate a necessary refutation of the religious value of the unscathed, the pure and the untouched, the sacred and the holy, the safe and sound: *absolute immunity* as the supremely

¹³¹ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 78.

¹³² In brief, I am here thinking of the aporia at the heart of the experience of hospitality, justice and democracy, which are always also experiences of the impossible and the undecidable impasse between an unconditional hospitality to the coming of time (and thus to a justice and democracy that must remain to come) and the laws which come to limit and condition it in its inscription as a law. In as far as pure unconditional hospitality exempts from all responsibility it cannot amount to a political concept. Derrida therefore does not deny the necessity of 'defensive measures,' as Hägglund puts it, that try 'to reckon with unpredictable and potentially violent events.' Home-making endeavours that must however remain deconstructable as they 'may always turn out to be inadequate and are fundamentally exposed to the undecidable coming of time, which can challenge or overturn what has been prescribed' [Hägglund, 40]. Derrida fittingly describes the improbable yet necessary experience of an impossible justice [but the same can be said for hospitality and democracy] as a moment in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule and thus requires *a calculation with the incalculable* [Derrida, 'Force of Law', 947].

desirable'.¹³³ In other words, it is the description and *demonstration* of the fact that '[f]initude is [...] not a negative limitation that prevents us from having access to the fullness of being,' but '[o]n the contrary, [...] is an unconditional condition that makes the fullness of being unthinkable as such'.¹³⁴ The experience of an essential exposure to finitude constitutes a challenge to sovereignty that is both threatening and full of hope. '[A]utoimmunity,' the essential corruption of the ostensibly unscathed,

is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes – which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event.¹³⁵

'Derrida's crucial move,' Hägglund summarizes,

is to mobilize the unconditional exposure to *what happens* – to whatever or whoever comes – in order to deconstruct the concept of sovereignty. If there were a sovereign instance, nothing could ever happen to it since it would be completely given *in itself*. The concept of sovereignty is thus predicated on the exclusion of time. As Derrida puts it in *Rogues*, "sovereignty neither gives nor gives itself time; it does not take time". While the indivisible presence of sovereignty traditionally has been hailed as absolute life, Derrida underscores that it is inseparable from absolute death. Without the exposition to time, nothing could ever happen and nothing could emerge. Or as Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*: "pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only

¹³³ Hägglund, 8.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, 30

¹³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005), 152.

another name for death". Absolute sovereignty is thus not a desirable consummation that is unattainable because of our human limitations. Absolute sovereignty is unattainable, unthinkable, and undesirable because it would extinguish every trace of life.¹³⁶

Iterability, as the essential opening of every effect of presence or meaning to the possibility of its corruption, is thus another name for this structural, autoimmune challenge to sovereignty. As the chance/threat of temporal survival – the becoming space of time and the becoming time of space – it conditions the experience of time on an unmasterable alterity. As a paradoxically repeatable singular mark of a particular place and time, the iterable 'signature' is able to remain in spite of temporal succession on the condition of the possibility of the other's 'counter-signature'. Any ostensibly indivisible presence of a sovereign instance finds itself compromised from its inception by its necessary exposure qua repeatability to the coming of time. 'In saying this I wish to be recognized,' Derrida says in an interview to perhaps express a desire for a limited effect of sovereignty, only to add: 'but what I have said is something that I cannot reappropriate'.¹³⁷ 'When I say this,' Derrida goes on to say, 'I know I am speaking of my death [...] where I will no longer be able to reappropriate the future. Only a mortal can speak of the future in this sense, a god could never do so'.¹³⁸ Given that the limit of reappropriation is also the condition for anything to arrive in the future and thus for the affirmation of life as a necessarily compromised survival, Derrida's radical atheism spells out, as Hägglund insists, not only that God does not exist but also 'that the immortality of God,' as well as, concomitantly, the indivisible presence of sovereignty, 'is not desirable in the first place'.¹³⁹ The crisis of meaning and meaning-to-say, to return to

¹³⁶ Hägglund, 20-30.

¹³⁷ Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*. trans. by Giacomo Donis. (Cambridge: Polity Press 2001), 23.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Hägglund, 8.

the context and rhetoric of *Signature, Event, Context*, 'is not an accident, a factual and empirical anomaly of spoken language, it is also its positive possibility and its "internal" structure, in the form of a certain outside'.¹⁴⁰ With this conception of a structural failure of communication as a necessarily inscribed possibility of dissociation – and thus of *dissociability as the condition of all limited association* – we are perhaps not far from a certain experience of isolation and *Trauer* [sadness, melancholy, mourning] as Benjamin detects it in the wake of an institutional crisis of the German baroque. The crisis of eschatology that follows the Reformation's rejection of "good works," deprives the institutions of the Church and the state of the 'power to endow collective life with a meaning that could comprehend and surpass individual mortality'.¹⁴¹ The allegorical mode of perception and signification that Benjamin identifies as a model response to this difficult temporal experience, must therefore answer 'to the problematic situation of an isolated self and its difficult relation to the community'.¹⁴² With this in mind, it seems noteworthy to see Derrida, when prompted in an interview, to readily associate his conception of the constitutively precarious form of all association with what he there calls 'a community that does not constitute itself on the basis of a contemporaneity of presences but rather through the opening produced by [...] *allegoresis*'.¹⁴³ Derrida goes on to define the latter as 'the interpretation of a text not given, not closed in on itself, an interpretation that itself transforms the text'.¹⁴⁴ To participate in such ongoing transformations of

¹⁴⁰ Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', 11.

¹⁴¹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 171.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 168.

¹⁴³ Derrida & Ferraris, 24.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*. 'We would have, then,' Derrida goes on to say, 'a community of writing and reading – a community that would be bound by a testament to the law that is neither given in advance nor understood in advance. [...]the force of the future that has to be at work in it has to be a force of disruption no less than a force of integration, a force of dissension no less than a force of consensus. Why call it a community? [...] If I have always hesitated to use this word, it is because too often the word 'community' resounds with the 'common' [*commun*], the as-one [*comme-un*]' [*ibid*, 24-

a text and law not given in itself is to challenge the dominant but far from sovereign efforts of its politico-institutional closure, as well as learning how to die, that is, how to accept the radical finitude of every art of living. Learning how to finally live, Derrida says in a last interview saturated with the imminence of his own death, 'ought to mean learning how to die – to acknowledge, to accept, an absolute mortality – without positive outcome, or resurrection, or redemption, for oneself or for anyone else'.¹⁴⁵ And yet, he clarifies and problematizes, albeit believing in this truth he is unable to resign himself to it. 'I have never learned to accept it, to accept death, that is,' he says.¹⁴⁶ Derrida therewith describes the experience of an aporia, or else, *the structure of experience as aporia* – between the acceptance and inacceptance of the radical immanence of mortal life – and links the necessary gesture of its bearing to the structure of a paradoxical survival. On the one hand, resigned to the absence of all guarantees to the (positive) outcomes of any of our acts, helplessly and precariously exposed to the coming of time. On the other, no absolute acceptance, if not an outright revolt, against the mere passive consignment to the infinite finitude of this coming without some temporary reprieve, that is, a minimal if necessarily weak hold over the passage of time in the radical absence of redemptive horizons. Such a

5]. In his reading of Benjamin's insistent analysis of the difference between *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy, Weber indicates its relation to two different conceptions of "community." Albeit unable here to reconstitute the larger context of this analysis, the following quotation should nevertheless be able to indicate the general direction of this comparison and its relevance in our context, namely, how both the *Trauer* [mourning] and *Spiel* [play] of *Trauerspiel* are inextricably related to an experience of the disintegration and reproblematicization of the status of community during the German baroque: 'What the baroque mourns is not just the death of tragedy, but also the significance of death for tragedy. The baroque mourns the loss of a notion of death that entailed the promise of a New Order, that of self-identical subjectivity: the One God, the universality of Man, determining itself as a People, and gathering itself into the totality of community' [Weber, *Benjamin's abilities*, 157].

¹⁴⁵ Brault, Pascale-Anne & Naas, Michael trans. *Learning to Live Finally. An interview with Jean Birnbaum*. (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House Publishing 2010).

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

double gesture, memory and forgetting, defensive measure and vulnerable exposure, calculation with the incalculable, follows the logic of a trace that is 'not just the inscription of memory and legacy but the mark of abandon or loss, a way of marking not just one's presence but one's absence and death'.¹⁴⁷ It is a way, as Derrida puts it, of living one's death in writing at each moment of one's life:

The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the *hope* that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it's something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, "proceeds" from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing.¹⁴⁸

Derrida's formulations here clearly seem to stress the ultratranscendental status of his description of an inescapable structure of life as survival. Yet at the same time, they engage, reinscribe and perhaps refunction the religious concept of a hope for salvation by evoking, as we might here put it, *a weak hope for a non-sovereign survival*.

Benjamin's portrayal of the German baroque as an epoch in the grips of anxiety and melancholy in face of a crisis of eschatology, describes a problematic experience of time that might be said to call for the refunctioning of an inherited concept of hope. By making the latter dependent on "faith alone" in the wake of the Reformation, depriving it of all institutional guarantees of access to grace, the overriding feeling of the epoch was marked by a hopeless despair before the coming of time. The *Trauerspiel*, as the paradigmatic locus for a reworking of hope, was not a theatre that made sad but one that was performed before those who are. The modality of its allegorical theatricalizations that seek to

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 32-33 (my emphasis).

reanimate what is otherwise experienced as an ‘empty world,’ could thus be said to bear every hope although remaining itself without hope. ‘Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness and the *salut* of salvation’.¹⁴⁹

The Baroque *Trauerspiel* as a Response to a Religious Crisis of Eschatology

In his essay, *Storming the Work*, Samuel Weber reads Benjamin’s *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* [Origin of the German Mourning Play] by seeking to stress the *Trauerspiel*’s theatrical employment of allegory as a response to a specific historical situation that he identifies as a crisis in Christian eschatology in the wake of the Reformation. Following Benjamin, Weber designates the epochal situation of the baroque as ‘a paradoxical historical configuration, characterized on the one hand, by the hegemony of Christianity in Europe and, on the other, by the threatened implosion of this hegemonic force through the challenge of the Reformation [...]’.¹⁵⁰ ‘For all that the increasing worldliness of the Counter-Reformation prevailed in both confessions,’ Benjamin says of the baroque, ‘religious concerns did not lose their importance: it was just that this century denied them a religious solution, demanding a secular solution instead’.¹⁵¹ What distinguishes the

¹⁴⁹ Derrida, *Rogues*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 160.

¹⁵¹ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 60 and Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. trans. John Osborne. (London: Verso 2009), 79. Translations of Walter Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* take their starting point from John Osborne’s translation, yet are more or less modified by myself throughout. References are made both to the German and English editions. If only the German edition is referenced, translations were made without consultation of Osborne. Additionally, citations of Benjamin are at times also made with recourse to how they appear in the writings of Samuel Weber as indicated. In those cases they are Weber’s translations of the original German.

specifically German experience of this religious crisis of epochal proportion, Weber relates, was the absence of a modern unified state apparatus that would have been able to respond to these demands. The particularity of that situation paved the way for another worldly institution to offer up such a response in its stead. That institution was the theatre. The capacity of theatre 'to offer a *possible way out* of the dilemmas resulting from a failing religious and cosmic order,' Weber says, 'will guide Benjamin in his approach to the German *Trauerspiel* and to modernity in general.'¹⁵²

What the worldly institution and medium of theatre was called upon to respond was an increasing feeling of anxiety induced precisely by the problematic experience of a certain failure of an instituted mediation, namely, between the profane world and the sacred realm, between finite life and transcendent meaning, between a fallen creation and the prospect of salvation. Whereas the traditional Christian eschatological narrative had sought to assuage such anxieties, the latter's waning significance exposes them brutally. What is more, whereas the institution of the Catholic Church had been put in the service of regulating and guaranteeing the relation of worldly means to sacred ends, the Reformation's radical antinomianism severed what was perceived as an immanent, fallen world from all socially organised access to grace. 'If the German baroque had to be characterized through a single trait,' Weber notes,

this might be the one: for it the Fall has become a permanent decline. There is no Beyond any longer. Therefore all eschatology, at least in the Christian, redemptive sense, is excluded. And therefore its originary milieu was the "strict immanence" resulting from the Reformation.'¹⁵³

¹⁵² Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 166 (my emphasis).

¹⁵³ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 304.

The *Trauerspiel's* solution to the prevalent problematic of the German baroque was to find *a way out* within – and thus never fully or once and for all – that is, a way out of a melancholic, alienating, despairing and stultifying experience of the immanence of mere life without recourse to a posited instance of absolute salvation and the rehabilitation of a concept of history as a more or less organised path towards it. 'Whereas the Middle Ages portrayed the vulnerability of world events and the transcendence of all creatures as stations on the way to salvation,' Benjamin states, 'the German mourning play buries itself entirely in the disconsolate character of worldly existence...'.¹⁵⁴ In doing so it responds to an ensuing crisis of institutions in the aftermath of Martin Luther's rejection of "good works" in favour of "faith alone", which deprives the ostensible sovereignty of human action and its products ('works') of their conventionally regulated meanings or effects. In the wake of a general crisis of 'works', the *Trauerspiel* finds its resources for its response in the irreducibly fragmentary, situated and disjunctive character of its staging, exposing itself as a theatrical medium that is done with the status of a work. In this way, it begins to mirror the fate of human action and its products more generally, which, vulnerably exposed to an unmasterable coming of time, are increasingly rendered ambiguous, if not opaque. The medium of theatre takes on a paradigmatic function for dealing with the crisis of works precisely by emphasising its irreducibility to the latter's status of a meaningful self-identity not dependent on anything outside itself. In contrast to the work thus conceived, the significance of the *Trauerspiel's* ostentatious representation *before* a mutable and inconsistent audience increasingly begins but never ends to depend on the latter's participation. '[...T]rauerspiel,' Benjamin says, 'must be understood from the standpoint of the viewer. The latter experiences, how on the stage, an interior space of feeling devoid of any connection to the cosmos, situations are placed before him'.¹⁵⁵ *Theatrical allegorization*, as Weber identifies the hallmark of this theatre, describes

¹⁵⁴ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 171.

¹⁵⁵ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 101.

the movement of such an infinite conditionality of the effects of presence on their situated reception. Put in the deconstructive register that implicitly informs our reading here, one might say that the *Trauerspiel* therewith begins to affirm the autoimmune opening to an unconditional coming of time as the condition of its situated significance. Allegorical *Deutbarkeit*, the *excessive* and unmasterable possibility to signify and be interpreted, offers what is experienced as an immanent, meaningless and 'empty' world the prospect of its quasi-transcendence, that is, not the institutional guarantee of a deferred access to the immunity of an afterlife in communion, but the precarious chance/threat of a shared survival.¹⁵⁶ As a response to 'the problematic situation of an isolated self and its difficult relation to the community,' *allegoresis* here begins to facilitate the secretly shared production of an accustomed place that *must* remain precariously exposed to its possible "corruption". By its essential dehiscence, the staging of such an 'allegorical theatre – theatre as allegory, and allegory as theatre' – albeit 'delimited and constituted essentially by those who witness it as audience and as spectators, as

¹⁵⁶ The word sharing, which will also play a significant part in later sections of the thesis, is here at least implicitly employed with reference to the French *partage*. Derrida says of his use of the latter verb: 'We make use [...] of the word *partaking*, as elsewhere *imparting*, to render the ambiguities of the French *partage*, a word which names difference, the line of demarcation, the parting of the waters, scission, caesura as well as participation, that which is divided because it is shared or held in common, imparted and partaken of' [Jacques Derrida, 'Shibboleth for Paul Celan' in Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question. The Poetics of Paul Celan* ed. by Thomas Dutoit, 1-64. (Fordham: Fordham University Press 2005), 34]. The resources of the word *partage* thus further begin to resonate with the German verb *mitteilen* [imparting, to communicate] as it plays a significant role in the writings of Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, as we saw, the virtuality of media are marked by a becoming opaque of means no longer transparent to their ends, in other words, by impartability [*Mittelbarkeit*] as the possibility of communication severed from a communicated message [*Mitteilung*]. As the verb *teilen* [sharing] plays a significant part in both *mitteilen* [imparting], *Mitteilung* [message] and *Mittelbarkeit* [impartibility], Benjamin's conception of the virtuality of media, which the latter term seeks to describe, must be read in close proximity to a thinking of association as conditioned on dissociability, the possibility of sharing conditioned on the impossibility of the common and as-one [*comme-un*] of community.

onlookers,' as Weber puts it with a felicitous formulation in the context of our analysis of a politics of rehearsal, '*never definitely takes place*'.¹⁵⁷

Reanimating an Empty World

The playwrights of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin stresses, were Lutherans. Deeply affected by Martin Luther's proposed rejection of "good works" as an instituted means of redemption, they found themselves struck by an overriding sense of anxiety and melancholy in face of an unmasterable exposure to the contingent coming of time. The Lutheran motto of 'faith alone' could not prevent life from becoming stale and stultified. What emerges, Benjamin notes, is an 'empty world'. Its inhabitants experience their existence as placed within an expanse of ruins filled with so many incomplete, inauthentic actions. Life, Benjamin says, revolted against such a state of affairs [*Dagegen schlug das Leben aus*].¹⁵⁸

The rigorous morality of its [Lutheranism] teaching in respect of civic conduct stood in sharp contrast to its renunciation of 'good works'. By denying the latter any special miraculous spiritual effect, making the soul dependent on grace through faith, and making the secular-political sphere a testing ground for a life which was only indirectly religious, being intended for the demonstration of civic virtues, it did, it is true, instil into the people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced melancholy. Even in Luther himself, the last two decades of whose life are filled with an increasing heaviness of

¹⁵⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 173, (my emphasis).

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 20.

soul, there are signs of a counterstroke against the storming of the work.¹⁵⁹

The sharp reaction, tinged with melancholy, of a counterstroke against the storming of the work, is that of isolated individuals severed, as we might put it, at *each moment of their lives*, from a social organization with the 'power to endow collective life with a meaning that could comprehend and surpass individual mortality'.¹⁶⁰ For Benjamin construes the situation of the baroque as one that 'exalts the situation of the individual, while subjecting that individual to an *uncertain destiny*, alone before God, *unable to influence the future by action*, dependent upon a faith whose status remains fundamentally *opaque*'.¹⁶¹ Whereas before the Reformation, as Weber notes, 'the legitimacy of the Catholic Church [...] offered a guarantee of an orderly *transparent* relationship of immanence to transcendence through the sacraments and rites that it organizes and defines as "good works,"' the rejection of the transparency of 'works' in favour of an opaque means of "faith alone," precariously exposes isolated individuals to the unpredictable effects of their acts. In the wake of a crisis of 'works,' a situation emerges, as Weber puts it, which is 'quite literally *unworkable*'.¹⁶² Mourning the loss of transparent means of salvation as well as anxiously experiencing a more general opacity of means, the unworkable situation of the German baroque finds itself inscribed within a larger problematic of mediation and of media, which can no longer be perceived as transparent means to an end. This situation is unworkable in as far as the work – an activity or its product, as Weber defines it, 'that is localized, determined spatially and temporally, and invested with a certain narrative meaning as the result of an intention of which it is the effect' – as we saw, is no longer imbued with the instituted guarantees of its miraculous effects, or else, with the phantasm of its sovereignty. '[E]ffective action as defined by the

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, 119.

¹⁶⁰ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 171.

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, 169 (my emphasis).

¹⁶² *ibid*, 171 (my emphasis).

production of meaningful works becomes problematic,' Weber says with regards to the Reformation's storming of the work.¹⁶³ The counterstroke against this storming of the work, therefore, is a desperate attempt to deal with or else overcome – the difference will remain decisive here – increasing feelings of anxiety, insecurity, vulnerability, isolation and alienation in view of the helpless experience of individual actions as opaque means severed from their institutionally regulated ends. In the absence of functioning conventional orders of social organisation, isolated individuals, deprived of the ostensible guarantees of the positive outcomes to their acts, find themselves vulnerably exposed to the coming of time. The *Trauerspiel's* response to this 'unworkable' situation of an evacuation of meaning from human action and its products in the realm of politics, history and art, I want to suggest, is that of an allegorical or theatrical "attitude" [*Haltung*], informed as much by a more or less desperate attempt to stem the forward thrust of time by arresting it in the congealed simultaneity of space, as well as by a concomitant and contradictory affirmation of an unmasterable opening towards temporal finitude.

The *Trauerspiel's* compositional tendency towards temporal arrest and spatial juxtaposition reflects and responds to a historico-theological dilemma that prompted the religious man of the baroque, as Benjamin puts it, to 'hold onto the world'.¹⁶⁴ All immediate paths to the beyond [*Jenseits*] denied, the fragmented and stacked up representations of the *Trauerspiel* reject the progressive movement of a plot in favour of what Benjamin calls an immanent swelling [*eine Anschwellung von innen*

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 48-9 (my emphasis). The *Trauerspiel's* efforts to arrest the flow of time finds a symptom in its common fixation of the dramatic plot to the night and especially midnight. For in the midnight hour, according to popular myth, time stands still. Fateful manifestations seek out this particular space-time [*Zeitraum*], Benjamin says, and 'stand within the midnight hour as the hatch of time'. Within its framed opening appears again and again the same image of a ghost. [*ibid*, 115]

her].¹⁶⁵ In the absence of all concrete forms of hope, history, which has previously been conceived as the movement towards salvation [*Heilsgeschichte*], turns into its opposite, that is, *Unheilsgeschichte*, the unstoppable movement towards a catastrophic *telos*. The only hope available to the situation of the German baroque, as Weber puts it, ‘is to attempt to stem this forward tide, slow if not abolish the irresistible pull toward a catastrophic terminus.’¹⁶⁶ History wanders onto its stage and piles up [*Häufung*] on the showplace [*Schauplatz*]. Benjamin describes this process as concomitant with the movement of secularization itself, which he describes as the ‘conversion of originally temporal data into spatial inauthenticity and simultaneity’.¹⁶⁷ Yet when history wanders onto the stage [*Schauplatz*], as Weber relates, it is exposed [*zur schau gestellt*] and (re-)staged, not as transparent representations of unquestionable realities but as allegories, their fragmented, cluttered assemblage open to re-arrangement by others.¹⁶⁸ For instance, by those who witness it as situated audience. Here, *Deutbarkeit* as the silent

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin, Walter. ‘Das Passagen Werk. Aufzeichnungen und Materialien’, *Gesammelte Schriften Band V*, 79-654. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 410.

¹⁶⁶ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 173.

¹⁶⁷ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 56. Temporal processes, Benjamin relates, are captured and analysed within spatial images. The *Schauplatz*, of which the court is the *Trauerspiel*'s preferred setting, becomes the key to historical comprehension. Yet the overriding sense of such a process of spatialisation, that is, of the simultaneous and layered exposition of previously temporal data, is anything but comprehension, but one of entanglement and confusion [*Verwirrung*]. Here, a moral or ethical confusion of how to act in the absence of calculability doubles up as the pragmatic confusion of the spectacle [*ibid*, 75-6]. The latter finds its spatial equivalents in the alchemical laboratories of magicians and physicists, children's playrooms, polter cabins and pantries [*ibid*, 165]. The *Trauerspiel*'s acts do not so much follow each out of the other, but are stacked like terraces. ‘The dramatic structure is displayed in broad plains of simultaneous survey [...]’ [*ibid*, 170]. We will find not dissimilar compositional strategies both of a cluttered, non-linear assemblage of historical data, as well as the discrete separation of parts that call for their future re-assemblage by an audience in the contemporary theatre practices of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door* in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁶⁸ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 172.

medium of allegory, virtualizes the spatial arrest that offered an initial way out of time by a frantic flight into an unredeemed “nature” and prevents it from definitely ‘taking place’. The double movement of arrest and virtualisation in the allegorical theatricalizations of *Trauerspiel* here begins to recall what Benjamin, in a later context – both with regards to his own life as well as with regards to the context of the analysis – as we saw, was to designate as the ‘citability of gesture.’¹⁶⁹ More generally, it might thus also be said to follow, affirm and expose what Derrida has described as a quasi-transcendental structure of experience as spacing, that is, the simultaneous becoming space of time and becoming time of space. Spacing secures limited effects of shared significance on the condition of its essential corrupt- and dissociability. In the wake of a crisis of eschatology, the *Trauerspiel* rehearses, so to speak, a quite different relation of immanence to transcendence. For the authors and audiences of *Trauerspiel* it is no longer a matter of making their situation ‘workable’ once and for all by seeking to recuperate the transparency of media and the sovereignty of ‘works,’ but rather, as we might here put it, of rendering them perpetually ‘re-workable’ through the radically

¹⁶⁹ A distorted similitude might be said to run throughout Benjamin’s descriptions of *Trauerspiel* and Epic Theatre, most notably, in light of a shared contestation of the Aristotelian conception of drama as tragedy, with regards to their compositional employment of strategies of interruption, stilling and discontinuity. For instance, when describing a not uncommon feature of *Trauerspiel* – that is, for the “dialogue” within a specific image-assemblage to constitute its explanation [*Erklärung*], signature, title, or maxim, which declares the image-scene to be allegorical as if spoken by the image itself – Benjamin reverts to a comparison with the light-effect of baroque paintings that much more vividly seems to conjure the palpable arrest of time through the flash of photography, as well as, by extension, the discontinuous progression of a spatio-temporal montage [Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 173]. ‘Brightly it flashes up within the darkness of allegorical entwinement,’ Benjamin says of the “dialogue” as motto, arresting and framing the scene as an allegorical image that must be read [ibid, 175]. The action moves into these frames as into always renewed compositional arrangements, with the jerky, intermittent rhythm of a constant pausing [*Einhalten*], turning and renewed congealment [ibid, 175]. Its displayed situations change suddenly in a flash, Benjamin says, like the aspect of the type area when turning the pages of a book [ibid, 162-3].

performative affirmation of an essential opacity of means and the virtuality of media. The Lutheran motto of 'faith alone,' Benjamin says, could not prevent life from becoming stale and stultified. What emerges was an 'empty world'. Life, as Benjamin puts it, revolted against such a state of affairs [*Dagegen schlug das Leben aus*].¹⁷⁰ The violence of this blow, however, stands in stark contrast to the tyrannic phantasms of omnitemporality as another response to the crisis of sovereignty. Instead of seeking to institute a new order of hegemonic convention, it finds itself precisely predicated on 'an irreducible violation of whatever convention has consecrated as natural, organic and self-contained'.¹⁷¹ Far from a recuperation of transparency then, as Weber relates, 'the very opacity of the "emptied world" becomes the condition of its masked resurrection.'

The *Trauer* staged by this theatre is not just melancholic, nor does it simply mourn, as the following brief but incisive passage makes clear: "Sadness and Mourning is the sensibility [*Gesinnung*] in which feeling reanimates the emptied world by masking it [*maskenhaft neubelebt*], in order to draw an enigmatic satisfaction from its appearance... The theory of *Trauer*... can accordingly, be unrolled only through the description of the world that arises [*sich auftut*] in response to the melancholic gaze." The world that emerges in response to the melancholic glance is "reanimated" through the "masks" it now wears: since nothing in this world can be deemed to be transparent any longer, the very opacity of the "emptied world" becomes the condition of its masked resurrection. But that resurrection remains a mask, tied to the theatre. What otherwise will be known as "secularization" becomes, in Benjamin's account, something more like *allegorical theatricalization*. Such allegorical theatricalization cannot simply

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, 120.

¹⁷¹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 179.

overcome time and mortality, but it can temporarily arrest, interrupt, or suspend their progress.¹⁷²

Towards an Attitude of Allegorical Theatricalization

To be sure, Benjamin, in his study of the *Trauerspiel*, does not revert to the formulation of an ‘allegorical attitude [*Haltung*]’ as I would here like to put it forward. Yet the *Trauerspiel*’s persistent endeavor to arrest the temporal flux as the first step towards the possibility of investing an immanent, unredeemed situatedness without an institutionally regulated access to transcendence with a meaningful content [*Gehalt*] by its theatrical reanimation, perhaps warrants the employment of a term that in our context seeks to link a performative bearing of virtualisation in the production of meaning to the paradoxical arrest of a stance that never quite, never definitely takes (its) place. The precarious erectness of such a stance further seems to lie in pursuit of what we might here designate a quasi-transcendental ambition, that is, the affirmation of ‘a disappointed transcendental ambition,’ the constitutive failure of a desire to make last – for resurrection and salvation – a ‘falling from a height reached,’ as Geoffrey Bennington describes this movement with reference to what Derrida repeatedly refers to as a falling erection: *l’erection tombe*.¹⁷³ The constitutive failure of such quasi-transcendental ambitions is bound to follow the precarious protocols of an attitude [*Haltung*] of rehearsal, the disjunctive theatre of the future that re-inscribes repeatable traces for an unpredictable time to come. Such an ambition must begin (and end) with a gesture that seeks to hold onto [*festhalten*] the world – arresting [*anhalten*] the ephemeral flux of time, and imbuing what is otherwise perceived to be an ‘empty’

¹⁷² *ibid*, 190-1.

¹⁷³ Geoffrey Bennington. *Derridabase*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993), 268.

world with a content [*Gehalt* or *Inhalt*] that, given the virtualizing effects of “its” *other possibilities*, never fully comes to rest.¹⁷⁴ It is the allegorical and theatrical stance of such a precariously contained (situated) discontainment, the radically performative production of *Gehalt* [content] qua *Halt* [arrest] that here further warrants the recourse to the terminology of *Haltung*, that is, an attitude or bearing that doubles up as arrest, hold and discrete pose marked by the possibility of its graft qua iter- as alterability. The allegorical theatricalizations of *Trauerspiel*, as we will soon see in more detail, are the limited, that is, paradoxically open gestures of containment in the absence of a hegemony of convention in the wake of a crisis of institutions. In other words, an epochal crisis of institutions and the collective organization of conventional schemas exposes a quasi-transcendental structure of spacing that links repeatability as the condition of all situated significance to the virtual possibilities of its difference. In the absence of transparent means of salvation, life during the German baroque, as we saw Benjamin and Weber describe it, is unable to endow itself with a meaning that could comprehend and surpass individual mortality. In light of this dilemma, memory, Weber notes, ‘takes on a new function, that of consoling a world in which action is no longer the unquestionable pathway to grace’.¹⁷⁵ Yet the kind of remembering that is practiced, he adds, does ‘not seek to recover a self-contained meaning or resurrect the dead. Rather, such memory knows itself to be inseparable from forgetting rather than its simple opposite; it does not strive to neutralize or surmount time in a transcendence of the self’.¹⁷⁶ In other words, it rehearses a different relation of immanence and transcendence by adhering to, affirming and perhaps, more or less thoughtfully as well as more or less responsibly,

¹⁷⁴ ‘The root of the words *Inhalt* and *Gehalt* is, of course,’ Weber reminds us in a different context, ‘the verb *halten*, “to hold,” but also “to stop, to halt, to arrest.” The action that constitutes “content” is a *holding action*, an act of *containment*. [...] For something to be held, the passage of time must be interrupted and suspended. Only by arresting the passage of time can a *Gehalt* be constituted’. [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 240].

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, 194.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*.

engaging certain autoimmune or self-deconstructive processes inherent to an ultra- or quasi-transcendental condition of spacing.¹⁷⁷

A Secret Convention of Allegory

The importance of allegory during the German baroque, as a mode of signification and perception engaged in the absence of, but also perhaps *against* a certain institutional hegemony of conventional orders of interpretation, might be said to lay in its ability of a certain scheming in the absence of dominant schemata. As a response to a crisis of institutions, works and meaning, it never amounts to a gesture of re-instituting collective schemata for an ostensible unity of *communication*, but displays sensitivity for the precarious and problematic status of all such coming together. If 'Benjamin presents his elaboration of [the function of] allegory [in *Trauerspiel*] as an *alternative* to the predominant theory of the symbol as unity of image and meaning [...],' as Weber states, it is precisely to problematize the ostensible systemic closure or absolute containment of such unity.¹⁷⁸ Allegory, for Benjamin, as Weber relates, involves precisely

not a "conventional expression," but an "expression of convention," which is to say, an expression of the *problematic*

¹⁷⁷ Hägglund fittingly describes the latter as a generalised writing with the function 'to mediate between past and future through inscriptions that are characterized by the becoming-space of time as well as by the becoming-time of space. On the one hand, the written is always already an inscription of memory, a trace of the past that *spatializes time*. On the other hand, the written can only be read after its inscription and is thus marked by a relation to the future that *temporalizes space*. The reason for writing in the first place is to preserve what happens as a *memory for the future*, which constitutes both the possibility of repetition and its inevitable counterpart: the threat of extinction, of forgetting [Hägglund, 72].

¹⁷⁸ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 237.

status of all such coming together, of all *conventus*, however indispensable such convergence is to all language and culture. As a result, allegory in the German baroque, and perhaps in general, is fundamentally *theatrical*: it involves representations whose referent is necessarily problematic, open, heterogeneous. And theatricality entails first and foremost representation for the other.¹⁷⁹

In the absence of hegemonic conventions, the open status of allegorical representations offers another way to participate in the collective production of what we might designate as a precarious quasi-transcendental significance. Allegory's etymological derivation from the Greek, as Siegrid Weigel relates, is unanimously construed as 'other speech': *allos* other, *agoreuein* to speak (publicly). 'Some are more precise in their definitions of the relationship between "other" and "speech," Weigel goes on to state, 'translating allegory as "speaking other than publicly": *allaeh* other than, *agoreuein* to speak in the agora or public assembly; allegory, then, as "to speak other than comprehensibly to all".¹⁸⁰ Yet in Benjamin's use of this term, the 'speaking other' of allegory is, in the final instance, irreducible to any idiosyncratic use of a hyper-conventional language of secrecy.¹⁸¹ Benjamin defies such popular

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Siegrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space*. (London & New York: Routledge 1996), 94.

¹⁸¹ Benjamin, when discerning a brief genealogy of allegory, traces a development from a strict conventional secrecy to the expression of an essential secrecy of convention. Tracing a historical period of a growing interest in allegorical interpretations of hieroglyphics and a general fascination with the secretive writing of Renaissance picture-puzzles [*Rätselschriften*], Benjamin discerns a turn from the precise use of historical and cultic keys for allegorical interpretation to that of a more general employment of a confusing clutter of nature-philosophical, moral and mystic commonplaces. An emerging, enigmatic passion at replacing phonetic signs with image-signs often resulted in the formation of whole new iconological lexica, Benjamin relates, its secretive signifiers filling medals, columns, gates of honour and manifold Renaissance artefacts [Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 147]. Yet whereas initially these mysterious picture-puzzles [*Rätselschriften*] were used in order to hide their

conceptions of allegory as a purely conventional relationship between a signifying image and its meaning. Whereas the latter would seek to reign in the otherness of this speech, the 'other' in Benjamin's version of 'speaking other' precisely refers to the uncontainable, excessive play of meanings that are constituted, as Weigel notes, 'out of the heterogeneity of *logos* and *material*, of signifier and signified [...]'.¹⁸² For Benjamin, allegory thus construed, constitutes an immersion into the 'dialectical roar,' as he emphatically puts it, within the 'abyss between image-being and meaning'.¹⁸³ Its secrecy is thus never that of a particular key of translation, the code of a particular knowledge granting access to a hidden conceptual meaning of figurative language, but precisely the latter's excess.¹⁸⁴ If allegorical theatricalization as a response to a crisis

meanings from third parties – their correct decipherment depending on a limited access to a more or less secret knowledge – following the period of their popularisation in a wide range of contexts (from theology, natural science and ethics, to heraldic, celebrative poetry and the language of love), its stock of imagery, Benjamin says, became increasingly unlimited. 'With every idea the moment of expression coincides with a veritable eruption of images, which gives rise to the sedimentation of a chaotic mass of metaphors' [ibid, 151 and Benjamin, *The Origin*, 173]. Allegorists were driven to use ever more obscure properties of a represented object or image for its signified content, which multiplied the possibilities of signification alongside more traditional, inherited signifying functions. As a result, one and the same signifier was increasingly able to represent oppositional terms and could be put to use to denote more or less anything. It is this development, Benjamin says, which leads towards the *antinomies of allegory*, namely, that '[e]very person, every thing, every relationship can signify an arbitrary other' [Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 152].

¹⁸² Weigel, *Body and Image*, 96.

¹⁸³ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 144.

¹⁸⁴ I employ the word secret, as in the formulation of 'an essential secrecy of convention' with loose reference to Derrida's use of this term, which similarly distinguishes it from the mere secrecy of convention. The unveiling of the secret, Derrida says, 'confirm[s] that there is something secret there, withdrawn, forever beyond the reach of hermeneutic exhaustion. A non-hermeneutic secret, it remains [...] heterogeneous to all interpretative totalization, eradicating the hermeneutic principle' [Derrida, *Shibboleth*, 28]. '[T]his secret that we *speak* of but are unable to *say*, is the sharing of what is not shared: we know in common that we have nothing in common' [Derrida & Ferraris, 58]. 'In consensus, in possible transparency, the secret is never broached/breached [*entame*].

in eschatology, as I here want to suggest, furthermore amounts to a critical engagement with certain auto-immune processes of the self-deconstruction of sovereignty, it is able to do so by further problematizing and putting into question the political organisation of access to such knowledge within a history of power-knowledge systems. Its gesture is that of an exposition of the fundamental historicity of all efforts at containing the possibilities of allegorical play, including its own. In exposing the absence of unequivocal and universally valid schemas of interpretation, the secrecy of a 'speaking other than comprehensively to all' becomes that of an inscribed possibility of *other* effects of presence in any given context of their limited containment. Or else, of a certain virtualisation of conceptualization. The allegorical signifier lives in excess of any given schema of reference [*Verweisung*] to a meaningful content. With the affirmation of the antinomies of allegory, that is, the ability of '[e]very person, every thing, every relationship [to] signify an arbitrary other,' any given reference [*Verweisung*] doubles up as an orphaning [*Verwaisen*].¹⁸⁵ In other words, the immediate non-present

If I am to share something, to communicate, objectify, thematize, the condition is that there be something non-thematizable, non-objectifiable, non-sharable. And this 'something' is an absolute secret, it is the *absolutum* itself in the etymological sense of the term, i.e., that which is cut off from any bond, detached, and which cannot itself bind; it is the condition of any bond but it cannot bind itself to anything – this is the absolute, and if there is something absolute it is secret' [ibid, 57].

¹⁸⁵ The German word *Verweisung* [reference], which Benjamin uses to describe the referencing character of the allegorical 'detail' (image, person, thing, relationship, in short, signifier) phonetically resembles that of *Verwaisung*, that is, 'orphaning.' Werner Hamacher makes a similar use of the couple *Verweisung/Verwaisung* in a different but, implicitly for now and increasingly explicitly later on, inextricably related context. That context is Benjamin's conception the messianic. Hamacher reads and responds to a small section of Benjamin's *Thesis On the Concept of History* that speaks of 'the 'index' of a 'messianic power', which 'we have been endowed with like every generation that preceded us.' If this index 'marks every historical *possibility*,' Hamacher comments, 'then messianic referentiality is *the structure of the possible* and of the historical time in which it lives on. Benjamin attributes weakness to this structural messianicity *not in order to note an accidental defect*, which, under ideal circumstances, could be remedied, but in order to emphasize

remaining of the signifier allows for the recognition of other possibilities of its signification. Allegorical theatricalization thereby follows a movement of gathering [*Sammlung*] and dispersion [*Zerstreuung*], as Benjamin puts it, by which ‘things are gathered for their meaning; disinterest in their being causes them once more to disperse’.¹⁸⁶ Such is the powerful, if ambivalent entertainment that offers itself to the melancholic writers and audiences of the *Trauerspiel*: banal objects rise ostentatiously out of the depth of allegory only to be left alone once more to their bleak everydayness.¹⁸⁷ The demonstrated exposure of the virtual possibilities of signification appeals to the melancholic readers of *Trauerspiel* as it renders a problematic relation of immanence and transcendence as infinitely re-workable. The opening of allegory to other possibilities of signification calls for an infinite participation in the construction of its significance. As such, the allegorical theatricalizations of the German baroque *Trauerspiel* offer the paradoxical chance of a quasi-transcendental experience of repeatable singularities. It does so by the aporetic performance of a simultaneous gesture of acceptance and non-acceptance of finitude and mortality in the absence of a meaning

a structural element of this messianicity, through which it, in turn, is referred to its possible failure. The possibility of happiness is only indicated with the corresponding possibility of its failure. The messianic index is crossed a priori by its reference to a possible failure and thus a possible impossibility. There is, in short, no referring (*Verweisung*) to a ‘messianic power’ that should not at the same time indicate, as Paul Celan used the word, its orphaning (*Verwaisung*); no index that would not have to reach the borders of its indexicality and become an ex-index; no messianicity that does not emerge from its non-messianicity. The weakness of the ‘messianic power’ lies in its structural finitude. [...]’ [Werner Hamacher, ‘Now’: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time’ in *Walter Benjamin and History*. ed. Andrew Benjamin, 38-68. (New York: Continuum, 2005), 45, my emphasis.] Albeit unable to develop it here, it would seem fitting in this context to at least indicate a possible link between the weakness of a messianic power and the *secrecy* of the rendez-vous [*geheime Verabredung*] between past generations and the present one, of which Benjamin speaks in the same thesis from his *Thesis On the Concept of History* [Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2002), 251-2].

¹⁸⁶ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 166.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*, 102.

that would be able to fully transcend such limitations. 'Because allegory is the traditional means of investing a manifestation with a signification that it cannot possibly have in terms of a pure immanent, self-contained structure,' Weber says, '[i]t [...] brings the signifying potential traditionally associated with a generalized transcendence to bear upon the claims of a localizable and individualizable secular immanence'.¹⁸⁸

[W]hat you see in the *Trauerspiel* is all you are going to get: all and nothing. What is performed on the stage is all there is: it has no further intrinsic, symbolic significance, except perhaps that of confirming the lack of symbolic significance, the lack of a transition leading from the secularised stage of the Counter-Reformation to a world beyond. But at the same time what you see is not what you get, since the significance of what you see depends upon things not seen and not shown. This lack of a symbolic immanence opens the theatrical site to a potentially endless, if by no means simply arbitrary, series of possible allegorical interpretations, which in turn calls into question the stage itself.¹⁸⁹

'Whereas the spectator of tragedy was solicited and legitimated by the drama,' Benjamin says, 'the *Trauerspiel* must be understood from the standpoint of the viewer'.¹⁹⁰

That Strange Detail of Allegorical *Verweisung/Verwaisung*

In the absence of hegemonic schemata of translation, the scheme of allegory must begin to account of its structural opening to other

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*, 174.

¹⁸⁹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 176.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*.

possibilities. The antinomies of allegory imply that every reference [*Verweisung*] doubles up as an orphaning [*Verwaisung*]. If it is through their ability to point elsewhere [*Verweisung*] that ‘the properties of meaning’ of allegorical signifiers ‘acquire a power that makes them appear incommensurable with profane things and raises them to a higher level,’ as Benjamin puts it, such a ‘power’ must remain structurally weak.¹⁹¹ For the immediate possibility of a mark’s orphaning from any given context intent at fixing those properties of meanings, exposes the essential impossibility of the latter’s containment. The structural weakness of a power to point elsewhere – *Verweisung/Verwaisung* – marks a shift in status for the (allegorical) detail. In his discussion of the antinomies of allegory, Benjamin suggests that the possibility of ‘[e]very person, [...], thing, [...] relationship [to] signify an arbitrary other [...] announces to the profane world an annihilating yet just verdict. For that world is designated as one in which details are not so important’.¹⁹² Yet, as Weber points out, Benjamin’s analysis of the status of the detail in baroque allegory is not an account of its simple devalorization but of a transformation of its function, or else, of its re-functioning.¹⁹³ What is devalorized, Weber suggest, is the status of the detail as signifying property ‘with respect to a criterion of value modelled on an ideal of identity as essentially self-contained or self-present. In this perspective,’ Weber adds, ‘the value of a detail derives from its organic relation to that from which it has in some way detached itself but of which it still remains an integral part’.¹⁹⁴ The transformed value of the allegorical detail on the other hand, lies in a *new and unpredictable significance* – its weak power to point elsewhere – that finds itself precisely predicated on the destruction of all ostensibly organic relations between part and whole. ‘The result,’ Weber notes, ‘is a proliferation of details without a unifying or informing point of view’.¹⁹⁵ Subsequently, the detail becomes

¹⁹¹ Benjamin. Ursprung, 152 & Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 177.

¹⁹² *ibid* & *ibid*.

¹⁹³ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 241.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, 242.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, 247.

distinctly theatrical: ‘There are “properties” [of meaning] but without assured owners or sites: in short, props – stage-properties, *Requisiten*’.¹⁹⁶ [T]he detail is no longer itself “in” anything at all: rather it lies exposed, like “dust,” signifying “enigmatically” on the theatrical stage’.¹⁹⁷ Allegory, Weber relates, is a scheme in a dual sense. What Benjamin calls the Midas-touch of allegory transforms whatever it grasps into something

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 248. Benjamin devotes large sections of his reading of *Trauerspiel* to its representations of the body as a particularly pertinent context of the allegorical emancipation of parts from their ostensibly organic relation to a whole that finds itself predicated on ‘an irreducible violation of whatever convention has consecrated as natural, organic and self-contained’ [*ibid.*, 179]. In his account, Benjamin incisively portrays a tendency for the body and “its” parts to take on a prop-like quality. Descriptions of the characters of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin points out, often evoke an impression of puppet theatre. The physical appearance of kings and princes – draped in regalia, bearing golden paper crowns, looking dim and sad, performing eccentrically stilted gestures, ‘heavy with crowns,’ seem rigid and object-like as puppets and the kings of a deck of cards [*Kartenkönige*] [Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 103-106]. What is more, the body often uncannily fragments into a collection of props, like that of ‘the burned head of the steadfast princess of Georgia’ [*ibid.*, 105-6]. The Midas-touch of allegory performs violence against the conception of the body as organic whole through its gory dismemberment. It strives towards the emblematic fragmentation of the life of the human body, Benjamin notes, allotting its parts to the antinomies of allegory, in order to read an enigmatic meaning from its shards. A fragmented and unfree *physis* reveals itself, like Winckelmann’s *Description of the Torso of Hercules at the Belvedere in Rome*, not symbolically in the fleeting light of redemption, but piecemeal [*ibid.*, 154 & Benjamin, *The Origin*, 176]. The strictest realisation of such allegorical allotment of the body, Benjamin states, is consummated only with the corpse [Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 193]. The characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, Benjamin says, not to become immortal, but to turn into corpses. ‘Life, from the perspective of death, is the production of the corpse’ [*ibid.*, 194]. In Benjamin’s account, the corpse becomes the *Trauerspiel*’s supreme emblematic prop. In the so-called ‘meal of the dead,’ three glasses of blood are served alongside three beheaded heads. The staging of such meals was conducted according to an Italian trick, in which the head of an actor appeared through a hole of the table whose cover reached all the way to the ground, accomplishing the effect of the body’s soulless exposition. The uncanny aspect of the body’s augmentation finds another example in the *Trauerspiel*’s strange practice of doubling the appearance of characters with ghostly versions of themselves. Ghosts of the living that evidence, as Benjamin insists, an obsessive allegorical multiplication of what previously was felt to be uniquely self-enclosed [*ibid.*, 172].

significant by wresting an isolated phenomenon from its context. Weakening the phenomenon's resistance to allegorical interpretation by isolating it 'in its singularity,' as Weber puts it, it is able to 'transform the singular phenomenon into a (general) signification'.¹⁹⁸ The double scheme of allegory here functions as the pivot point between the singular and the general, facilitating their rotation whilst exposing their paradoxical interrelation. Here, singularity, as the *condition and excess* of all situated allegorical appropriation, describes the becoming opaque of the body of a signifier severed from any given contextual determinations of its significance. It is the opaque *Schriftbild* of what Werner Hamacher, in a different but nevertheless related context designates as the caesura, the "cloudy place" [*wolkige Stelle*] or incomprehensible gesture in the representation [*Darstellung*] of historical experience, which opens the latter to its future alterity.¹⁹⁹ Instead of mediating [*vermitteln*] between a particular figure and a general meaning, Hamacher states, the opaque signifier parasitically draws attention to itself and defers the arrival of meaning in the representation.²⁰⁰ With reference to the status of the singularity of a name within the system of language, Hamacher notes how the latter does not belong to those aspects of it that *impart* something but to those marks that secure *impartability* itself.²⁰¹ However, like the singular phenomenon of allegorical appropriation, for Hamacher, the name always remains translatable into a general concept. As such, it must in turn subject itself to the unlimited combinatorics that constitutes the experience of language. Its property and transparency is

¹⁹⁸ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 337.

¹⁹⁹ Werner Hamacher 'Die Geste im Namen', *Entferntes Verstehen*, 280-324. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1998), 293. The context in which Hamacher develops these reflections is that of the literary work of Franz Kafka. I am unable here to develop the resonance between Hamacher's or indeed Benjamin's reading of Kafka and the German baroque *Trauerspiel*. To indicate the direction of such a comparison, however, one might suggest that both respond to a crisis of tradition and institution with a gesture that seeks to defer the coming in order to multiply its possibilities.

²⁰⁰ Hamacher, 285.

²⁰¹ *ibid*, 299.

put into question by the swell of its possibilities. It is the immanent threshold or *Schwelle*, the pivot point of an oscillation between the singular and the general, opacity and transparency, *Schriftbild* and instrument. As every name is translatable into a concept, every concept must equally be translatable into a name. Following this brief detour via Hamacher's reflections on the relative opacity of the name, it becomes possible to link the suspended process of isolating the phenomenon from the context that determines its use or meaning to what Benjamin, in yet another context, describes as the gesture of rescuing [*Rettung*]. What is rescued or saved from the reduction of language to an instrument by a gesture that similarly seeks to isolate fragments from any given conventional context is the impartability of language. Severed from any given context of its determination, the isolated fragment becomes opaque, like the word that, the closer a look one takes at, as Benjamin was so fond of quoting Karl Kraus, the greater the distance from which it looks back.²⁰² Benjamin, with reference to the citational writing practice of Karl Kraus, non-fortuitously describes this gesture as 'calling a word by its name'.²⁰³ The isolated name, like the singular phenomenon of allegorical appropriation, finds itself exposed, weakened in its resistance to the coming of an appropriative code. As the limit of both singularity and generality, it undermines the property of the name or the closure of a system and begins to swell under its impartability [*Mittelbarkeit*]. In the realm of allegory, which is not that of alphabetical writing, the strange detail of allegorical *Verweisung/Verwaisung* is not the 'word called by its name' but all kinds of the most inconspicuous phenomena [*Dinge*] deprived of their natural and productive place and function in the

²⁰² Walter Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*, 334-367. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 361.

²⁰³ Walter Benjamin in *Walter Benjamin, The work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty & Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone & Howard Eiland. (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2008), 384. I will return to the context of Benjamin's concept of *Rettung* in much more detail at a later stage of the thesis.

world as a cipher for a mysterious [*rätselfhaften*] wisdom.²⁰⁴ Benjamin, by turning to Dürer's famous painting *Melencolia*, reads an aspect of the latter as an illustration of the thus orphaned status of phenomena, isolated in their 'singularity' and weakened in their resistance to allegorical appropriation. These are the depiction of objects that have ceased to be mere instruments: 'the appliances and tools of working life [that] lie unused on the floor as objects of contemplation'.²⁰⁵ Carpentry tools lacking in use-value – a plane, a saw, a plank of wood, some nails – are exposed in their 'singularity' in excess of their instrumentality. Cast by a melancholic gaze, they offer themselves to the infinite transformations of their *Deutbarkeit* as the silent but virtual medium of allegory.

The Plotter and the Sovereign

That the detail is no longer itself "in" anything at all but lies exposed as prop on the theatrical stage of course implies that it can also no longer be simply the mere part of a plot. As such, the gesture of its "isolation" is one that seeks to wrest it from the continuity of time rather than the synchrony of space and is concomitant to the *Trauerspiel's* efforts to bring temporal progression to a halt by stacking previously temporal data into the clutter of spatial assemblages. The remnants of the *Trauerspiel's* plot, severed from the totalizing goal of its end, Benjamin relates, become part of the scenario rather than constituting its informing frame. Ornamental layers of baroque stakku conceal or bury what remains of the tensions or development of a dramatic plot. Contrary to its role in Classical drama, the *Trauerspiel's* chorus, furthermore, no longer appears as a commentator on its overall

²⁰⁴ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 121.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

unfolding at decisive moments between the acts, but behaves towards plot and act as ornamental margins in Renaissance print do towards the type. The unravelling of the isolated and stacked up parts of what remains of the plot in *Trauerspiel* finds itself closely linked to the figure of the plotter or intriguer [*der Intrigant*] who facilitates their embroilment.²⁰⁶ In the absence of dramatic tensions that derive from an uncertainty over the outcomes of a plot, the plotter replaces the significance of the hero-protagonist. His scheming and plotting no longer seek to achieve anything at all, least of all leaving behind a great work.²⁰⁷ He manipulates links and connections, arranges and combines for the pleasure alone. For the plotter, power and violence [*Gewalt*] no longer constitute instruments for the institution of sovereignty, but are scheming devices without end, put to work in the perpetual re-working of the ostensibly sovereign but essentially precarious orders of institutional containment. Responding to a general crisis of works, for the plotter, all that remains is the virtuosity of the labour of reworking. The plotter, we might say, follows the distinctly theatrical protocols of the rehearsal in contrast to or in excess of the ostensible security of the work. His facilitations and seductions, Benjamin notes, are devoid of interest for power and control. As the promoter of ‘choreographic embroilments,’ he resists the historical flow towards the ends of history, whether of salvation or apocalypse. ‘[T]he plotter – *der Intrigant*[,]’ Weber states,

is related to the plot (*die Intrige*) not just lexically, but semantically and etymologically, as Benjamin’s argument makes clear. If the term “intrigue” derives from the Latin *intrigare*, “confuse, confound,” such confusion is inseparable from a tendency of the baroque to which Benjamin attaches considerable importance: its “projection of temporal process into space,” and in particular into that particular space known as the “court”. The

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, 76.

²⁰⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 178.

intriguer is the “exponent of [this] showplace,” the exemplary courtier, in that he has no proper place, no “home” outside of it. Inside, however, his function is to in-trigue, to confuse, and the condition of such confusion is precisely the particular spatialisation and localisation of processes that are usually considered to be temporal or historical in character. As, for instance, political processes: “The course of political events [*geschehen*] is frozen and fixed by the plot [*die Intrigue*], which strikes the seconds [*schlägt den Sekundentakt*]”. The plot beats time, as it were, by em-plotting it, confining and con-fusing it within the narrow and local space of the court.²⁰⁸

Through his incessant rearrangement and re-combination of discrete fragments severed from the totalizing schemas of a whole – for instance, those of the plot, the work and the body²⁰⁹ – the plotter, albeit perhaps irresponsibly so, affirms and perpetuates the self-deconstruction of the sovereignty of institutions, works and action under way in the German baroque. He begins to deal with the crisis of sovereignty from within the experience of a radical immanence to which the world of the baroque sees itself condemned. As such, the plotter forms a counterpart to the figure of the sovereign in *Trauerspiel*. Marked by a deep anxiety over the unpredictable coming of time and the ineffectiveness of his acts, the sovereign’s predominant response to his predicament consists of a paranoid reflex that wants to overcome the crisis of sovereignty by the tyranny of phantasm of omnitemporality. If the epoch’s theatrical figures stand, as Benjamin puts it, within the glaring light of their changing decisions, nowhere does this become more apparent than in the figure of the sovereign. Like ‘torn fluttering flags’ he is subjected to the arbitrary

²⁰⁸ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 141-2.

²⁰⁹ Benjamin speaks of the plotter as a precursor to the ballet master, who, as Weber notes, begins to stand for a near dictatorial effort to train and torture his pupils, ‘to make them learn and master their bodies, not as organic unities, but as articulations of joints and of *membra disjecta*, ready to be placed in space rather than deployed as a whole’ [ibid, 179].

and despotic nature of the storm of his affects.²¹⁰ Swaying physical impulses determine his decision making process. Whereas the expression of a general conflict of will and sensation, Benjamin notes, is to be found in both the dramatic and plastic figures of the time – fittingly described by Riegel as ‘the discord between head and body position – with the theatrical figure of the sovereign, as well as its worldly referent, the crisis of decision takes on the highest stakes. In the political realm of the baroque, the sovereign embodies the unworkability of an increasingly problematic definition of effective action by the production of meaningful works. ‘[T]he rise of the authority of the secular state with respect to the power of the Curia,’ Weber observes,

endows princes with a power that tends to the absolute. But such absolute power reveals its limitations, since it is no longer able to claim a transcendent justification, and hence the power to endow collective life with a meaning that could comprehend and surpass individual mortality. The sovereign is thus *primus inter pares*, but still subject to the guilt and corruption held to pervade an essentially unredeemed and guilty creation, consisting of mortal, perishable, and largely unsalvageable individuals.²¹¹

Previously conceived of as the earthly head of creation, partaking in a sacred order, reformatory forces expose the head of state as creature [*Kreatur*]. His exalted position all the more conflicted by the powerless non-mastery [*Ohnmacht*] over the outcomes of his acts. Severed like the rest of creation from access to grace, the sovereign begins to wield absolute power with the gestures of a clumsy creature. When representing the thus conflicted figures of authority, Benjamin relates, the *Trauerspiel* offered two major responses to the crisis of their sovereignty: the creaturely dimension of a corporeal martyrdom and the despotic efforts of a tyranny of decisiveness. The latter, as the

²¹⁰ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 53.

²¹¹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 171.

dictatorship over wavering affects and contingent historical events, the restoration of order through a permanent state of exception and the implementation of “natural” law that constitutes its utopia, gives some sense of the political stakes of possible responses to the baroque crisis of eschatology.²¹²

In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but the two faces of the monarch. They are the necessarily extreme incarnations of the princely essence. As far as the tyrant is concerned, this is clear

²¹² Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 55. The theme of a constitutive crisis of sovereignty – here exposed by an epochal crisis of institutions – can also be found in Benjamin’s previous reflections on the finitude of sovereignty in his ‘Critique of Violence.’ Following Mathias Fritsch’s reading of the latter, Benjamin can be seen to develop a conception of the essential finitude of power, that is, the necessary self-alienation of all law-positing violence/power [*Gewalt*] from which springs ‘the recognition of a messianic force associated with the powerlessness of power [...]’ as it will become an increasingly dominant theme for these reflections on a politics of rehearsal [ibid, 105]. The essential finitude of all law-positing power, as Fritsch relates, ‘signifies the necessary openness of political and legal power to its own transformation’ [ibid, 104]. The tyranny of the *Trauerspiel*’s sovereign, therefore, merely consists of a particularly desperate gesture of a general disavowal of finitude pertaining to the exercise of power as such. For what Benjamin’s reflections on violence [*Gewalt*] seek to reveal is that the disavowal of the inherent weakness of institutions is necessarily at work in the implementation of legal order as the positing and *preservation* of law that seeks to achieve stability and permanence. For Benjamin, it is important to ‘understand this necessity of power to institute itself, and to subsequently monopolize violence in the interest of its own self-preservation,’ in so far as the latter insight is also what provides a foundation for a critique of violence. Benjamin’s own version of this critique subsequently broaches ‘the possibility of pure means and pure violence free of this necessity’ [ibid, 111]. In the context of German baroque *Trauerspiel*, the plotter perhaps constitutes an active proponent of such a passively exposed gesture of “pure” violence without determinable end. Such a gesture would be a ‘means without end’ only insofar, as Weber puts it in a different but related context, ‘as the word “without” defines a relation not of simple exclusion or negation, but of *participation* “with” the “out”-side of an irreducible and yet constitutive exteriority’ [Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 197, my emphasis]. Not only does it put into question all preserving violence of existing institutions, but also does it interrupt its own act of positing or address. In departing from and establishing a relation to itself as other, the “purity” of this gesture constitutes a theatrical *Schwelle*, that is, a ‘zone of indefinite expansion and inflation reaching out to others on whose response it depends’ [ibid, 235].

enough. The theory of sovereignty, which takes as its example the special case in which dictatorial powers are unfolded, positively demands the completion of the image of the sovereign as tyrant.²¹³

In the *Trauerspiel*, the completion of the image of the sovereign as tyrant as a symptom of the baroque experience of a crisis in eschatology is contrasted by the figure of the plotter. In the character of the plotter or intriguer, it was able to depict an antipode to the sovereign's tyranny and an example of a different attitude towards crisis, which as a crisis of decision – *krisis* – is always a crisis of sovereignty. Both sovereign and plotter are eager to ward off an encroaching meaninglessness of their immanent acts severed from the organized *telos* of their transcendent ends. Where the tyrant violently seeks to overcome crisis by re-instituting a secure, permanent order, the plotter finds the resources for his response – a participation in the social re-construction of meaning that is able to overcome atrophy and stultification – within the general undecidability of crisis itself. In affirming the weak force of a finite power – the necessary openness of political and legal power, but also of meaning more generally, to its own transformation – the plotter's model attitude, like the playwrights and audiences of *Trauerspiel*, express a very different response to the sentiment of *Trauer* [mourning] than that of paranoia, the violent reinstitution of old or new orders of convention and the tyrannic suppression of contingency. The plotter's attitude, like that of the playwrights and audiences of *Trauerspiel*, is marked by the affirmation of a constitutive precariousness of a perpetually reworked ethos. Theirs was a response to an empirical crisis of sovereignty that begins to account for the structural processes of its self-deconstruction. Their playful, experimental, theatrical and radically performative gestures of reanimating what was otherwise experienced as an empty, meaningless and ephemeral world was marked by a *Haltung* that interrupts, not only the historical flow, but its own intentional, goal

²¹³ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 51. & Benjamin, *The Origin*, 69.

directed movement. In doing so, it begins to swell under the possibilities of becoming other. As such it becomes a model for a politics of rehearsal that engages the political effectiveness of ‘a certain thinking of virtuality, possibility, potentiality [...] – a certain virtualization of conceptualization itself [and] of “meaning”’.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 355.

CHAPTER TWO

Test-Performances in the Time of Reproducibility²¹⁵

Towards a New Concept of Inheritance

One of the manifold possible trajectories to discern and follow in Walter Benjamin's famous essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' is the movement of emancipation of the work of art from its parasitic subservience to *ritual* and its consequent reliance on *a different practice*.²¹⁶ This other practice Benjamin designates at different points of the essay as either *politics* or *play*, implicitly bringing into proximity two terms of seemingly disparate realms under the banner of a revolution of the social function of art. Benjamin's elaborate analysis of technical reproducibility of works of art takes place in the wider context of a concern with a crisis of tradition and inheritance as the movement of its transmission. Immediately parting with the present context of its production, the reproducible work of art – primary example for Benjamin throughout the essay is film – as Samuel Weber puts it, "takes place" in many places at once, in multiple here-and-nows, and [...] therefore cannot be said to have any "original" occurrence'.²¹⁷ As the time of its production is always already breached by the time of (its) reproducibility, it has inscribed in it the possibility of the coming of an infinite alterity at its very "origin." What previously imbued the artwork with 'the quintessence of all that is transmissible in

²¹⁵ In a commentary on Benjamin's essay, Samuel Weber suggests to translate its title as 'The Work of Art in the Time of its Technical Reproducibility.' 'Despite its obvious awkwardness,' Weber says, 'I use the word "Time" here, rather than the more idiomatic "Age", to translate 'Zeit' [...], because what is involved [...] is precisely a question of *time* and of an alteration in its relation to space' [Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, 82].

²¹⁶ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 106.

²¹⁷ Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, 90.

it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it,' here finds itself undermined and with it 'the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition'.²¹⁸ This process – the withering of the aura of the work of art – which Benjamin repeatedly circumscribes in differently nuanced constellations, is symptomatic, as he puts it, 'its significance extend[ing] far beyond the realm of art'.²¹⁹ The new type of (art) object, the reproducible work (of art), no longer finds itself embedded in a particular contextual space and cannot be submitted to 'the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day'.²²⁰ Instead, technological reproducibility jolts the reproducible object from the sphere of tradition by substituting what Benjamin calls a 'mass existence' [*massenweises Vorkommen*] for a unique existence.²²¹ Whatever else Benjamin seeks to signal towards with this expression, it clearly wants to designate a fundamental shift in the conception of the spatiotemporal relations between production and reception. A shift that is indicated throughout Benjamin's essay, as Weber notes, as 'the same German verb – *aufnehmen* – is used to designate cinematic production as well as reception,' indicating therewith 'that both ends of the process may share some very basic features'.²²² The shift in spatio-temporal identification not only affects the object of art produced – i.e. film – but also those captured in the process of its production, or else, those submitted to the *Aufnahme* [recording] of an apparatus. In a scenario of self-alienation that for Benjamin raises the stakes of a favourite theme of the Romantics,

²¹⁸ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 106.

²¹⁹ *ibid*, 104.

²²⁰ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 91.

²²¹ *ibid*, 103. A less idiomatic rendering of '*massenweises Vorkommen*' here might be 'plurality of copies,' but I want to stress the plurality of recipients rather than that of the object received. Furthermore, as both chance and threat, the ambiguous concept of the mass perhaps plays an important role in Benjamin's theory of modernity, which mourns the waning of tradition in the wake of a collapse of intimate, small, rural and religious communities whilst drawing hope from the "inhuman" character of anonymous, industrial and secular metropolises that finds an expression in the phenomenon of the mass.

²²² Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, 91.

one's (mirror-) image not only 'has become detachable from the person mirrored,' but has become transportable, as he puts it, '[t]o a site in front of the masses'.²²³ The *Aufnahme* [recording, reception] of transportable images renders organic wholes *zerstückelt* [cut into pieces] and *zerstreut* [dispersed]. Benjamin links the *cutting* 'operation' of the camera to that of a surgeon by 'the violence involved in their respective 'penetration' of organic wholes. The parcelling out of pieces in view of their dispersion and future gathering here must recall the allegorical mode of signification of the German baroque mourning play. For the mourning play's allegorical schema, as we saw Benjamin relate, is one of 'dispersion' [*Zerstreuung*] and 'gathering' [*Sammlung*]: '[t]hings are brought together according to their meaning; indifference to their being-there (*Dasein*) disperses them once again'.²²⁴ *Zerstückelt* is furthermore not only a subject's self-representation, but also the 'representation of his environment by means of this apparatus'.²²⁵ Benjamin links the piecemeal nature of the latter's images, together with its possibilities of closing in or slowing down that far exceed human capacities of perception, to the assurance of 'a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*]'.²²⁶ 'Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories,' he says,

seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.²²⁷

Here, an expanded field of action [*Spielraum*] is linked to the aftermath of destruction, that is, to the far-flung *remains* of previous orders of perception. Benjamin more generally describes such destructive-

²²³ *ibid*, 103.

²²⁴ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 166.

²²⁵ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 117.

²²⁶ *ibid*.

²²⁷ *ibid*.

productive forces by the 'shattering' and 'liquidation' of embedding traditions, a process connected with the freeing of non-ordinary and non-identical 'objects' and 'subjects' from the tight hold of any one context of determination qua time of reproducibility. It is the destructive forces unleashed by the withering of the aura of the work of art that for Benjamin make up some of the most positive forms of its revolutionized social function founded on the practice of politics and play.²²⁸ What is destroyed, is not necessarily or merely the reified products of a particular institutionalised cultural heritage, but the organized movement of their passing on. In other words, what is put into crisis is not only the content and authority of the transmitted, but the very mode and authority of the form of transmission. The 'upheaval in the domain of

²²⁸ Benjamin's thinking and writing, here as, albeit with shifting emphasis, elsewhere, is marked by what Samuel Weber has identified as 'a double (or "cracked") tone.' For Weber, the cracked style of Benjamin's writings follows from his effort to elaborate a non-instrumental conception of language that leads him to insist on the irreducible immediacy of the medial. The originating crack or fracture of all identity – whether of subjects, objects, things or meanings – marked throughout Benjamin's writings by a certain virtualization of conceptualization by the suffix –ability, 'comes to acquire historical, political, and cultural significance,' when applied in the historical context of a waning tradition. Benjamin's essay on the work of art in the time of reproducibility can clearly be seen to grapple with the political stakes of the –ability by stressing the tone of engagement and hope over that of melancholy and mourning. Weber's gloss on Benjamin's double tone, as will become increasingly clear, thus resonates deeply with our present concerns: '[Benjamin's thinking and writing] are marked by a double (or "cracked") tone. On the one hand, that of melancholy, sadness, and mourning (*Trauer* is a leitmotif from first to last); on the other hand, and inseparable from the first because its consequence, that of energetic engagement, militancy, and hope, because the very same fracture that is felt as loss also opens up the (linguistic) possibility of this loss itself being lost, imparting and thus altering itself and thereby keeping the way open for the coming of something radically different. This is how the ostensible transcendentalism of Benjamin's -abilities comes to acquire historical, political, and cultural significance. Everything that contributes to dislodging that which is – by forcing it into a mode of self-imparting, self-departing, by wrenching it free from its established sites – is both painful, creating a sense of loss (that of the "aura," for instance, provoked by the spread of techniques of "reproducibility") and at the same time the bearer of messianic hope' [Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 119].

objects handed down from the past' concerns these objects as much as the gesture of their handing down, the very modality of how the past is left for the future. A productive-destructive, if not self-deconstructive force unleashes with the shattering of tradition, which thereby reconfigures, as we might here put it in order to facilitate the afterlife of Benjamin's own text, the status of *signature, event and context*. If the unique work of art found itself more or less safely embedded in, if not tightly guarded by a tradition that sought to (re-)institute itself for eternity, the reproducible work of art, no longer unique and securely embedded in a counter-signing context that tends towards the closure of determination, must give itself over from its "origin" to the effects of space and time – or once more put in a register that is not Benjamin's: *the becoming spacing of time and the becoming time of space* – eschewing the relative permanence of contextual determinations (with all the power structures that come into play in such rigid contextual and institutional embedding), to surrender before the plurality of its 'mass existence.'²²⁹ Perhaps not the least important feature of this non-unique plurality of a 'mass existence' is what Benjamin calls the artwork's subsequent 'capability for improvement'.²³⁰ Here, by a structural movement of reproducibility that involves difference as much as repetition, the artwork exposes itself as infinitely reworkable.

²²⁹ I say 'more or less embedded' and speak of a 'tendency towards closure,' to indicate that it is not here a matter of identifying an absolute break, but an epochal shift in tendency. Following the ultratranscendental logic of a structural crack of identity regardless of its techno-historical conditions of inscription, the unique, embedded work of art will have always already been more or less subject to dynamic processes of a however curbed time reproducibility. At the same time, the reproducible work of art is still vulnerable to re-appropriations by governing powers in the service of enhancing tradition and aura. In fact, Benjamin's hope of a revolution of the social function of art finds itself menaced at various instances throughout the essay by the fear of capitalist and fascist appropriations of the new media. The chance of a mass participation is threatened from within by the threat of a hegemonic representation of the mass and vice versa.

²³⁰ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 109.

Improvability

Although Benjamin is thinking about the ‘capacity for improvement’ in the context of the staggered process of film production – from the initial ‘taking’ of images to the ‘final cut’ of its assemblage – it is nevertheless tempting to momentarily stop following the trajectory of his essay’s content to instead reflect upon its own formal composition and history of assemblage. For the latter quickly begins to mirror the very principle of a capacity for (editorial) improvement that it itself ascribes to film as the prototype of the reproducible work of art and antithesis of a monolithic object of inheritance. Comparing the reproducible work of art’s ‘capacity for improvement’ to the eternal values of Greek sculpture, Benjamin writes:

The finished film is the exact antithesis of a work created at a single stroke. It is assembled from the very large number of images and image sequences that offer an array of choices to the editor; these images, moreover, can be improved in any desired way in the process leading from the initial take to the final cut.

Benjamin’s repeated re-assemblage of his own essay over three different versions perhaps rehearses a similar structural possibility of the movement of alteration in repetition that here pertains to a fundamental lack of primary originality of film qua ‘time of reproducibility’. Given Benjamin’s anti-instrumental conception of language as an ‘immediate impartibility’ [*unmittelbare Mitteilbarkeit*] that virtually takes leave of itself in any given context of determination, ‘parts with what it was to become something else, to be transposed, transmitted, or translated into something else’ – substituting therewith, as we might here put it in light of the resonance of a certain sharing-with [*mit-teilen*], a ‘mass existence’ for a unique existence in its origin – his text, or indeed any text, must reckon with the possibility of its transformation at another time and

place, whether by Benjamin's own efforts or by its future reception [Aufnahme] through the manifold inheritors to come of its already multiplied versions or takes.²³¹ What is thus decisive in the

²³¹ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 42. Benjamin develops his concept of impart-ability in his early essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man'. The essay seeks to develop a theory of language that avoids construing the latter as an instrument or means [Mittel] to an end, as well as that of an *end in itself*. In these efforts, as Samuel Weber relates, Benjamin comes to formulate for the first time a certain *virtualization* in the formulation of a key concept by the suffix -ability [-barkeit], a stylistic particularity 'that will distinguish his writings from beginning to end' and which, as we have seen, also plays a central part in his reflections on the art work's reproduce-ability [Reproduzierbarkeit]: 'These are Benjamin's -barkeiten, Weber relates, 'his "-abilities," which define his major concepts in terms of what Derrida has called *structural possibility* rather than in view of their actual realization' [ibid, 39]. Given that for Benjamin language cannot be subordinated to an external measure, what imparts itself in language and never through it does so immediately or without mediation [unmittelbar] [ibid, 40]. The 'linguisticity of language,' as Weber also calls it, is thus described by a term - *Mitteilung* - that contrary to the resonances of its general translation as *communication* more literally suggests "parting with," "sharing", or "to impart" [mitteilen]. The immediacy of language's impart-ability here further resonates with the art works' *mass existence in the (first) time of its reproducibility*. In the context of his reflections on Benjamin's theory of language, Weber describes the logic of *unmediated impartability* as follows: "The impart-ability that constitutes language as medium is un-mediated, im-mediate: not a means to an end, nor a middle between poles or periphery, but also not simply the opposite of a means, which is to say, an end in itself. Rather, language still retains one decisive aspect of the means, which is that it is not self-contained, complete, perfect, or perfectible. It is simply *there*, but as something that splits off from itself, takes leave of itself, *parts with* what it was to become something else, to be transposed, transmitted, or translated into something else. [...] What is "immediate" is that which is defined by the potentiality of taking leave of itself, of its place and position, of altering itself. [...] In short, as medium, language *parts with itself* and can thus be said to constitute a medium of virtuality, a virtual medium that cannot be *measured* by the possibility of self-fulfilment but by its constitutive alterability' [ibid, 42].

Such immediate leave-taking of a place and position, a virtuality rendered by a constitutive alterability is similarly at work in Benjamin's writings on the reproducible work of art. Relating Benjamin's reflections on language to a discourse on the artwork, Weber states fittingly: 'Against the claims of the integrative artwork Benjamin insists on the medial imparting as the historical heritage of the work. Works are not self-enclosed or complete, but live on, survive themselves as something

transformative movement of (self-)inheritance is that beyond the limited context of Benjamin's above remarks on the process of film production, the structural logic of reproducibility must hold open the possibility of future alteration in excess of any so-called "final" cut of an editor or author. All receptions [*Aufnahmen*] of the latter are bound to return the relative "finality" of assemblage to a greater state of potentiality, before themselves choosing, whether knowingly or not, upon its more or less differing re-assemblage; following a movement of dispersion and gathering by which any given "finality" only comes to be in passing away. The rich and diverse afterlife of Benjamin's essay, whether in print, (mis)translation, or indeed (mis)interpretation, perhaps attests to the multiple alterities inscribed in the structure of its 'reproducibility' beyond Benjamin's own endeavours at putting to work, if not into play, but perhaps also seeking to more or less "finalize" and thus curb and bring to an end its *capacity for improvement*. That today it takes up such a preeminent position on the syllabus of Fine Art and Humanities courses of Higher Education is, unlike what Benjamin says of Greek sculpture's pre-eminence in Art History, no longer a result of its eternal values, but to the contrary, due to the productive lure of its general open-endedness. The latter invites, for better or worse, the continual reconfiguration of its

else, for instance, as criticism or as translations. Or as theatrical performances. In such performances, they are no longer the same as they were: they take leave to become something else' [ibid, 47-8]. Following Benjamin's conception of language, the latter's immediate imparting cannot be avoided but merely disavowed. From which follows that it cannot be reduced to the status of a style, as it is always already taking place on the level of the mark of language itself, regardless and in spite of an author's intentions. Nevertheless, Benjamin's method and style, attuned to language's immediate imparting, could be said to seek to include 'in *what* is described, but also in the practical discourse, in the *writing that describes*' the structural possibility of a transformative survival [Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 78]. For instance, by the movement of an active self-inheritance or recycling of concepts in a variety of contexts, which begin to swell under the multiplication of actual contextual difference and are exposed in their structural possibility of engendering an infinite amount of other contexts, Benjamin demonstrates the non-instrumental life of language even when putting it to more or less communicative ends.

parts in new contexts, including the present one. It follows that what Benjamin calls the reproducible artwork's capacity for *improvement* can thus equally and at the same time be always described as the *threat* of its coming corruption. Improvability must not be construed as perfectibility along a teleologic trajectory of a sublating synthesis, that is, as a mediation that 'is always only a "moment" on the way to becoming what it "virtually" will always have been; a future perfecting itself as the presence of the past (perfect)'.²³² Both its chance (of improvement) and threat (of corruption) are born of the same structural opening to the coming of the other. For 'when one speaks of "the other,"' as Martin Hägglund reminds us, 'one can never know in advance what or whom one invokes. It is thus impossible to decide whether the encounter with the other will bring about a chance or a threat, recognition or rejection, continued life or violent death'.²³³ Benjamin, speaking in the context of his discussion of the reproducibility of film, is of course not at all unaware of the ambivalence of potential of a work of art severed from 'a tradition that has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day'.²³⁴ When reflecting on the revolutionary chance of the social function of art, he increasingly begins to reckon as well as detect in his time the most worrying signs of the entanglement of the *chance* for a non-ritualistic social function of art founded on a practice of politics and play with that of the *threat* of its auratic re-appropriation put in the service of monopolist capitalism and fascism.

Benjamin, in any case, was well aware that the marks of language, like the dispersed 'object' of film and its *zerstreut and zerstückelt* 'subjects' captured, has always already lived a certain 'mass existence' in place of authenticity by virtue of its immediate impart-ability [*unmittelbar mitteilbar*]. However attentive to the epochal technological shifts underway in 'the age of reproducibility,' his analysis avoids the

²³² Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 37.

²³³ Hägglund, p.91. The logic of a possible corruption or contamination as the very condition of the limited function of a mark is thoroughly developed by Derrida's 'Signature, Event, Context' and *Limited Inc.*

²³⁴ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 103.

logic of a radical historical break by being grounded in what we might call a quasi-transcendental structure. His early insistence on the irreducible mediality of language qua impart-ability, as Weber notes, ‘indicates that his concern with the “media” originates not in his later studies of radio, film, and photography, but rather in his effort to elaborate a noninstrumental conception of language’.²³⁵ In so far as the immediacy of the medial belongs to language as such, it is irreducible to a particular style or text, whether Benjamin’s or any other. Yet despite the structural ability of language’s impart-ability to resist even the most laborious efforts at reigning in what Derrida calls a text’s structural unconscious – for instance, by the authority of signatures and institutional counter-signatures – those efforts are nevertheless able to exert limited embedding effects. On the other end of the spectrum there are those texts and (art)works that are more readily exposed to the coming of time, more demonstratively risking the possibility of a transformative survival and calling therewith for the participation of the other, that is, appealing ‘to negotiate the crack and take the leap [...] by a reading that goes against the grain of meaning ‘so that the text does not disappear into it but remains as figure: as writing-image (*Schriftbild*)’.²³⁶ Benjamin’s style, saturated with an excessive use of (self-)citation and montage, can perhaps be read along these lines, that is, as concerned with a practical staging of his theoretical concerns.

Politics and Play

Benjamin’s elaborations on the reproducible artworks’ ‘capacity for improvement’ take place in the context of a brief comparison with Greek art, for which the latter, as he puts it, would have been the least

²³⁵ Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 118.

²³⁶ *ibid*, 299.

compelling quality of the artwork or in any case one dismissed as marginal. The antithesis of the work of art capable of improvement qua mode of reproducibility can thus be found in Greek sculpture, created at a single stroke and literally all of a piece, passed on as a monolithic object of inheritance. Due to a limited availability of reproduction technologies, Benjamin suggests, the Greeks were compelled to produce eternal values in their art, which is why the pinnacle of their arts was the form least capable of improvement. 'To this,' Benjamin adds, 'they owe their preeminent position in art history'.²³⁷ His own time, on the other hand, strikes Benjamin as lying at the opposite pole from that of the Greeks. The reproducible work of art's capability of improvement is necessarily linked to a radical renunciation of eternal values. In the age of the assembled [*montierbar*] artwork, the latter presents itself as wholly provisional.

A similar polarity between the eternal and the provisional informs another comparative scene of Benjamin's essay. Having early on proclaimed the emancipation of the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual and the concomitant reconfiguration of the function of art from being founded on ritual to being based on a different practice, namely, *politics*, Benjamin reinscribes a similar polarity and shift in the function of the work of art in slightly different terms. He begins by describing a shift from the artwork's cult value to its exhibition value, a transformation that eschews the sacralised removal of objects from public view in places with only privileged access for the enormously increased visibility of technologically reproduced works of art. Whereas the former found its use in the service of magic and ritual, the latter signals towards a historical change in the function of art. By retracing this shift from the point of view of a technological function of the art object, Benjamin then contrasts a prehistoric use of art in the service of magical practice (first technology) to a modern use in the service of a distancing from nature through play (second technology). Here, once again, the polarity of the two functions of art as technology is

²³⁷ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 109.

one between fundamentally different attitudes towards time, history and inheritance. On the one hand, ritual use aims at a firm hold over the coming of the future, whereas on the other, playful use develops an attitude of provisionality and endless experiment:

The results of the first technology are valid *once and for all* (it deals with *irreparable* lapse or sacrificial death, *which holds good for eternity*). The results of the second are wholly *provisional* (it operates by means of *experiments* and *endlessly varied test procedures*). The origin of the second technology lies at the point where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies, in other words, in *play*.²³⁸

Eschewing first technologies aim at a “mastery over nature,” second technology, Benjamin relates, aims instead at ‘an *interplay* between nature and humanity’.²³⁹ Here, in the context of this *inter-play*, it is perhaps not surprising that Benjamin reverts to a theatrical trope when once again defining ‘the primary social function of art today,’ namely, ‘to *rehearse* that *interplay*’.²⁴⁰ In other words, the new social function of art links the practice of politics to the repetitive, playful experiments of rehearsal and ‘training’ [*Übung*]. What is at stake for Benjamin in such training exercises is the ability ‘to deal with a vast apparatus [*Apparatur*]’ that might otherwise enslave one.²⁴¹

Training to Deal With The Apparatus: On Test-Performances

‘The function of film,’ Benjamin says emphatically, ‘is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a

²³⁸ *ibid*, 107 (my emphasis).

²³⁹ *ibid*.

²⁴⁰ *ibid*, 107-8.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, 108.

vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily'.²⁴² But what is an apparatus? In Giorgio Agamben's text of that title, he reflects and expands upon Michel Foucault's famous concept of the *dispositif* [apparatus] by tracing a broadly scoped genealogy of the term, without however touching at any point upon Benjamin's use of the latter. If, for now, we assume a correlation between their respective conceptions of the apparatus, it is perhaps striking how both Benjamin and Agamben link the latter to the movement of its expansion in our lives, which, if we believe Agamben, has not stopped growing ever since Benjamin began to observe it in 1936. For at several points in his text, Agamben, like Benjamin before him and not perhaps without a similar pathos, attests to the 'boundless growth of apparatuses in our time'.²⁴³ Before following Agamben's broadly staked out genealogy of the apparatus in more detail and linking it to Benjamin's use of the term where possible, I want to follow the theme of the apparatus and the particular training one's dealings with it demands within Benjamin's text alone. 'Dealing with this apparatus,' Benjamin continues and concludes the above reflections on 'second technology,' 'also teaches them [humanity] that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity's whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free'.²⁴⁴ The apparatus thus has a capacity to enslave, but it can also be dealt with. Instead of finding oneself enslaved by it, that is, put in its service, one must learn how to deal, handle or work with it by submitting oneself to training [*Übung*]. Here, learning how to deal with it qua training [*Übung*] and dealing with the apparatus, as will become increasingly apparent, are perhaps the same thing. What is necessary for a movement of emancipation from a potential enslavement is to transform the work *for* the apparatus into a work *with* it. What is more, by the transformed *Umgang* with the apparatus a certain potentiality of technology is

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009), 15.

²⁴⁴ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 108.

revealed – linking therewith the apparatus, or at least the task of dealing with it, to the question of technology, as well as, thereby, to the socio-technological function of the reproducible work of art: no longer put in the service of magic (1st technology) but instead constituting something of a rehearsal space for the inter-play between nature and humanity (2nd technology). Working-with instead of for an apparatus must thus involve a critical questioning of the goals or ends to which the apparatus seeks to harness one's service, as well as the experimental task and attitude of putting it to ever new ones, however provisionally posited. In other words, *working with* by working against given univocal ends of an apparatus involves a practice of politics and play that seeks to expand the 'scope for play' in one's dealing with apparatuses, or *the apparatus*, opening up an expanded 'field of action' that Benjamin calls a *Spielraum*, literally, a 'playroom' or 'room for play'.²⁴⁵ Dealing with the apparatus means training to deal with the apparatus and training to deal with the apparatus takes place through 'test performances' – for instance those peculiar performances, as Benjamin relates, of the film actor in front of an apparatus.²⁴⁶

Benjamin begins his reflections on the test-performances of the film actor by distinguishing his performance from the realm of art. If film only becomes a work of art by means of montage, he reflects, then its individual components are 'reproduction(s) of a process which neither is an artwork in itself nor gives rise to one through photography'.²⁴⁷ The peculiar performance of the film actor in front of an apparatus – here, seemingly both the mechanism of the camera as well as 'a group of specialists' ready to interrupt the performance – finds itself unable by itself to reach the status of a work (of art), a status that can only be bestowed to it, as it were, belatedly, through the process of editing (montage). In the meantime, the performance finds itself precariously exposed in face of an uncertain future. Benjamin, to be sure, does not

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, 124.

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 111.

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, 110.

explicitly call it that, yet his writing clearly implies such a precarious quality of film acting. He does so however, or so it seems momentarily, only to link precariousness to the movement of overcoming it and the actor's eventual triumph that lies in his ability of 'preserving his humanity in the face of an apparatus.' Perhaps here as elsewhere when Benjamin seeks to preserve or champion 'humanity' in face of an apparatus – and more explicitly elsewhere of a modern media apparatus – one must not read too readily an oppositional thinking between the human and the technological as nothing could be further from Benjamin's thought, given its more explicit critiques of humanism and the various engagements with what we might call a certain posthumanism *avant le lettre*, whose cherished exponents are the character's of the novels of Paul Scheerbart and Micky Mouse.²⁴⁸ A context in which Benjamin at least elliptically elaborates on the status of the 'human being' that preserves himself in the face of an apparatus is for instance the small text 'Theatre and Radio - The Mutual Control Of Their Educational Program,' which here warrants a brief discussion.

Responding to A Crisis of Sovereignty: Theatre and Radio

During a consideration of the competitive relation of theatre and radio, as well as the potential positive influence on one another in the realm of 'their educational program,' Benjamin poses the question as to what the theatre might have to offer to counter the technological superiority of radio and its higher degree of exposure [*Exponierung*]. His answer is seemingly and perhaps misleadingly simple, namely, the use of living people. Benjamin is quick to complicate this general appeal to the employment of living people by discerning two sharply contrasting ways of doing so – one reactionary, the other progressive – which further amount to two diverse responses to the crisis of theatre that doubles up

²⁴⁸ Benjamin 'Erfahrung und Armut' in *Illuminationen*, 295.

as the crisis of the human being. Whereas the former takes no notice of this crisis and seeks to employ man as autonomous and self-determining, 'at the height of his powers, the Lord of Creation, a personality (even if he is the meanest wage labourer),' the latter employs a 'reduced' and 'debarred' human being 'in our crisis'.²⁴⁹ Benjamin thereby draws up a scenario where on the one hand, a proud, self-confident, big-city theatre, oblivious to its own and the world's crisis produces itself as "symbol," "totality," and *Gesamtkunstwerk*, holding sway, as he puts it, over today's cultural sphere in the name of the 'human,' and on the other, Epic Theatre, as an example of 'the progressive stage', places at its centre 'the human being in our crisis'.²⁵⁰ It is therefore a matter of contrasting the disavowal or prospective overcoming of crisis with a certain manner or attitude of working or dealing with it in more or less precarious circumstances. Benjamin's appeal to the preservation of humanity in face of an apparatus is thus never simply an appeal to maintain or recover from the accident of an onto-theological subject thrown into crisis by socio-technological processes of alienation. In fact, as *Theatre and Radio* seems to suggest, to preserve humanity must involve the maintenance of its very crisis. The short text never however specifies how one is to construe more concretely its generalised references to our, the theatre's or indeed the world's crisis, whether positively (in opposition to its disavowal) or negatively (in opposition to a certain exploitation or aggravation) construed, which, although seemingly designating a specific historical, technological, economic and political context of the present, also has a textual tendency towards the abstract by its appeal to the productive forces of a generalised crisis.

Abstracted from a socio-historical context or narrative, crisis, from the Greek *krisis* [decision] and *krinein* [to decide], is necessarily a crisis of decision, a certain difficulty if not impossibility of deciding and therefore must befall, before anything else, the idea of an autonomous

²⁴⁹ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 394-395 & Walter Benjamin, "Theater und Rundfunk", *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*, 773-776. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 774-5.

²⁵⁰ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 394-395.

subject and the institutional organisation of its acts. Although Benjamin's text never explicitly elaborates on the status of this "accident," one might speculate on the basis of the appeal to a mode of response that does not seek to *restore*, that the "accident" never simply befell a previously autonomous subject from a distant outside. By appealing to a mode of response to crisis that simultaneously maintains it, Benjamin seemingly hints at a structural crisis of ontology that avows and experiments with man's constitutive lack of autonomy and mastery. Such experiments of dealing with (here: *Auseinandersetzung*, literally: setting-apart) a generalised crisis of sovereignty are never far from dealing with a technological apparatus. Humanity is preserved in its dealings with an apparatus that might otherwise, but not necessarily, untenably perpetuate and exploit its crisis, taking advantage of its precarious exposure. For the human being in our crisis, Benjamin seems to suggest, is precisely 'the human being who has been *eliminated* from radio and film – the human being (to put it a little extremely) as the fifth wheel on the carriage of technology'.²⁵¹ Precarious preservation is thus opposed to full-blown elimination. Despite this self-declared extremity of rhetoric with regards to the modern media's potential elimination of the human being, the dividing line, as we have already seen, between a progressive and reactionary response to the latter's crisis is never however one between theatre and modern media, nor for that matter, between the human and the technological. The progressive stage sets the example for the type of *Auseinandersetzung* [dealing with] with 'radio and cinema' Benjamin has in mind. Such an *Auseinandersetzung* with modern media apparatuses is never however simply the scene of a 'debate with them,' as a recent translation has it, that is, the mere appeal to theatre's topical, thematic concern with media on the level of its content.²⁵² Rather, what is at stake for Benjamin is the 'engagement' or 'dealing with,' which, as a literal rendering of *auseinander-setzen* as setting-apart or decomposition furthermore suggests, must begin and probably end at a point of

²⁵¹ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

²⁵² *ibid*, 395.

constitutive interrelation or interweaving. The dramatic laboratory of Epic Theatre does so by what Benjamin enigmatically describes as its *sober* attitude toward technology. One such a “sober” (starting) point of interrelation, Benjamin suggests, is Epic Theatre’s reappropriation of the technique of montage. Through its discovery and construction of *gesture* by means of interruption, Benjamin states, Epic Theatre retransforms the method of montage from a technological to a human process. For Epic Theatre, interruption begins to have ‘a pedagogic function and no longer has the character of a mere stimulus. It brings the action to a halt, and hence compels the listener to take up an attitude toward the events on the stage and forces the actor to adopt a critical view of his role’.²⁵³

Samuel Weber proposes to link Benjamin’s use of the concept of ‘interruption’ in this context to the Hölderlinian notion of ‘caesura’, a link that further resonates in Benjamin’s description of ‘the disposition of Epic Theatre in adapting the techniques of the new media for its own ends as “sober” [...] a word that,’ as he puts it, ‘more than any other, articulates “the tendency of [Hölderlin’s] late” works’.²⁵⁴ For Hölderlin, Weber continues, ‘the effect of this cut or caesura is, not just to suspend the rush to judgment, the “alternation of representations,” but to allow “representation itself [*die Vorstellung selbst*],” which he also calls “the pure word,” to emerge’.²⁵⁵ ‘And it is precisely this,’ Weber states, ‘the production of the theatrical process in its distinctive mediality – *Vorstellung* [literally “placing-before” S.S.] as *representing before* rather than simply as *representation* – that Benjamin associates with the “interruption” practiced by Brechtian theatre’.²⁵⁶ The incessant interruptions of Epic Theatre expose a human being no longer fully in control over his actions, devoid of self-presence and mastery, exposed before the uncontrollable coming of time. Through its suspension, identity comes up short, Weber explains, ‘and it does so through

²⁵³ *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 114.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 114-5.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 115.

“gesture”^{.257} Gesture interrupts action as a movement of meaning and fulfilment. Devoid of identity and mastery, ‘man in our crisis’ is subjected, not unlike the film actor in front of an apparatus, to various trials. In the absence of guaranteed ends to his permanently interrupted actions, his experiments begin to amount to test-performances. Epic Theatre subjects a reduced, debarred human being in crisis to various *trials*. ‘What emerges from this approach is that events are alterable not at their climactic points, not by virtue and *decision-making*, but strictly in their habitual course, by reason and practice [*Übung*].’^{.258} ‘To the dramatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*,’ Benjamin writes, ‘Epic Theatre opposes the dramatic laboratory. It returns in a new way to the great and venerable resource of theatre – exposing the present [*die Exponierung des Anwesenden*].’^{.259} The relegated human being submitted to tests and examinations in such a laboratory distinguishes himself starkly from the notion of “man” at the heart of the reactionary conception of theatre from which Benjamin seeks to distinguish it. His constitutive crisis bars him from a simple power of intentional decision-making. ‘What is exposed by Epic Theatre, and by theatre generally,’ Samuel Weber suggests, ‘is the claim of humanity to be present to itself, in the guise of the autonomous individual. [...] Epic Theatre [...] exposes the “living” by stripping it of its heroic claims to sovereignty, claims that confound the divine with the human and that find their secular and dissimulated embodiment in the cult of “personality”’.^{.260}

A Leap and A Crack: The Swell of Test-Performance

The film actor’s proposed preservation of his humanity must be read in the light of these more nuanced reflections on the status of the

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 395.

²⁵⁹ Benjamin cited in Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 115.

²⁶⁰ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 115-116.

latter. It is furthermore unclear quite how much of an actor's preserved humanity only *appears* as such to a cinema audience as the belated result of the editing process. Whether as appearance or not, the actor's publicly exhibited triumphant dealings with an apparatus is capable of revenging, as Benjamin puts it, all those city-dwellers that come to watch him after having had to relinquish their humanity throughout the workday, 'in offices and factories' [...] 'in the face of the apparatus'.²⁶¹ However much we want to follow Benjamin's assertions on the actor's revenge on behalf of a film audience, his or her preservation of humanity in face of an apparatus or indeed the general faith put in the function of film to '[train] human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus',²⁶² what should interest us here with regards to the question of the apparatus is what links the actor's performance in front

²⁶¹ *ibid*, 111. Although Benjamin here clearly seeks to harness the emancipatory if not revolutionary values of an actor's triumphant test performance before the apparatus, it seems important to note how ambiguous his own reflections can be on the topic. In a later footnote that discusses the effects of reproduction technology on the political realm alongside similar effects on the theatrical institution, Benjamin seemingly relates the test performance to a more sinister practice of selection before an apparatus: 'Radio and film are changing not only the function of the professional actor but, equally, the function of those who, like the politician, present themselves before the media. The direction of this change is the same for the film actor and the politician, regardless of their different tasks. It tends toward the exhibition of controllable, transferable skills under certain social conditions, just as sports first called for such exhibition under certain natural conditions. This results in a new form of selection – selection before an apparatus – from which the champion, the star, and the dictator emerge as victors' [*ibid*, 128]. This would then perhaps constitute the annulment of the potential Benjamin otherwise sees in the increased 'control' of those 'not present to the execution of the performance'. For 'of course' it should not be forgotten, Benjamin alerts us, 'that there can be no political advantage derived from this control until film has liberated itself from the fetters of capitalist exploitation. Film capital uses the revolutionary opportunities implied by this control for counterrevolutionary purposes. Not only does the cult of the movie star which it fosters preserve that magic of the personality which has long been no more than the putrid magic of its own commodity character, but its counterpart, the cult of the audience, reinforces the corruption by which fascism is seeking to supplant the class consciousness of the masses' [*ibid*, 113].

²⁶² *ibid*, 118.

of cameras, lights, microphones and a body of experts to the performances of office and factory workers, indicating therewith the stakes and the scope of an expanding apparatus and the necessity of learning how to deal with it. What links the performance of film actors and office workers is a certain spatio-temporal precariousness in one's dealing with an apparatus. Yet whereas the latter is merely a powerless *working for*, the former also allows for a different way of dealing with the apparatus by *working with* it or else, by reworking it. Apart from its uncertain status as a work of art, the precariousness of a film actors' performance springs from his constant exposition to the possibility of interruption. It is the intervention of the recording body of experts – executive producer, director, cinematographer, sound recordist, lighting designer, and so on – which puts to the test an actors aptitude. 'The film director occupies exactly the same position as the examiner in an aptitude test,' Benjamin states, before fittingly illustrating the kind of pressurised environment involved: 'To perform in the glare of arc lamps while simultaneously meeting the demands of the microphone is a test performance of the highest order'.²⁶³ The film actor is put to the test, but he himself is also testing, for instance, by multiplying his gestures as so many 'versions' or 'takes'.²⁶⁴ A multiplication that is not simply or merely diachronic but also happens synchronically through the virtual swell of other possibilities for any given 'take'. Test-performances find themselves severed from or only stand in the most provisional relation to their end – whether that of meaning or effect – within certain contextual constellations. This is adequately illustrated by Benjamin's later reflection on film production's tendency to 'split the actor's performance into a series of episodes capable of being assembled'.²⁶⁵ Here, the context of assemblage is not always already given with the performance of the interrupted sequence. The latter finds itself always already exposed to the time of reproducibility, severed from its present context and

²⁶³ *ibid*, 111.

²⁶⁴ *ibid*.

²⁶⁵ *ibid*, 113.

suspended by the multiplied relations to its possible afterlife. A leap from a window is filmed as a leap from a scaffold, Benjamin relates, and only much later contextualised in a montage with footage of a fall at some outside location.²⁶⁶ Or else, an actor's startled expression following a

²⁶⁶ The actors *leap* from a scaffold/window, divorced from but also swelling under the virtual intrusion of the possibilities of its uncontrollable afterlife or 'mass existence' – a virtual reception [*Aufnahme*] already structurally at work in the time of its recording [*Aufnahme*], the other *Aufnahme* in the first – begins to resonate with Rebecca Schneider's reading of a notably different but perhaps also not dissimilar leap, namely: Yves Klein, clad in a three-piece suit, in October 1960, leaping from a provincial two-story building. A leap, according to Schneider's account, which is neither happening for the first nor the last time and 'that will never have taken singular place,' as she puts it. On the one hand, it repeats a previous leap – that of January 12, 1960, performed in front of the lone witness of Bernadette Allain and ending with minor injuries – and on the other, it already anticipates 'generations of witnesses to a body caught in that act' [Schneider, 30]. For this October 1960 capturing of the January 1960 event, Schneider relates, '[Klein] had a tarpaulin held by 12 judokas from a judo club across the street to catch him. In this way the staging was projected both toward a future (an audience to witness the photograph as evidence) and in reference to a past [...]. This leap was, that is, *not for a present audience* but for a photograph that would record an event that had taken place at a prior time for a future audience that would see the leap on Theater of the Void Day, November 27, 1960, in the pages of the tabloid *Dimanche*. For the re-enactment of the real, the photographer Harry Shunk took not one, but two photos. One was taken with a net situated beneath Klein. The other was taken a few moments later from the same angle, but with the street empty. Shunk made a seamless montage of the two photos resulting in the "performance" of an act that will never have taken singular place, and resulting as well in generations of witnesses to a body caught in that act' [ibid, my emphasis]. If we consider that Schneider's essay's larger concern lies with 'once again' debunking art-historical origin myths through a reading, as she says, for "illegitimate" histories by 'listening for a syncopation of intention not "properly" resolvable in direct lineage, and, more radically perhaps, joining that syncopation as a critic with one reading among many' – her reading of the split temporality of Klein's leap is never far from Benjamin's own wider concerns with the provisional gesture of an artistic "signature" in the time of its reproducibility and a new conception of the function of art in its socio-historical transmission. 'Can we listen for other voices in seeming "solo" work,' Schneider asks, 'like the multiple directions of reference figured in the way Klein's *Leap* is both citational (referencing backwards) and invocational (calling forward), readable as part of an antiphonal conversation beyond the frame or whitewash of the walls; a

knock at the door was initially produced by ‘a shot fired without warning behind the actor’s back on some other occasion when he happens to be in the studio’.²⁶⁷ The entire process of film production, Benjamin asserts, is determined by the repeated intervention of a body of experts: ‘many shots are filmed in a number of takes. A single cry for help [...] can be recorded in several versions. The editor then makes a selection from these’.²⁶⁸ A similar detachment of an action from its end informs Benjamin’s example of another context of test performances. Here, in the context of sport, test performances stand in a peculiar relation to their ‘corresponding real action(s),’ as Benjamin puts it. This scene of a contextual doubling inscribes the test-performance in a general movement of de-contextualisation:

An action performed in the film studio therefore differs from the corresponding real action the way the competitive throwing of a discus in a sports arena would differ from the throwing of the same discus from the same spot in the same direction in order to kill someone. The first is a test performance, while the second is not.²⁶⁹

Benjamin therewith puts forward the notion of a test-performance, which removes actions from what we might designate in the language of speech act theory the ‘happiness’ of their effects in a given context. No

response to a call and a call for a response (including mine) beyond the confines of singular intention or policed legitimacies?’ [ibid, 32]. Here, the leap begins to figure also the crack or fissure that the German word for leap – *Sprung* – signifies *at the same time*, as if the signifier *Sprung* is itself always already fissured, breached, cracked, insecurely placed in more than one place at the same time. That Benjamin pays particular attention to the double meaning of the *Sprung* as both leap and crack precisely at the “origin” [*Ursprung*] here should further encourage a reading of the ‘antiphonal conversation’ between Schneider, Klein and Benjamin, the leaping (performance) artist and the actor falling of a scaffold in the time of reproducibility.

²⁶⁷ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 113.

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, 111.

²⁶⁹ *ibid*.

longer subject to their conventional, contextually embedded ends, they acquire the status of non-present remainders or stand-ins that must incessantly be put to the test in new orders of experiment.²⁷⁰

Ritual and Play: A Dynamic Inheritance Machine

In his text, 'In Playland – Reflections on History and Play', Giorgio Agamben reflects on what he calls 'a relation of both correspondence and opposition between play and ritual, in the sense that both are engaged in

²⁷⁰ I borrow the terminology of a non-present remainder from Derrida's essays 'Signature, Event, Context' and *Limited Inc*, which at some length develop the concept of iterability in the context of an analysis of the speech act theory of J.L. Austin, a context to which I will turn briefly later on. In *Limited Inc*, Derrida retraces his initial development of the theme of a graphematic mark's structural possibility of survival in the absence of its author and addressee – severed, or severable, therefore, from all limited effects of presence in any given context – precisely by contrasting it in stark terms from R. Searl's attribution of a quality of 'permanence' to the written syntagma's possibility of remaining thus construed. 'Searl might have considered why it is that *Sec* speaks of "restance" [remainder], and even of "*restance non-présente*" [non-present remainder] rather than of "permanence." [...] In it, what is discussed [...] concerns not permanence, but remainders, *non-present* remains. How, then, can a non-presence be assimilated to permanence, and especially to the substantial presence implied by the temporality of permanence? [...] Thus I cite Searl citing *Sec* [Signature, Event, Context]. Searl writes: "He writes, "This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general: which is to say, as we have seen, the nonpresent remainder [*restance*] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin." [...] It [this phrase] [...] contains numerous signals designed to prevent one from confusing the *remains* of a grapheme in general with the *permanence* or survival of a "written language" in the standard sense [...]' [Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 51]. The differential structure of iterability, Derrida relates, escapes 'the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence, upon which opposition the idea of permanence depends. This is why the mark qua "non-present remainder" is not the contrary of the mark as effacement. Like the trace it is, the mark is neither present nor absent. This is what is *remarkable* about it, even if it's not remarked [...]' [ibid, 53].

a relationship with the calendar and with time, but this relationship is in each case an inverse one: ritual fixes and *structures* the calendar; play, on the other hand [...] changes and *destroys* it'.²⁷¹ Here, ritual and play's different relationship to time recalls Benjamin's similar employment of these terms when describing the shift in the social function of art. The latter's movement of emancipation is one from a parasitic subservience to *ritual* to a consequent reliance on a different practice: politics and/or *play*. Whereas ritual was marked as primarily concerned with instituting the relative permanence of its effects, play on the other hand was marked by an essential provisionality and a consequent capacity for "improvement". That Agamben's further elaborations on the close links and correspondences between play and 'the sacred' begin with an example from the realm of sport, may further indicate that we are not altogether far from what Benjamin seeks to designate as a test-performance. 'Numerous well-documented researches show,' Agamben relates, 'that the origins of most games known to us lie in ancient sacred ceremonies, in dances, ritual combat and divinatory practices. So in ball games we can discern the relics of the ritual representation of a myth in which the gods fought for possession of the sun'.²⁷² What this genealogical reading of sports performances already shares with Benjamin's example of the discus throwing test performance is the shift of a set of movements or actions from one context to another, of which the latter in both cases is play. In both scenarios, play furthermore repeats a set of actions outside their 'traditional' context, which had imbued them with a particular meaning or effect. With reference to a study by Benveniste, Agamben further elaborates the relationship of ritual and play by defining the latter as the repetition of ritual acts severed from their conjunction with 'myth', that is, their previously given sense and purpose. Play, according to Agamben, radically transforms

²⁷¹ Giorgio Agamben, 'In Playland – Reflections on History and Play' in Agamben, *Infancy and History. Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, 65-89 (London: Verso 1993), 77.

²⁷² *ibid.*

ritual ‘to the point where it can plausibly be defined as ‘topsy-turvy sacred’’.²⁷³

‘The potency of the sacred act’, writes Benveniste, ‘resides precisely in the conjunction of the *myth* that articulates history and the *ritual* that reproduces it. If we make a comparison between this schema and that of play, the difference appears fundamental: in play only the ritual survives and all that is preserved is the *form* of the sacred drama, in which each element is re-enacted time and again. But what has been forgotten or abolished is the myth, the meaningfully worded fabulation that endows the acts with their sense and their purpose.’²⁷⁴

It is striking how much Benveniste’s formulations here structurally mirror those with which Benjamin seeks to describe the writings of Franz Kafka. Echoing or calling for some of the concerns of the essay on technological reproducibility, Benjamin’s writings on Kafka similarly touch on the question, if not the crisis, of tradition and a new conception of the movement of inheritance. In a letter to Gershom Scholem, Benjamin describes Kafka’s work as depicting a tradition that has fallen ill. Wisdom, understood as the epic side of truth and therefore the goods of tradition [*Traditionsgut*], or else truth, as Benjamin also calls it with reference to the Jewish tradition, in the form of the Hagada – the “telling” – has gone missing. The genius of Kafka, Benjamin explains, lay in his unique experiment: to give up truth in order to hold on to the possibility of the movement of “its” ‘passing on’. His parables no longer submit to the doctrine, like the Hagada does to the Halacha, “the telling” to the collective body of Jewish religious laws. In Kafka, one no longer encounters wisdom as such, but only the remainders of its decline

²⁷³ *ibid*, 78.

²⁷⁴ *ibid*.

[*Zerfallsprodukte*].²⁷⁵ Nowhere perhaps is the decline of tradition and the absence of its 'doctrine' or 'teaching' [*Lehre*] more palpably felt than in the curiously theatrical gestures of Kafka's characters. Kafka, Benjamin says in an essay on the latter, 'takes away the inherited supports of human gesture, in which he then finds an object of reflections that have no end'.²⁷⁶ Never ending reflections that are furthermore actively rehearsed in shifting orders of experiments. 'Kafka's whole work consists of a codex of gestures,' Benjamin exclaims, 'that are far from having a certain symbolic meaning for the author'. The latter are in fact pursued in ever changing *contexts* and orders of experiments'.²⁷⁷ In other words, Kafka's gestures, in experimental pursuit of their meaning across changing contexts of determination, constitute test-performances. They are the non-present remainders of an ailing tradition, or what Benjamin calls the latter's *Zerfallsprodukte*, the products of its ruin, which are put to the test in precarious contexts of significance. Whether as ruin or non-present remainder of a living tradition, the gesture of the test-performance bears an opaque relation to its significance and comes to stand-in for the new. Finally, it is not without import that what is at stake for Benjamin in Kafka's parables without doctrine and the submission of non-present remainders of an ailing tradition to an infinite series of tests is 'the question of the organisation of life and work in the human community'.²⁷⁸ Such an 'organisation of life and work' must here strike us as fundamentally related to the question of the apparatus and one's dealings with it.

²⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 736.

²⁷⁶ Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', 417.

²⁷⁷ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

²⁷⁸ *ibid*, 417. Tradition is of course always more or less ailing. As its transmission is essentially breached and open for transformation, it cannot be absolutely immune to corruption. Nevertheless, Benjamin often turns to specific contexts –the literary work of Franz Kafka, the German baroque, the age of reproducibility – in which its essential breach is aggravated, or put differently, in which a quasi-transcendental structure comes to acquire historical, political, and cultural significance.

Agamben, in his reflections on ritual and play, similarly pursues the latter's effects beyond the correspondences with ritual to find the general movement of its de-contextualisation furthermore at work with regards to what he terms the practical-economic sphere. Echoing a favourite theme of Benjamin's, he invites us to consider the world of toys, which 'shows that children, humanity's little scrap-dealers, will play with whatever junk comes their way, and that play thereby preserves profane objects and behaviour that have ceased to exist'.²⁷⁹ We have seen a not dissimilar logic of the playful preservation of what is otherwise under threat from elimination, namely, the human, to be at work in the laboratory of Epic Theatre. There, what is preserved does not survive unscathed. Instead, the very idea and ideal of the unscathed itself is put into question. Similarly, what is preserved of profane objects and behaviour through toys and play, Agamben adds, is certainly not a matter of their cultural significance or function.²⁸⁰ Instead,

[w]hat the toy preserves of its sacred or economic model, what survives of this after its dismemberment or miniaturisation, is nothing other than the human temporality that was contained

²⁷⁹ Agamben, 'In Playland', 79. In his reflections on children's play, Benjamin also emphasizes such an inventive reception of the discarded and outmoded. 'Children [...] are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things, they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in new, disjunctive relationships' [Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse. Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 2011), 17]. Miriam Hansen, by commenting on the above, adds a synchronic aspect to such play, which similar to Agamben, emphasizes the temporal aspect of the operation: 'In other words, by creating their own world of things within the larger one, children simultaneously transform material objects; they wrest them from their ostensibly linear, instrumental destination and reconfigure them according to a different logic – not unrelated to the aesthetics of bricolage, collage, and montage' [Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 2012), 150].

²⁸⁰ Agamben, 'In Playland', 80.

therein: its pure historical essence. The toy is a materialisation of the historicity contained in objects, extracting it by means of a particular manipulation. While the value and meaning of the antique object and the document are functions of their age – that is, of their making present and rendering tangible a relatively remote past – the toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturising the present – playing as much on *diachrony* as on *synchrony* – makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the ‘once’ and the ‘no longer’.²⁸¹

In other words, the toy with regards to objects as well as play with regards to behaviours, here function as non-present remainders that expose the finitude of their previous or present contextual organisation. Playing with the ‘crumbs’ and ‘scraps’ belonging to structural wholes, Agamben relates, the toy ‘transforms old signifieds into signifiers, and vice versa. But what it ‘plays’ with,’ he adds, ‘are not simply these crumbs and scraps, but – as the case of miniaturisation makes clear – the ‘crumbness,’ if one can put it that way, which is contained in a temporal form within the object or the structural whole from which it departs’.²⁸² In this way, Agamben says, ‘play is a relationship with objects and human behaviour that draws from them a pure historical-temporal aspect’.²⁸³ What Agamben here idiosyncratically calls the ‘crumbness’ of objects and structural wholes is the possibility of their ruin, prefigured in the monuments of a tradition subject to the infinite finitude of time. To avow such possibilities might mean, following a theme of Derrida’s, that the love of tradition qua inheritance must account for the possibility of its destruction, that is, is always already a love of its ruin and bound to ‘an experience itself precarious in its fragility’. ‘One cannot love a monument, a work of architecture, an institution as such,’ Derrida says,

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

²⁸² *ibid.*, 81.

²⁸³ *ibid.*

except in an experience itself precarious in its fragility: it has not always been there, it will not always be there, it is finite. And for this very reason one loves it as mortal, through its birth and its death, through one's birth and death, through the ghost or the silhouette of its ruin, one's own ruin – which it already is, therefore, or already prefigures.²⁸⁴

The prefigurement of the ruin in the monument here corresponds to the prefigurement of play in the practice of ritual. For ritual and play must never be fully opposed, but find themselves inextricably linked and entangled, like monument and ruin, like repetition and difference, like the auratic and reproducible work of art, as opposing poles of a dynamic process. A ritual can always be played and play can always be more or less re-ritualized. Ritual and play describe the opposite end of a spectrum of attitudes towards the passage of time and the movement of inheritance: one marked by a tendency to annul the interval between two moments in time and dissolve spatio-temporal differences in absolute synchrony, the other with breaking the connection between past and present in the absolute diachrony of pure events. 'If ritual is therefore a machine for transforming diachrony into synchrony,' as Agamben puts it, 'play, conversely, is a machine for transforming synchrony into diachrony'.²⁸⁵ Yet their polarity never resolves into an opposition that is absolute, and their efforts at establishing or undermining temporal continuity, as Agamben relates, are never complete.²⁸⁶ Every game contains a ritual aspect and every rite an aspect of play. The discontinuous difference of the "event" of play depends on a repetition of at least the non-present remainder of ritual. Ritual, on the other hand, in its efforts at establishing continuity qua identical repetition, must, in order to be repeatable, leave itself exposed as non-present remainder to the possibilities of the play of differences. Ritual and play, as Agamben

²⁸⁴ Derrida cited in Häggglund, 278.

²⁸⁵ Agamben, 'In Playland', 83.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

suggests, must thus not be regarded as ‘two distinct machines but as a single machine, a single binary system, which is articulated across two categories which cannot be isolated and across whose correlation and difference the very functioning of the system is based’.²⁸⁷ Read in the context of the movement of transmission of an inheritance, of which this machine is perhaps here another name, Agamben’s reflections on the inextricability of ritual and play, in other words, of repetition and event, further imply that a crisis of tradition never simply befalls the latter from an outside, as it was always already prefigured and at work as virtual possibility of ruin in the very efforts of its upkeep.²⁸⁸

What is an Apparatus?

Test performances rehearse our dealings with an apparatus. But what is an apparatus? Benjamin, as we saw, employs this term and the necessity of our dealings with as opposed to our enslavement to it, in relation to both technology, as well as to what we might here designate the practico-economic sphere, the labour relations in factories and offices. Both these realms, technology in the broadest sense and the socio-economic organisation of labour power, are regulating and directing human behaviour as a means towards certain ends and are thus inscribed in relationships of power that Benjamin’s notion of a test-performance seeks to *con-test*.

²⁸⁷ *ibid*, 84.

²⁸⁸ This is not to say that there are not epochal shifts to be taken into account, moments of greater or lesser degrees of structural instability. In this light one might consider Benjamin’s work as both attentive to the contextual specificity of such moments of heightened instability – foremost amongst them the “crisis” of the German baroque and modernity – as well to the structural generality of permanent *krisis* [decision] in the suspense of undecidability at the moment of every decision, as Derrida might put it, worthy of the name, no longer following the predictable orders of what has become more or less calculable and possible to control.

In his reflections on the apparatus, Giorgio Agamben takes his starting point from the English translation of Michel Foucault's famous use of the French term *dispositif*. Foucault's employment of the concept of the *dispositif* [apparatus] is even more broadly conceived than the Benjaminian apparatus, designating 'a thoroughly heterogeneous set' consisting, amongst other things, of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, laws and administrative measures. For Foucault, the apparatus constitutes 'the network that can be established between these elements'.²⁸⁹ It describes 'a formation [...] at a given historical moment' with a strategic function and is 'thus always inscribed into a play of power'. What Foucault here calls the strategic function of the apparatus must precisely be understood as the latter's efforts to manipulate this play of power, for instance by a 'concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to *develop them in a particular direction*, or to *block them*, to stabilize them, and to utilize them'.²⁹⁰ Already we see how test-performances, by rehearsing our dealings with an apparatus, might challenge the latter's hegemonic 'strategy' by seeking to *unblock* the play of power and *redirecting*, if only provisionally, the relations of forces into new directions. In his genealogically driven reflections, Agamben further links Foucault's use of the concept of the *dispositif* to G.W.F. Hegel's employment of the concept of 'positivity'. Here, once again it is matter of a collective, social organisation 'imposed on individuals' at a certain historical moment, for instance, 'the set of beliefs, rules, and rites' that Hegel designates as "positive religion".

If "positivity" is the name that [...] the young Hegel gives to the historical element – loaded as it is with rules, rites, and institutions that are imposed on the individual by an external power [...] then Foucault, by borrowing this term (later to become "apparatus"), takes a position with respect to a decisive problem [...]: the relation between individuals as living beings and the

²⁸⁹ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 2.

²⁹⁰ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

historical element. By “the historical element,” I mean the set of institutions, of processes of subjectification, and of rules in which power relations become concrete. [...] For Foucault, what is at stake is [...] the investigation of concrete modes in which the positivities (or the apparatuses) act within the relations, mechanisms, and “plays” of power.²⁹¹

Perhaps another way to designate a large part of this “historical element” as Agamben construes it, albeit not completely covering its scope, would be to call this set of imposed institutional structures, rules and rites the inherited order of a tradition. Benjamin’s attention to historical moments of the latter’s undoing, which is always an undoing of its instituted conventions, whether in his reflections on a post-Reformation baroque or the strangely unhinged organisation of Franz Kafka’s worlds, similarly tends to problematize what Agamben calls ‘the relation between individuals as living beings and the historical element’ precisely at the point where the latter’s organisational hold of the former becomes more or less undone.²⁹² If we follow Agamben’s general account, an overriding sense of the apparatus imposes itself that concerns the submission of parts to wholes and means to ends under the logic of a hegemonic ‘strategy’. The subsumptive structure that organises parts within wholes is further reflected in the use of the concept of the apparatus itself, that is, in the relation of *its* parts – the elements of a set – to the overall ‘strategy’ of the ‘network’ between them. Agamben seemingly reserves the term apparatus for both this network as well as the elements of the set themselves. Whereas ‘*the* apparatus’ broadly and generally describes the set of regulating institutional structures in a hegemonic assemblage, the plural of ‘apparatuses’ may also designate the more concrete parts of the set. Both the relation of parts to wholes and means to ends is further reflected in at least two of the common definitions of *dispositif* from a French dictionary to which Agamben turns:

²⁹¹ *ibid*, 5-6.

²⁹² *ibid*, 6.

b. A technological meaning: “the way in which the parts of a machine or of a mechanism and, by extension, the mechanism itself are arranged.”

c. A military use: “The set of means arranged in conformity with a plan”.²⁹³

The third definition, which defines a strictly juridical sense, links the apparatus to a certain performativity of the judicial decision, as ‘the part of a judgement that contains the decision separate from the opinion [...], the section of a sentence that decides, or the enacting clause of a law’.²⁹⁴ Here, the link of a performative speech act in the form of a deciding judgement to the question of the apparatus is perhaps not irrelevant in light of our discussion of the play of test-performances in the ‘time of reproducibility’, which is always also a time of the crisis of tradition and therefore of undecidability and uncalculability in face of a waning historical hegemonic organisation.

‘To some extent,’ Agamben suggests, ‘the three definitions are all present in Foucault’s use of the term apparatus as ‘a set of practices and mechanisms (both linguistic and nonlinguistic, juridical, technical, and military) that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate’.²⁹⁵ Pursuing a loose genealogical trajectory, Agamben is furthermore able to link the Foucauldian apparatus to the Greek term *oikonomia*, that is, ‘the administration of the *oikos* (the home) and, more generally, management’.²⁹⁶ He does so by locating the use of the latter in the writings of the ‘Fathers of the Church’, where it came to designate ‘the administration and government of human history’ entrusted to Christ by God, in a movement that seeks to save the oneness of his being in light of its partitioning through the trinity by separating ‘in

²⁹³ *ibid*, 7.

²⁹⁴ *ibid*.

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, 8.

²⁹⁶ *ibid*.

Him being and action, ontology and praxis'.²⁹⁷ '*Oikonomia* [...] became a specialized term,' Agamben relates, 'signifying in particular the incarnation of the Son, together with the economy of redemption and salvation' and so merging 'with the notion of Providence and begin[ning] to indicate the redemptive governance of the world and human history'.²⁹⁸ The translation of this fundamental Greek term in the writings of the Latin Fathers, Agamben relates, is *dispositio*, the Latin term from which the French term *dispositif*, or apparatus, derives. 'The "dispositifs" of which Foucault speaks,' Agamben is thus able to claim, 'are somehow linked to this theological legacy'.²⁹⁹ What is decisive for Agamben's claim about this link of the Foucauldian apparatus to the theological afterlife of the Greek term *oikonomia* is the latter's implication of 'the fracture that divides and, at the same time, articulates in God being and praxis'.³⁰⁰ For the "apparatus" similarly designates, according to Agamben, that 'in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being'. 'This is the reason why apparatuses,' he adds, 'must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject'.³⁰¹ The latter is never given as such, but comes to be by coming to pass away through the inter-play of human beings with the *oikonomia* of the apparatus, the 'set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviours, gestures, and thoughts of human beings'.³⁰² In light of these processes of subjectification by the administration or management of apparatuses, Agamben, meanwhile abandoning the context of Foucauldian philology, is finally able to propose, as he puts it,

²⁹⁷ *ibid*, 10.

²⁹⁸ *ibid*, 10-11.

²⁹⁹ *ibid*, 11.

³⁰⁰ *ibid*, 11.

³⁰¹ *ibid*.

³⁰² *ibid*, 12.

nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured. On one side, then, to return to the terminology of the theologians, lies the ontology of creatures, and on the other side, the *oikonomia* of apparatuses that seek to govern and guide them toward the good.³⁰³

With this broad partitioning in mind, Agamben is able to expand the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses by 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings' – from the pen, agriculture, philosophy, cigarettes and cellular phones to, as he puts it, 'language itself, [...] perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses [...]'.³⁰⁴

In their interaction with apparatuses – Agamben calls it 'a relentless fight', recalling thereby the close proximity of politics and play as we have encountered it in Benjamin's account of a revolutionised social function of art as the rehearsal space for dealing with an apparatus – living beings or 'creatures' become subjects, without their subject-position ever fully overlapping with their substance. Instead, as Agamben suggests in a theatrical register, the same substance 'can be the place of multiple processes of 'subjectification', pushing to the extreme, in light of the boundless growth of apparatuses in our time, 'the masquerade that has always accompanied every personal identity'.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ *ibid*, 13.

³⁰⁴ *ibid*, 14.

³⁰⁵ *ibid*, 15.

Test-Performances as Failed Performatives

In J.L. Austin's *How to do things with words*, the success or happiness of a performative speech act depends on its contextual embedding that often ties the speaking of certain words to a set of tightly observed ritual practices and circumstances of a specific time and place. Although

[t]he uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act [...], the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, [...] it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the *sole* thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say 'Done'), and it is hardly a gift if I *say* 'I give it you' but never hand it over.³⁰⁶

It is perhaps hardly surprising that in Austin's account of such conventionally regulated ritual acts, the theory of the speech act finds itself constantly exposed to the threat of its failure by the subversion of play – the non-serious as Austin calls it, parasitic on its 'normal' use –

³⁰⁶ John Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1975), 8-9.

that more or less repeats the ritual act in circumstances that can no longer guarantee its conventional effects. A hollow repetition of a non-present remainder, we might say, of the *form* of the ritual act severed from a forgotten or abolished circumstance that endowed the act with its sense and purpose. If the paradigmatic context for the non-serious in Austin is the theatre, we might also detect a more general theatricality of the everyday whenever the 'masquerade' of multiple processes of subjectification in an expanding apparatus becomes exposed and rendered more fluid in circumstances of the latter's dissolution. For if one necessity of circumstance for the success of the speech act is the appropriate subject position – *Stellung* – of those performing as well as attending the act, it is clear that successful speech acts can never be performed by 'creatures', as it were, but always depend on the relative security of an instituted subject position. It is thus non-fortuitous to see Austin, when conjuring up a scene that at first seems reminiscent of the probing misfires of the gestures of Kafka's characters, quickly reverts to hypothetical examples of monkeys and penguins when further discussing the role of misplaced subject-positions at the heart of a failed ritual speech act.

Suppose, for example, I see a vessel on the docks, walk up and smash the bottle hung at the stern, proclaim 'I name this ship the *Mr. Stalin*' and for good measure kick away the chocks: but the trouble is, I was not the person chosen to name it (whether or not – an additional complication – *Mr. Stalin* was the destined name; [...] One could say that I 'went through a form of' naming the vessel but that my 'action' was 'void' or 'without effect', because I was not a proper person, had not the 'capacity', to perform it: but one might also and alternatively say that, where there is not even a pretence of capacity or a colourable claim to it, then there is no accepted conventional procedure; it is a mockery, *like a marriage with a monkey*. Or again one could say that part of the procedure is getting oneself appointed. When the saint baptized the

penguins, was this void because the procedure of baptizing is inappropriate to be applied to penguins [...]?³⁰⁷

Austin's rhetoric, as already indicated, here recalls the world of Franz Kafka's writings, in which misfired performatives proliferate in light of the dissolution, as Benjamin puts it, of the 'organisation of life and work in the human community'.³⁰⁸ In ways reminiscent of the scenario of a failed performative, in Kafka's world actions often take place without quite taking place. In a contextual void that is without guaranteed effects or significance they probe for the possibilities of the latter by which action quickly turns into acting. 'Elsewhere K. himself does a bit of acting,' Benjamin begins to describe a particularly theatrical scene from *The Trial*:

Without being fully conscious of it, 'slowly... with his eyes not looking down but cautiously raised upwards he took one of the papers from the desk, put it on the palm of his hand and gradually raised it up to the gentlemen while getting up himself. He had nothing definite in mind, but acted only with the feeling that this was what he would have done once he had completed the big petition, which was to exonerate him completely'.³⁰⁹

Samuel Weber fittingly summarises the link between organisation and theatricality, if not theatre, in Benjamin's writings on Kafka as well as those on German baroque Mourning Play [*Trauerspiel*]:

In the absence of an established and authoritative set of values – whose historical emergence Benjamin had retraced in his study of the German mourning play as a reaction to the radical antinomianism of the Reformation – "organisation" becomes an end in itself. Benjamin varies the famous phrase of Napoleon in

³⁰⁷ Austin, 23-4, (my emphasis).

³⁰⁸ Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', *Gesammelte Schriften* II, 420.

³⁰⁹ Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', 419.

his conversation with Goethe to read “organisation is destiny,” arguing that “the organisation of life and of work in human community” gains importance in proportion to the lack of transcendent justification. Since this organisation lacks legitimacy, however, it remains opaque, impenetrable, something to be surmised and alluded to, the object of parables rather than the basis of doctrine. In Kafka’s writings, Benjamin argues, the model of such an unavoidable but opaque organisation of everyday life is not the tribunal or the castle but *theatre*.³¹⁰

In other words, Kafka’s theatrical worlds depict an apparatus in ruins, in which previously goal directed actions, no longer guided by transcendent justifications, have become contextually dislodged repetitions of themselves, probing gestures severed from their guaranteed ends, ‘void’ of clarity of purpose, or else test-performances, more or less precariously exposed in search of their only ever provisional effects in non-saturable contexts. Furthermore, not only dissolve actions into acting, but subjects into actors, that is, *stand-ins* of positions [*Stellungen*] that can never be fully secured. Kafka’s characters are therefore often to be found more or less desperately scrambling, whether in a more or less desperate *relentless fight* or high spirited *playfulness*, for more or less secure subject positions within precarious scenarios of working *with* as well as *for* an apparatus. In an echo of Agamben’s partitioning of creatures and subject-position-endowing apparatuses, what seeks out this or that particular subject position by dealing with an apparatus in certain of these scenarios is in fact no longer a human being at all. ‘It is possible to read Kafka’s animal stories for a considerable time,’ Benjamin reminds us, ‘without realising that they are not about human beings at all. Encountering the name of the creature [*Geschöpf*] – monkey, dog or mole – one looks up startled and sees that one is already at a great distance from the continent of the human’.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 70.

³¹¹ Benjamin, ‘Franz Kafka’, 419.

Distortion [*Entstellung*] As Stand-In Of 'The New'

A context that repeats otherwise and perhaps brings together in productive ways some of our previous concerns with the radical performative – or else, affirmative – quality of gesture, are the writings of Werner Hamacher.³¹² In his essay 'The Gesture In The Name: On Benjamin and Kafka', Hamacher employs the concept of the gesture precisely as a figure saturated with the immediacy of the medial. Hamacher begins his reflections with a reading of the recurring trope of 'the cloudy spot' in Benjamin's writings on Kafka, the becoming opaque of transmission that is used more or less synonymously with the figure of gesture. 'For Kafka,' Benjamin states, 'something was only ever comprehensible through gesture. And these gestures, which he did not

³¹² Werner Hamacher, 'The Gesture in the Name: On Benjamin and Kafka' in *Premises*, 294-336. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999). In the context of his reading of Walter Benjamin's conception of a pure means of violence and language, Hamacher puts forward the conceptual series of *affirmation*, *afformance*, and *afformative* in contrast to *performance*, *performance* and *performative act*. Hamacher's conception of the conception of the affirmative, which I can here only point towards but not develop, 'as a 'condition' for any instrumental, performative' act that 'at the same time [...] suspends its fulfillment in principle,' is fundamentally related to everything that here comes under the rubric of the virtual: 'But while affirmations do not belong to the class of acts – that is, to the class of positing or founding operations – they are nevertheless, never simply outside the sphere of acts or without relation to that sphere. The fact that affirmations allow something to happen without making it happen has a dual significance: first, that they let this thing enter into the realm of positings, from which they themselves are excluded; and, second, that they are not what shows up in the realm of positings, so that the field of phenomenality, as the field of positive manifestation, can only indicate the effects of the affirmative as ellipses, pauses, interruptions, displacements etc., but can never contain or include them. The affirmative is the ellipsis which silently accompanies any act and which may silently interrupt any speech act. What 'is' affirmative can therefore never be represented in the form of a rule or a law. While every presentation depends on a positing and is essentially performative in character, the 'deposing' of which Benjamin speaks, the affirmative, would not lend itself to presentation of any sort. [...] [Hamacher 'Afformative, Strike', 125-6].

understand, from the cloudy place [*Stelle*] of the parables from which emerges Kafka's literature'.³¹³ Picking up on Benjamin's assertion that Kafka's work constitutes a tradition that has fallen ill, Hamacher pays special attention to the status of a language that continues to commit itself to the passing on [*Tradierung*] of what has become impossible to be passed on [*des Untradierbaren*]. The cloudy spot of gesture performs such a transmission of an opaque doctrine. Kafka's texts infinitely hesitate before their own meaning, Hamacher notes. Blockage of the movement of transmission multiplies its signifying potential. Representation passes over into the unrepresentable [*Undarstellbare*], revealing the absence of all revelation.³¹⁴ Such a transmission of the untransmissible follows the structural movement of a means without end, as we have already encountered it, and that is nevertheless not an end in itself, but retains an aspect of itself as means. Hamacher describes this movement as a passing on without content, a giving without gift, which gives nothing but the giving itself.³¹⁵ He further construes it as the movement of a defunct inheritance, by which the prospect that a law of the past would be valid for the future and thus a conception of history as a normative continuum can no longer be upheld. Instead, the interruption of continuity (of meaning) can be experienced both as loss and as chance. What might be lost, are the past doctrine and a sense of the historical continuum. What might be gained, is an opening onto an unknown future, that is, the 'preparation' of what has never been. This possible coming of the other, however, Hamacher insists, is certainly never *for us*. For what Kafka says about hope is also valid for the law of tradition and the literature that transmits it and as which it transmits itself [*sich übermittelt*], namely: there is sufficient hope, infinitely so – but not for us.

³¹³ Benjamin in Werner Hamacher, 'Die Geste im Namen: Benjamin und Kafka' in *Entferntes Verstehen* 280-323. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2011), 284.

³¹⁴ *ibid*, 290.

³¹⁵ *ibid*, 288.

There is hope always only for another – and for “us” only when there is, so to speak, no “us,” when “we” stop being “ourselves” and begin to be another. “Plenty of hope,” therefore, “but not for us.” Hope, rather, case by case, for others, for another literature and another history.³¹⁶

If the cloud therefore constitutes an opacification of Enlightenment, Hamacher says, one should not however be morally critical of it. The failure of transmission must not be diagnosed as a symptom of chance [*Zufallssymptom*]. In other words, the accident of its fall, the illness that has *befallen* tradition, warrants a response that does not simply propose to seek to recover ‘old goods,’ as Hamacher puts it, but at least considers the possibility ‘that through the disintegration of representation something other prepares itself, which has not been present thus far nor is simply anticipatable’.³¹⁷ For Benjamin, Kafka’s parables without doctrine – non-present remainders, as we might also here put it – may not only continue to transmit what is left of the doctrine as relic, but also prepare it as its precursor. The doctrine, law and order before which Kafka’s parables fail or withhold themselves, as Hamacher states, ‘belong [...] to the future no less than the past’.³¹⁸ Yet neither future nor past is figured in Kafka’s writings. Instead, the ‘cloudy spot’ and the incomprehensible gesture that inhabit it must be read ‘precisely as a testimony of refusal or an impossibility to anticipate the coming and subject it to past forms of representation’.³¹⁹ ‘Distortion [*Entstellung*], which proliferates in Kafka’s prose, is therefore the *stand-in* [*Platzhalterin*] of a new, which has *no place* [*Platz*] in an as yet accepted order of representation and itself does not constitute such an order’.³²⁰ Here, the status of a stand-in, which we have previously attributed to the acting characters in Kafka’s disintegrating organisations of the human

³¹⁶ Hamacher, ‘The Gesture’, 303.

³¹⁷ Hamacher, ‘Die Geste’, 292.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ *ibid.*, 293.

community, grappling with the remains of an apparatus in insecure subject-positions, returns in the context of a consideration of language as the medium of historical transmission of tradition and the historical continuity of organisation. Yet the opacity of a transmitted inheritance as stand-in is not simply a historical consequence of an ailing tradition, but also the deconstruct-ability of all positing as the very condition of its limited success. Test-performances, as we saw, might play with the non-present remaining of a tradition that has fallen ill, or else expose the non-present remaining of an opaque stand-in within limited contextual effects of presence. Not unlike the status of test-performances and test-performers, distortions [*Entsellungen*] as stand-ins are no longer properly and securely placed [*gestellt*] within a contextual order of representation, but precariously exposed to the coming of other possibilities of use or signification. Hamacher links the provisional status of the stand-in to what he designates as its *modernity*. The modernity Hamacher here has in mind, far from following the trajectories of teleological progress, does not follow on from an old order as a new one, but is that which ‘in all order and firstly in the order of representation opens up what behaves heterogeneous to it’.³²¹ Generalizing the role of distortion [*Entstellung*] in the representation of historical experience, Hamacher suggests that all art has a dimension that could be called modern, if, in its representation of historical experience, it *exposes* the *caesura*, the “cloudy spot” or the unintelligible gesture.

Resistance against the assimilation of the future to the past is the minimal political programme of a modernity thus construed. It is therefore the refusal to capitulate before the demand for universality of a tradition of representation which carries out this assimilation. The old does not fail so that the new succeeds, but what fails is the principle of representation itself, which instigates

³²¹ *ibid.*

the continuity between „old“ and „new,“ and therefore the continuity of historical time thus far, in the first place.³²²

The chance of a revolution of the social function of art as Benjamin seeks to discern it in the wake of the withering of the aura of the work of art in the time of its reproducibility, follows the minimal political programme of a modernity thus construed. No longer subservient to the omnitemporal force of ritual as what seeks to guarantee ‘the continuity between „old“ and „new,“ and therefore the continuity of historical time thus far’, it begins to rely on the participatory practice of politics and play, which perpetually rehearses or reworks the inheritance of the past as the future to come.

³²² *ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE

Clumsy Creatures:**Walter Benjamin in the Bestiary of Edwina Ashton³²³**

Fig. 1. Seven Sites launch party, August 2011. Edwina Ashton. Freund.



Fig. 2. Walter Benjamin, 1937. Photographed by Gisèle

³²³ The present chapter has been published in *Performance Research* 18:4 On Falling.

'Clumsiness speaks of the infiltration of falling in human action'.³²⁴ In other words, actions and speech acts, movements that strive toward meaningful ends, are here destabilised. Whether describing the interruptions of sudden pratfalls and slips of the tongue, or slower processes of rendering futurity uncertain, the clumsy infiltration of falling undermines mastery through a more or less gradual loss of control over end-directed ambitions.

'The clumsy one is weighed down [...] by a body that he does not fill or coincide with sufficiently to command'.³²⁵ Here, Conner describes a breakdown of mastery under the weight of non-coincidence. A process of doubling, self-distancing and self-multiplication that Charles Baudelaire, in his essay 'Of the Essence of Laughter' had similarly associated with a professional attitude towards falling, practiced alike by philosophers and buffoons.³²⁶ Falling, in this context, exposes the failure of the myth of self-identity. It is the gesture of self-alienation par excellence. In this light, Baudelaire's notion of a professional stance towards falling, if one can put it thus somewhat paradoxically – a more or less controlled loss of control, degrees of mastery in non-mastery – perhaps necessitates what Walter Benjamin says of the actor in Epic Theatre, that is, 'to preserve for oneself the possibility to artfully fall out of one's role'.³²⁷

Such technologies of and professional attitudes towards falling must be put in relation to Benjamin's lifelong practico-theoretical fascination with the 'the off-fall [*Abfall*, lit. rubbish] of history,' the ruins, fragments, images and gestures discarded by or cut from a dominant

³²⁴ Steven Connor 'Shifting Ground'. This is the English version of an essay published in German as 'Auf schwankendem Boden', in the catalogue of the exhibition *Samuel Beckett, Bruce Nauman* ed. by Michael Glasmeier. (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2000): 80-7. Accessed November 2011.

³²⁵ *ibid.*

³²⁶ Charles Baudelaire, 'Of the Essence of Laughter, and generally of the Comic in the Plastic Arts', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings On Art And Artists*, trans. P.E. Charvet, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

³²⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater? (2)', 29.

historical organisation (Benjamin 1983: 575). A crisis of organisation and the proliferation of fallen fragments inform Benjamin's reading of two paradigmatic contexts: the German baroque *Trauerspiel* and the literary work of Franz Kafka. Both depict a world that is marked by the loss of redemptive horizons in light of a failure [*Aus-fall*] of eschatology. Here, actions find themselves severed from their collective symbolic organisation. Barred from redemptive guarantees and inhibited from access to grace, movements are no longer set upon a teleological trajectory and thus infiltrated by falling. In this context Benjamin develops a notion of the creature [*die Kreatur*] as so many distortions [*Entstellungen*] from the ordered position [*Stellung*] of human mastery. Distorted and clumsy, the creature finds itself vulnerably exposed to an utter lack of security and future. Unless, that is, it turns out to be more professionally at ease in precarious conditions of non-mastery, playfully at work in exuberant attitudes of experiment.

In what follows, I would like to reflect further on the ambiguous conditions of the clumsy creature, both productively and precariously at play in the work of contemporary artist Edwina Ashton's creature costumes, performances and films, and the writings of Walter Benjamin. Finally, I would like to consider Benjamin himself, of whom Theodor W. Adorno said that he resembled an animal that collects things in its mouth, whether vulnerably exposed or exuberantly at play, as one more creature within Ashton's bestiary.³²⁸

An Ambiguous Politics of the Clumsy

'In these days', Walter Benjamin proclaims in a note from *One-Way Street*, 'no one should be set upon [*sich versteiffen*] what he "can do."

³²⁸ Eckhardt Köhn, 'Sammler' in *Benjamins Begriffe*. ed. by Michael Opitz & Erdmut Wizisla. 695-724. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2000).

Strength lies in improvisation. All decisive blows will be dealt by the left hand'.³²⁹ The small aphorism hangs ambiguously between an active ethico-political call to self-interruption and the reactive stance of making do with an imposed loss of control. In any case, a decisive [*entscheidende*] blow can no longer be planned or anticipated, but springs forth from positions of insecurity, whether actively sought out or passively experienced. From being thus precariously placed, actions unfold severed from guaranteed meaningful ends in processes of experimental non-mastery. The latter, perhaps a kind of politics of the clumsy, is to be found in Benjamin's thought and life, in all its active-reactive ambiguity. Throughout his work and letters, Benjamin's attitude seemingly oscillates between the lament for the loss of secure positions [*Stellungen*] embedded within inherited traditions and the radical call for exploding and cutting to bits the precarious remains of the orders of things. Not least of all the teleological organisation of actions within a progressive historical continuum. His own life is testament to the pull of this polarity. It strikes out, so to speak, in extremes; at times stifled within conditions of vulnerable exposition within forced upon exiles, at others exuberant in attitudes of destruction within cunning orders of self-experiment.

To Find Pathways Everywhere

In a letter to Gershom Scholem from 1930, Benjamin expresses a frustration with his general lack of a secure social position [*Stellung*]. 'It is indeed not easy,' he says, 'at the threshold of forty, to stand [*zu stehen*] without property, position [*Stellung*] and capital [*Vermögen*]'.³³⁰ Yet in his essay 'The destructive Character' written around the same time, he emphatically describes the features of this admirable type as an active

³²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*, 14.

³³⁰ Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin – die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1975), 202.

rejection of the securities of the proper. The polarity of Benjamin's desire for and against a minimum of proper securities can further be construed by juxtaposing his life-long passion as a collector with the destructive character's call to make room for a joyful uprooting of one's condition [*Zustand*].³³¹ Writing to Scholem in 1931, Benjamin speaks of the reunion with his library in a Berlin flat at Prinzregentenstrasse 66 that he took over from the painter Eva Bloy in the late autumn of 1930. The library, which by then had grown from 1200 to 2000 books, 'even in these times,' as he suggestively puts it, is situated in the office of the flat. The presence of his private book collection makes the office, despite its unfinished condition, quite inhabitable. Here, Benjamin seemingly offsets the fragility of the office's condition – a work in progress that denies masterful use – with the reassuring presence of one of his dearest possessions. As if however to make up for a momentary weakness, Benjamin goes on to calmly relate the absence of a work-desk. Contrary to what one might expect from a professional writer, he is not however put out by this in the least. Drawing Scholem's attention to his long acquired habit, due to a variety of circumstances, to write whilst lying down, he begins to joyfully relate the presence of a sofa that, albeit unsuitable to sleep on due to its hardness, apparently makes for a marvellous place to work. Here, Benjamin's happy transvaluation of the use of things is able to follow his own descriptions of the destructive character's ability to find pathways [*Wege*] everywhere. 'Because he sees pathways [*Wege*] everywhere, he himself always stands at the crossroads [*Kreuzweg*]. No instant may know what the next will bring'.³³² Despite the contextual rhetoric of empowerment, the description clearly retains the darker aspects of standing precariously at the crossroads in perpetual alert, that is, of a fragile exposition to the utter unpredictability of all futurity. Benjamin says as much with the first entry of his *Diary from the seventh of August Nineteenhundredthirtyone until the Day of*

³³¹ Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, 289.

³³² *ibid*, 290.

Death, which remarks on the hopelessness [*Ausweglosigkeit*, lit. absence of a way out] of his situation.³³³

Being Insecurely Placed

Similar polarities between states of hope and hopelessness within given positions of insecurity are at work in Benjamin's reading of Franz Kafka. Kafka's hermetic fictional worlds rigorously put into play questions regarding the positions [*Stellungen*] of their characters. The German word *Stellung* in this context is to be understood in all its senses and associated meanings – of position, place and stance, of employment and status, as well as general relations of social hierarchy. What occupied Kafka, the more it became impenetrable to him, was the 'question of how life and work are organised in human society'.³³⁴ Kafka's characters scramble for, or retreat from, their given positions [*Stellung*], following an ambiguous desire of (dis-) belonging to the organising institutions of their world. Central characters like K., Josef K. and the young Karl Rossmann often find themselves out of (their) place, as well as in the process of more or less desperately seeking to gain securer positions [*Stellungen*]. Their endeavour to appropriate and secure a certain status or employment [*Stellung*] for themselves often exposes the theatrical organisation of their world.

A scene that combines the distribution of theatrical roles with the sinister stakes of a violent threat to the most minimal security of position plays itself out over the first few pages of *The Castle*: K. is woken by a young man with an actorly [*schauspielerhaften*] face.³³⁵ Soon enough, following an aggressive debate concerning his lawful right to sleep in the most rudiment place [*Stelle*] on a sack of straw in the corner of a still

³³³ Köhn, 719-20.

³³⁴ Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, 420.

³³⁵ Franz Kafka, *Das Schloß*. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1998), 7.

busy inn, he wants to put an end to this comedy.³³⁶ Accused of being a vagabond, K. seeks to assert himself with reference to his employment [*Stellung*] by letting it be known that he is the land surveyor who was called upon by the count of the castle. Judging however from his own reaction to the authority's belated confirmation of this audacious claim, his proclaimed land-surveyorship [*Landvermesserschaft*] turns out to perhaps have been nothing but a cunning yet desperate attempt at self-preservation. The Castle, as sovereign power, does not so much as confirm a position [*Stellung*] and title previously arranged, but seemingly accepts his role-play by retrospectively appointing him to it.³³⁷ K.'s lack of secure position, his exile and theatricality, perhaps constitute a middle ground of a spectrum of displacements and distortions [*Entstellungen*] that run throughout Kafka's world. For Benjamin there is hope for very few characters within this spectrum. The fragility of the majority of their positions [*Stellungen*], he notes

[...] weighs heavily on this world of creatures as a dark kind of law. None has a firm position [*Stelle*], none has a firm, non-exchangeable outline; none that is not either rising or falling; none that is not trading places with its enemy or neighbour, none that is not deeply exhausted and yet is only at the beginning of a long duration. Here, to speak of any order or hierarchy is impossible.³³⁸

Benjamin's reading nevertheless primarily concerns itself with drawing our attention to those characters that form exceptions to the norm. Although far from exempt from a lack of secure position, these characters are somewhat able to take up a different attitude with regards to the fragility of their predicament. They are Kafka's assistants [*Gehilfen*], students and buffoons, who neither belong to nor are foreign to any

³³⁶ *ibid*, 8.

³³⁷ *ibid*, 10.

³³⁸ Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka – Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages' in *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*. 409-438. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 415.

other orders of belonging. 'For them and their kind, the unfinished and clumsy, there is hope'.³³⁹ Full of an exuberant resilience, their courageous fumbling and groping draws on a mixture of cunning and high spirits.³⁴⁰ Performing happy investments without guaranteed returns, or else, 'experiments, always of course accompanied by lisps and chuckling,' they ambitiously venture into the world like the lad who left his home for he wanted to learn what fear was.³⁴¹ Without power, yet far from impotent, as well as hopeful as Josephine the singing mouse, they are full of 'unfathomable yet nevertheless existing and not to be terminated high spirits' [*Munterkeit*].³⁴²

³³⁹ *ibid*, 415.

³⁴⁰ In an aside of 'The Storyteller' Benjamin notes that 'this is how the fairy tale polarises *Mut* [courage], dividing it dialectically into *Untermut* – that is, cunning – and *Übermut* [high spirits] (Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, 404).'

³⁴¹ Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', 414-5.

³⁴² *ibid*.



Fig. 3. Walter Benjamin at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris 1937. Photographed by Gisèle Freund.



Fig.4. Warm Hand of History (film Still) 2008, Edwina Ashton.

The Creature-World of Edwina Ashton

In May 2012 I travelled to the capital of the Basque country, Vitoria- Gasteiz, to visit the exhibition ‘In the Belly of the Whale (Act III),’ curated by Rosie Cooper and Ariella Yedgar, at Montehermoso, a centre for contemporary art. The title of the group show was given with reference to Orson Welle’s said habit to refer to his theatre hall as the belly of a whale – ‘in which the actors are unwittingly trapped’– and resonates with the physical reality of the exhibition space, a former water-tank of the city.³⁴³ The accompanying exhibition text addresses the reader as follows: ‘You have entered an exhibition concerned with rehearsal and its related notions of version, repetition and failure [...]’.³⁴⁴ Spread out over the vast, tall and hollow space of the old water-tank, in and amongst the other works, are five small TV monitors displaying looped video recordings of diverse creatures – performers dressed in elaborate costumes made from scraps of old fabric and make shift

³⁴³ Rosie Cooper & Ariella Yedgar, *In the Belly of the Whale (Act III)*, (exhibition information leaflet), Vitoria: Montehermoso 2012, 11.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*

everyday materials like old tongs, duvets, scarves and jumpers – by the artist Edwina Ashton. These creatures are each depicted in more or less awkward, clumsy, yet often exuberant, frantic and at times desperate pursuits of futile tasks whose ends are infinitely postponed. A stickman in a helpless hunt for a fly on the window, its fragile stiff wooden arms approaching it again and again without the slightest signs of impatience or adherence to a reality principle. Endlessly pursuing a futile desire, this stickman's mission makes for an ambiguous scene, both melancholic and hilarious. A beetle caught up in a mad, busy, effortful and noisy activity without end – frantically shuffling a giant *papier maché* ball up a narrow stairway only to immediately let it roll down again. A chubby silkworm sporting a tiny little brown hat, concerned with the construction of a 'Beautiful Pot.' With tentacle arms it tries to mould a lump of clay that lies on a table in front of it. Seemingly half-blind, the creature gropes for a ribbon adjacent to the clay and begins to clumsily wrap it around the lumpy shape. A task that proves most difficult yet is nevertheless pursued awkwardly with what, after a while, perhaps resembles an ambition that borders on the desperate. When the action momentarily ends in failure – pot and ribbon fall to the ground – the camera lingers for a short while on the helpless protagonist. At this moment, whether audible or not, it is as if the creature gives off a sigh. A delicate moment of helpless frustration exposes the silkworm's vulnerability. However, soon enough the video cuts back to its beginning and we follow once more, amused yet not without an awkward hint of pity, the renewed energetic commitment to a repeated attempt.

A Creaturely Dimension of the Human

A fourth video of the series depicts a creature more difficult to attribute to a specific animal species. It has left the domestic interior behind and ventured outside, yet is nevertheless occupied with an

activity that embodies the domestic scene. Holding a bucket and mop it stands in front of a large rock face happily polishing without noticeable effect the rock in its immediate reach. Every so often interrupted by following an airplane with its gaze, it seems not in the least put out by the unfathomable size of the task that seemingly lies ahead. The four videos' emphasis on domestic habitats and home-making endeavours bring to mind another encounter with Ashton's world. In 2011, on the top floor flat of Arthur Millwood Court, Salford, SEVEN SITES, a series of performances for unusual contexts and locations, curated by Laura Mansfield and myself, launched with a performance by Edwina Ashton. Upon arrival, a bird-like creature in yellow and blue, equipped with turquoise rollers for claws and a beak, shows guests the way to the lift. Once in the small flat overlooking the skyline of Manchester, in place of curator and artist, guests are hosted to a shambolic tea party by five other creatures: a bear frantically at work in the kitchen, two cat-servants running around between the guests – seeing to and obstructing their comfort in equal measure – an immobile beetle sat on the couch tangled in wool, as well as a caterpillar busily cleaning a window from out on the balcony. Once again, a clumsy exuberance accompanies these creature's actions that distort [*entstellt*] the realm of human domesticity. Battenberg cake is served in unpredictable sizes, speeds and manners to selected guests only, as well as hidden or stored in bathroom cupboards and corners in equal measure. In the kitchen, the bear repeatedly starts and stops to follow a recipe for scones, creating a spectacular mess with flower, water, pot and whisk. These playfully neurotic domestic displacements perhaps gesture to what more generally strikes me as Ashton's creatures' humorous yet melancholic distortions of the orders of the human and its meaning producing structures and institutions. Their clumsiness displays itself as a result of the infiltration of falling in human action. It is such regressions from human skill sets and end-oriented endeavours, as well as its assumptions of self-identical mastery that bring forth a creaturely dimension. Like Kafka's creatures, these "animals" are only ever more or less removed from the continent of the

human, as is everything in Kafka, Benjamin says, including the “human itself”.³⁴⁵ Ashton’s suggestive yet vague visual references to birds, cats, caterpillars and beetles are not so much anthropomorphised animals as creaturely humans, occupying a middle world, unfinished and clumsy. By interrupting, suspending, distorting [*entstellen*] as well as repeating the fragile remains of the orders of “human” organisation and teleology, they exhibit a creaturely dimension that may be both, sign of active revolt in self-experiment as well as fragile resilience in imposed positions of vulnerable exposure.

Fall from Redemptive Horizons: the Creature of the Baroque

Kafka, Benjamin notes, removes the traditional [*überkommenen*] supports of human gesture, ‘to render it an object of endless contemplations’.³⁴⁶ Such a process of a passive loss or active removal of inherited supports – schemata of meaningful orders of gestures, words, things – combined with an attitude of contemplation without end, is precisely the situation Benjamin locates in his analysis of the German baroque *Trauerspiel* and the operation of its allegorical *Tiefblick* [deep (in)sight]. Within this context, a historical scene that doubles as a structural paradigm, Benjamin first introduces the concept of creature [*Kreatur*].

For Benjamin, the baroque’s paradigmatic structure has to be understood as a result of a failure [*Ausfall*] of eschatology. The *Trauerspiel* responds to this failure by seeking to address questions that have escaped theology after it lost its privileged claim to interpretation. In light of the Reformation, the curie’s organisation of redemptive guarantees is rendered uncertain. Luther’s rejection of “good works” in favour of “faith alone” instigates an institutional crisis. The failure of all

³⁴⁵ Benjamin, ‘Franz Kafka’, 419-20.

³⁴⁶ *ibid*, 420.

privileged claims to the social organisation of the sensible exposes isolated individuals cut off from one another and the world. Life, no longer endowed with a meaning that could surpass individual mortality, increasingly becomes engulfed in feelings of anxiety and alienation. Actions, severed from predictable ends become meaningless, ephemeral and undecidable. Fragments of a fallen nature find themselves cut from their teleological organisation, exposing themselves to a radically unforeseeable and uncontrollable future. Within this context, the creature [*die Kreatur*] describes a fallen humanity severed from, yet nevertheless understood with reference to a sacred realm. Creaturely life thus re-emerges to the degree that life is no longer embedded within institutions that organise its access to a symbolic order able to raise it above its fallen condition. In this structural paradigm the category of life itself is split between a creaturely dimension of mere life and its redemptive participation in a sacred symbolic realm. Creaturely life therefore describes the survival of a fallen creation severed from access to grace. Nowhere is this split structure of the human more apparent than with regards to the *Trauerspiel's* representation of the sovereign. 'No matter how high he is enthroned above subject and state,' Benjamin notes, 'his rank is decided in the world of creation. He is the master of creatures, but remains creature himself'.³⁴⁷ No longer able to wield, so to speak, a decisive blow, he now marks the limit of sovereignty itself. A sovereignty, as Derrida puts it, which 'will always imply the possibility of...positionality, ...thesis, ...self-thesis, ...autoposition of him who posits or posits himself as *ipse, the (self-)same, oneself*'.³⁴⁸ 'Nothing teaches the fragility of the creature more drastically,' Benjamin elaborates, 'than the fact that even he was overcome by it'.³⁴⁹ The cause of his downfall cannot be found in a particular moral offence but must be explained through his general position as creaturely human [*Stand des kreatürlichen*

³⁴⁷ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 65-6.

³⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign Volume 1* ed. by Michel Lise, Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michand, trans. By Geoffrey Bennington. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2009), 67.

³⁴⁹ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 123.

Menschen].³⁵⁰ This *Stand* – position, rank, stance – is at the same time what undermines his previous place at the top of social hierarchy. In a perpetual oscillation from power to powerlessness, his exemplary self-mastery unravels into sovereign indecision and acts of clumsy non-mastery. With the infiltration of falling in sovereign action, end-directed demeanours find themselves interrupted. What is left is a more or less anxious display of clumsiness, acts of non-mastery with uncontrollable ends.

³⁵⁰ *ibid*, 70.



Fig.5. My Beautiful Pot (film still), 2008, Edwina Ashton.

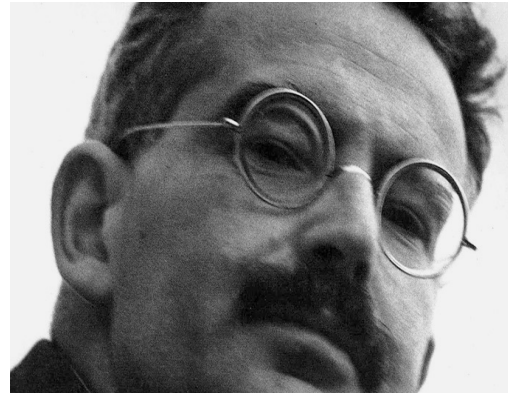


Fig. 6. Walter Benjamin, 1937
Photographed by Gisèle Freund.

Benjamin as Creature

Lisa Fittko, who in 1940 facilitated Benjamin's flight from the Gestapo across the French Pyrenees, enters a chorus of biographical accounts that describe the philosophers' lack of physical prowess. 'Never,' she says, 'have I been made so conscious of the tragic conflict between thought and action in a person'.³⁵¹ Michael Taussig, who relates Fittko's observations on Benjamin's apparent lack of adaptability, perceives such a conflict as

[...] all the more striking in Benjamin's case when we consider how overwhelmingly attuned his theories were to what he himself called the object world and to mimetic behaviour, such behaviour being in some regard the quintessence of what has come to be called "embodied knowledge" and what I think Lisa Fittko meant by "adaptability." "*Faut debroullier*," she said, "one must know how to help oneself, to clear a way out of the debacle." (...) Benjamin's love of modernism, and in particular of montage,

³⁵¹ Michael Taussig, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006), 11.

allegory, and fragmentation, all would seem to strongly predispose one to “adaptability,” meaning coping with new and strange circumstances [...]. Moreover, his letters and essays written on Ibiza in 1932-33 are glowing testimony to a love of material culture and keen eye for nature. But what does all this add up to if you can’t even hold a cup of hot tea?³⁵²

Vulnerably exposed, on his flight across the mountains, Benjamin is unable or else unwilling to adapt. Perhaps we must read the scene against the grain of an assumed inability to cope with new and strange circumstances. Taussig himself suggests as much when he states that it is ‘as if the lack of “adaptability” had a certain ethical principle behind it, which was, precisely, not to adapt’.³⁵³ In any case, Fittko’s demands for mastery, the skilled handling of a hot cup of tea, are here at odds with Benjamin’s keen interest in a very different sort of adaptation. Adaptability as practiced by Kafka’s servants, for instance, who are able to install themselves on two old skirts on the floor in the corner, paying heed to a creaturely dimension of non-mastery.

It was their ambition to take up as little space as possible. They undertook to this purpose several trials [*Versuche*], always of course under lips and giggles, crossed arms and legs, huddled themselves together. At dawn one could only see a large bundle in their corner.³⁵⁴

The assistant’s decisive trick seemingly lies in not so readily striving for the securities of mastery and *Stellung*, but to be able to take up high-spirited attitudes towards expositions of vulnerability. Benjamin, albeit gripped at times by longings for greater security, as well as violently

³⁵² *ibid.*

³⁵³ *ibid.*

³⁵⁴ Benjamin, ‘Franz Kafka’, 414.

driven to extreme forms of exile, for the most part sought to embrace what perhaps can be tentatively called a politics of the clumsy. Viewed in this way, it is precisely the clumsy, awkward, experimental postponement of the accomplishment of skills or goals that perhaps lies at the heart of his thought on “embodied knowledge.” Benjamin’s life and work are *testament* to being thus dis-placed, insecurely, in an ambiguous attitude of vulnerable exposition and hopeful experiment. A not dissimilar attitude can be said to inform Ashton’s creatures’ strange ambitions. They struggle, clumsily, for better or worse, in high spirited yet vulnerable pursuits of means with unfathomable or uncontrollable ends: a stickman in futile pursuit of a fly, a silkworm awkwardly occupied with ribbon and clay and Walter Benjamin, on top a mountain, helplessly fumbling with a hot cup of tea. The *Ausweglosigkeit* [hopelessness] of the latter’s final predicament is the dark underside of all of these creatures’ high spirited hope and cunning to find pathways everywhere.

CHAPTER FOUR
**Of Secret Signals, Absent Masters and the Trembling of the
Contours: Walter Benjamin, Yvonne Rainer and the
Repeatability of Gesture.**³⁵⁵
Introduction

Repetition relies on processes of idealisation, techniques or technologies of externalisation, degrees of retention and spacing, the tracing of relations between past and future. Inextricably bound to the construction and deconstruction of habit, tradition and identity, the movement of repetition follows a task of (self-)inheritance along chains of counter-signatures as so many re-cognitions, re-readings, re-enactments, re-uses, re-affirmations, re-appropriations and parodies of all that remains. Yet before repetition actually takes place, as Jacques Derrida has shown, the signature – paradoxically singular performance of an iterable mark – is always already haunted by the possibility of “its” coming counter-signature, ‘the time and place of the *other time* already at work, altering from the start the start itself, the *first time*, the *at once*’.³⁵⁶ To avow of this virtual possibility of repetition – repeatability – in modes of radical performativity, I will argue, is to take up an attitude [*Haltung*] of non-mastery in any given context, or else, to a being-in-rehearsal.

The performance practices of Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance take an often overlooked interest in engaging with archival remains, developing ‘strategies for dancing yesterday’ by which the live moment of performance lets itself be haunted by an other, past time and

³⁵⁵ The present chapter has developed out of a paper delivered at the interdisciplinary conference *And so on: On Repetition* at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, 30th November 2013 and has subsequently been published in Eirini Kartsaki ed. *On Repetition: Writing, Performance, Art*. (London: Intellect 2016).

³⁵⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 62.

place.³⁵⁷ A not dissimilar concern with the recognisability of re-enacted marks informs the theatre of Bertolt Brecht. In Walter Benjamin's writings on the latter an important shift of emphasis takes place: a concern with the act of repetition gives way to an analysis of the structure of repeatability that conditions it. Gestures, as the more or less unique and therefore privileged repeatable marks of (Epic) theatre, are the clearly framed time or movement fragments that stand still in the interrupted continuity of a plot or the temporal unfolding of a performance. Momentarily severed from the flow of time, a minimal movement of spacing – time becoming space – renders gestures citable. As citable gestures, they begin to *stand* in a fundamental relationship to the future, namely, *towards* the possibility of their repetition in other contexts to come. Such possible future displacements in time and space are bound to entail difference as much as repetition. Citable gestures virtually part with their present context of determination and begin to signal towards the possibility of a future alterity. Finding similar structures at work in the experiments in dance of Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance, I here seek to trace a certain Brechtian echo in the practices of the latter. An echo, to be sure, which like all echoes, links the movement of repetition to difference. Moving beyond the specific practices and discourses of Brecht and Rainer, I further want to suggest that perhaps all theatrical practice rests on a general structure of repeatability, particularly when remaining close to the process of its assemblage, namely, the rehearsal. In a detailed reading of certain extracts from Benjamin's essay on a 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' I finally pursue the theme of repeatability, as it has leapt from Brecht to Rainer via a shared concern with compositional devices of

³⁵⁷ Lambert-Beatty, 51. I here adopt the unfortunately elliptical phrase – 'Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance' – for purely economical reasons. For a detailed documentation of the history of this influential informal group of Avant-garde experimentalists working in New York during the 1960s, taking account of its many members and diverse practices, see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body*. (Durham: Durham University Press 1993).

interruption and citation, by rearticulating it as a politico-pedagogic attitude of radical performativity. As a movement of repetition that maintains a simultaneous reference to the past and to the future, performance as rehearsal begins to describe an experimental attitude [*Haltung*] towards the inheritance of a past. Designating a radically performative and provisional time-space for the experimental attitudes of non-mastery, the theatre as rehearsal turns out to be the paradigmatic context of education: an uncertain locality, where knowledge never quite settles nor performatives ever quite take (their) place.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ A brief clarification of the terms performance, performative and radical performative is perhaps here due. In the first place, as will become sufficiently clear in the latter part of the chapter, 'performance' should be understood as what has traditionally been opposed to the rehearsal as end product but can be strictly speaking so no longer. The word that Benjamin uses in the German is *Aufführung*, a presentation on the raised platform of the stage, which, contrary to the English *performance*, has little resonance with what contemporary theory designates as performativity nor what in Performance and Theatre Studies seeks to differentiate more or less successfully, performance from theatre. This latter distinction or debate has little import here. In fact, a politics of rehearsal as an attitude of the radically performative is in no way bound to the institutions of the theatre and its derivatives, which are here merely taken as paradigmatic. Finally, references to the word performativity and 'the performative' seek to signal towards contemporary concerns with non-essential, process oriented subject formations, whilst being rooted in J.L. Austin's opposition of the performative and the constative (speech act). Following Jacques Derrida's critique of Austin, I seek to furthermore differentiate 'the performative' – an utterance or action that holds out for the success of its effective occurrence within a saturated context – with a certain beyond of the performative, that is, a gesture that already distances itself from itself and the certainties of its own taking place within a given context by the use of the superlative 'radical'. The theatre is, of course, already in Austin's own analysis, a paradigmatic context for the failure of the performative. It is precisely the reevaluation of this failure that is at stake here. Radical performativity eschews the order of the "I can" and of mastery, as well as the ontological assumption they are founded upon. A performativity beyond the performative, as Derrida fittingly puts it, 'punctures the horizon, *interrupting* any performative organization, any convention, or any context that can be dominated by a conventionality'. [Derrida, 'The University Without Condition' in *Without Alibi* ed. & trans by Peggy Kamuf, 202-237. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2002), 244, my emphasis]. For Derrida's incisive reading of J.L. Austin see 'Signature, Event, Context' and *Limited Inc.* For his reflections on non-

The Kaiserpanorama

In a small text of his collection of childhood reflections *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Walter Benjamin, when relating his memory of the *Kaiserpanorama* – an elaborate early stereoscopic picture-display of mostly foreign landscape scenes – describes an auditory effect of an interfering kind, which to him seems nevertheless superior to the later developments of the phoney magic of musical accompaniment of similar image-scenes on a filmstrip. ‘It was the ringing of a bell,’ he says, ‘for a few seconds before the image joltingly disappeared, to give to view, at first a gap and then a new one’.³⁵⁹ Upon hearing it ring, Benjamin remembers, a melancholy mood of departure saturated each image. In those brief moments, realising that it would be impossible to exhaust the ‘glory’ of the image in one sitting alone, a resolution was made, albeit never followed up, that is, to come again the next day.³⁶⁰

The structure of interruption and the rhythm of a jolting discontinuity runs throughout Benjamin’s vehemently anti-progressivist thought on time and history, leaping across a wide variety of contexts encompassing diverse periods and media. Whether describing the baroque mourning play’s fixation of the dramatic plot to the stilled time-space of the midnight hour, the interruptions of plot and movement in Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre, the jolts and jerks of the montage technique of early filmstrips, or the manifold images of a revolutionary cessation of happening – the shooting of the clock towers, the pulling of the emergency breaks – that run throughout his famous thesis ‘On the Concept of History’, it is always a momentary halt of continuity that opens up a gap, a time-space [*Zeitraum*] and a time becoming space, suspended at the joints of a temporal flow rendered discontinuous.

masterable performativity in the context of education see ‘The University Without Condition’.

³⁵⁹ Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*, 81.

³⁶⁰ *ibid*, 82.

In the memory of the *Kaiserpanorama* as elsewhere, a rhythm of interruption and discontinuity finds itself linked to the possibility and desire for repetition to take place. As if interruption first renders repetition contemplable. The fact that it is never followed up in actuality does not prevent this virtuality from actually affecting the status of what here stands exposed and suspended in time under the blare of a ringing bell. Inexhaustible in a singular viewing that no longer happens quite simply once and for all, the interrupted and suspended temporal experience resists the linear sublation of the flow of a present. Unable to master his experience of the image in a single viewing, yet knowing of its imminent departure following the ringing of the bell, the young Benjamin seemingly does not want to surrender it to the oblivion of a continuous flow, nor the simple memory-trace of an absent present. Instead, he keeps the image in reserve by arranging with it a future rendez-vous, in a movement that is to supplant the melancholic backward looking glance of recollection with the spectral sending of a remembering ahead.

Given the incompleteness of the interrupted experience, a desire for repetition can no longer hope for the simple return of the same. As the time-space of spectatorship affected by this desire is already split, that is, impossible to master or exhaust in a single viewing, deferred and sent forth, stretched towards the possibility of a future return, its repetition to-come implies a necessary alterity. In this strangely deferred, stretched and non-localizable time-space that opens up with the interruptive ringing of a bell, a melancholy mood of departure mixes with the non-teleological hope of a performative resolution to repeat. The young Benjamin seemingly seeks to simultaneously say farewell to what has never quite arrived, whilst welcoming the deferred possibility of “its” return in a repetition that paradoxically is bound to be otherwise.

Read in this way, the childhood memory of the *Kaiserpanorama* inserts itself into a series of other texts and contexts of Benjamin’s work, which repeat otherwise the theme of a structure and attitude of

repeatability: the affirmation of a constitutive possibility of the differing return of marks, split in their origin, in other contexts to-come. For Benjamin, such a possibility never merely befalls the mark accidentally from an outside, but pertains to it structurally, affecting it beyond the traditional oppositions of possibility and realisation, the virtual and the actual. In *Benjamin's -abilities*, Samuel Weber discerns this thought of a structural possibility of alterity that affects identity in its "origin" in Benjamin's recurrent nominalization of verbs by the suffix *-ability* when formulating many of his most significant concepts. Reading several of the diverse contexts of their appearance, Weber dwells, for instance, on Benjamin's conception of the structural *impartability*, *criticisability*, *translatability*, *reproducibility* or *readability* of marks and the structural effects the '-ability' has on their identity.³⁶¹ One such context constitutes Benjamin's writings on Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. In Benjamin's reading of Brecht, a concern with the production of gestures as clearly rendered in their *citability* becomes central. Not unlike the disruptive ringing of a bell in the *Kaiserpanorama*, Epic Theatre's gestures, as Benjamin discerns, are rendered citable by an interruption that halts the forward thrust of continuous movement. Severed from the telos of the plot, the gesture stands still and momentarily exposed before an audience, signalling towards the possibility of "its" differing (re-)inscription in other contexts, whether past or to come. Virtually parting with "itself" and its present context of determination, the stilled pose of the gesture is put into motion by the structural pull of its citability. The possibility of this movement – citation comes from *citare*, "to put in motion" – links repeatability to an alterity always already inscribed in every so called "first time," affecting the gesture in the very now of its occurrence.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 4.

³⁶² The virtual spatio-temporality here discerned with recourse to Weber's reading of Benjaminian *-abilities* structurally resembles the logic of Jacques Derrida's notion of "iterability." Weber's reading of Benjamin, as his Introduction states, is in part inspired by the work of

Two Times out of Joint: Yvonne Rainer and Bertolt Brecht

In her book *Being Watched – Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*, Carrie Lambert-Beatty makes several if sparse references to Bertolt Brecht, indicating a certain echo across the centuries between two seemingly so diverse practitioners: one often associated with the modernist efforts of a new political theatre during the last throes of the Weimar Republic and beyond, the other with a budding minimalism of an increasingly interdisciplinary US Neo-Avant-garde art scene during the 1960s and the imminence of postmodern dance. Yet Lambert-Beatty relates Rainer's own expression of an awareness at re-inscribing a Brechtian reworking of the Aristotelian conception of drama, not as reference to a past moment in a linear art historical narrative, but as the unfinished business of a persisting problematic of the temporal experience of spectatorship.

Theatre is still based on – and people still go to the theatre with – the old Aristotelian notions. If not actual catharsis or purging thru fear and terror, it is a “loosing of oneself” that one is supposed to experience. One judges a theatrical event according to the degree to which one became “involved” with it. Yes I know all about Brecht & alienation [...] and how they have supposedly changed all that. But it just ain't so. Theatre is as concerned as it ever was with magic, transformations, transcendencies, if not outright ascendancies and various & sundrie [sic] forms of seduction to assure the “drawing in” of the spectator.³⁶³

Rainer's links to the experiments of neo-Brechtianism, however, go far beyond her own identification with the general aims of hindering a spectator's involvement, his or her being drawn into and along with the linear flow of events, to include some of the very devices with which

Derrida, which for him 'has always been profoundly related to Benjamin's writings' [Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 4].

³⁶³ Lambert-Beatty, 119.

Brecht sought to allow for a more relaxed and distanced viewing position. For instance, when examining the effects repetition may have on the viewer of Rainer's work, Lambert-Beatty makes the following brief recourse to the discourse of Brecht. 'Thirty years before,' she writes,

Bertolt Brecht had written of his attempts to replace the singular flow of drama that "carried away" the spectator with something more like the looping temporal experience of reading and rereading. The sequential repetitions in the work of Rainer and others at Judson are very much in this spirit, as if they thought dance viewers, like Brecht's theatre-goers, should be provided some version of "footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point." In 1965 Rainer wrote of her dance *Parts of Some Sextets* that moments of repetition made "the eye jump back and forth in time."³⁶⁴

Although Lambert-Beatty does not further pursue the suggested analogies between Brecht and Rainer, between footnotes and 'some version of "footnotes,"' on closer inspection, 'versions of "footnotes"' in both Rainer and Brecht take on very similar shapes and structures. As footnotes function in a written text, they interrupt and cut into the continuous flow of linearity. Whereas the status of a literary footnote is already uncertain, belonging both to the inside and outside of the body of a text, these 'versions of "footnotes"' inserted into the temporal unfolding of the performance intensify the experience of a split in time, that is, of being in more than one place at the same time. Leaving to one side for now the stakes of such an onto- or hauntological split in the temporal experience of 'versions of "footnotes,"' it is clear that what resembles the effect of footnotes for Rainer, according to Lambert-Beatty, is a particular use of the techniques of interruption, repetition and discontinuity. In fact, Rainer's self-proclaimed consistent engagement with the interruption of linearity qua repetition perhaps repeats, much more literally than

³⁶⁴ *ibid*, 63.

Lambert-Beatty suggests, a Brechtian concern with temporal discontinuity. As Rainer writes in her own retrospective notes on *Parts of Some Sextets*:

It was clear to me that there must not be a flowing or developmental type of progression in the action, but rather *whatever changes were to take place must be as abrupt and jagged as possible occurring at regular intervals*. So I resorted to two devices that I have used consistently since my earliest dances: *repetition and interruption*. In the context of this new piece, both factors were to produce a “chunky” continuity, *repetition making the eye jump back and forth in time [...]*.³⁶⁵

Walter Benjamin’s writings on Epic Theatre reveal striking similarities to Rainer’s discourse. Benjamin describes the essential accomplishment of Brecht’s experiments as that of rendering gestures citable. He arrives at this achievement precisely through the devices of repetition and interruption. In the first place, gestures appear as the result of interruptions. What is interrupted is theatre’s temporal flow, the end-oriented continuities of plot, action and movement, which are spliced into clearly framed – perhaps what Rainer calls ‘jagged’ – elements. The fact that temporal fluidity cannot be brought to a halt entirely necessitates the reinsertion of each framed element into the temporal flux to create a “chunky” continuity, to use Rainer’s words, or, following Benjamin, one that moves in jolts and jerks, not unlike the images of a filmstrip. At its largest point of framing, Epic Theatre is divided into several parts interrupted by regular intervals, making the clearly demarcated situations of the play clash, as Benjamin puts it, in a state of shock.³⁶⁶ Through the more minute interruptions and self-interruptions of each action and actor, the clearly framed gesture-fragment becomes

³⁶⁵ Yvonne Rainer, ‘Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called “Parts of Some Sextets.”’ *The Tulane Drama Review*. 10/2 (1965), 172 (my emphasis).

³⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, 29.

subjected to repetitions that, not unlike Rainer's use of such techniques, makes the eye jump back and forth in time. 'One and the same [gesture],' Benjamin says, 'summons Galy Gay to the wall, first to have his clothes changed, and then again to be shot. One and the same [gesture] gets him to renounce the fish and to accept the elephant'.³⁶⁷ Here, "[o]ne and the same", as Samuel Weber observes, 'is precisely what the citable gesture both situates and unhinges in an instant that does not come full circle [...]'.³⁶⁸ Such unhinging in and of the instant renders the time of its occurrence out of joint. Like the uncertain spatio-temporal status of the footnote, the gesture is always in more than one place at once and thus never fully contemporaneous with itself, never fully present to itself. Its performance has always already departed from its present context of determination by gesturing from or towards another, whether that of a previous occurrence or a possible future one to come. This in turn implies that the context of determination can never be saturated and mastered in a single viewing, as it is always already split, its time out of joint, stretched between at least more than one place and time, at the same time.

Remembering Ahead

Beyond its actual use as a compositional device in the time-structure of the performance, repetition, in both Rainer and Brecht, furthermore exceeds the spatio-temporal confines of the event itself. For instance, as Benjamin states with regards to Epic Theatre, even before repetition occurs during the performance as such, Brecht's endeavour to rid the stage of its narrative sensations always already seeks to alienate the plot from a simple self-presence by doubling a more or less

³⁶⁷ *ibid*, p.20 & Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 109.

³⁶⁸ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 109-10.

recognisable past.³⁶⁹ Before being repeated on stage, gestures largely occur already as citations for the first time. Similar strategies of citation inform the movement vocabularies of Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance, in which specific gestures more or less recognisably embody a historiographic mark, distancing the viewer from its present re-inscription.

Lambert-Beatty attends to these perhaps often neglected aspects of the work of Judson Dance in the context of a more general endeavour to wrest its analysis from any quick recourse to the discourses on liveness, immediacy, co-presence and lived experience circulating in the 1960s, as well as from later performance theories of evanescence-as-dissent. Paying close attention to the historiographic aspects of these works, her analysis of the use of repetition begins to take account of its citational elements. '[S]tillness meant quotation,' Lambert-Beatty relates. 'Poses not only arrested onstage action, but also embodied a previous, photographic stoppage [...].'³⁷⁰ Through its citational and mnemonic modes of performance, a proclivity for still poses, photo-derived and photo-like positioning – what Lambert-Beatty calls 'strategies for dancing yesterday' – Rainer's work thus avoids simply landing on either side of a dichotomy of lived experience and historiographic trace.³⁷¹ For Lambert-Beatty,

³⁶⁹ Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater? (2)', 23.

³⁷⁰ Lambert-Beatty, p.48.

³⁷¹ *ibid*, p.51. For an excellent troubling of the binary conception of the photograph and performance see Rebecca Schneider's chapter 'Still living' in *Performing Remains*. Schneider considers what she calls 'the liveness of death' or the 'livingness of passing,' that is, the photograph 'not only as record, but also as durational event – ongoing through the circulatory aspects of [...] call and response'. [Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. (London & New York: Routledge 2011), 140]. Yet beyond a concern with the living-on or survival of photographic stills in contradistinction to 'long-standing assumptions that photography offers thanatological "evidence" of a time considered, in linear temporal logic, irretrievable,' Schneider further traces an often forgotten prehistory, as she puts it, of photography located in the "living still" [*ibid*, 138 -140]: 'Clearly there are other technologies of the still that are reconstituted (reenacted) in the scene of photography by which a viewer is arrested in the arrest of the image – technologies of the live, such as tableaux vivants [...]. Are

these tendencies of the work are evidence of a wider epistemological scepticism and anxiety that can be found in many other works of the period. Driven by a questioning of available epistemologies for experiencing the live, these works, far from displaying a simple faith in the unmediated access to the event qua co-presence, proximity and participation, complicate all binary conceptions of the live and the mediated. Nowhere, however, Lambert-Beatty stresses, is ‘the *tension* between singular, embodied experience and *something else* – which is to

these not in some ways “technologies” of image capture? Reflecting on the legacy of living stills, and the relation of the pose to the scene and its frame, we might ask in what ways photography inherits (rather than invents) the still, and in that way ask in what ways photography can be considered another among a great many technologies of the live’ [ibid, 140-1]. For Schneider, both photography and performance ‘participate in the ambivalent *gesture of the time-lag*’. Following this troubling of the binaries of life and death, performance and document, with recourse to the “technology” of the ‘living still,’ Schneider further reveals an interest in the latter’s (possible) chains of repetition that is of great relevance here in the context of a conception of ‘remembering ahead.’ She links the ‘posture’ of the ‘gesture of the time-lag’ to ‘a wobbly course’ of repetition (sameness and difference) that ‘basic citationality affords’ [ibid, 143]. Without explicit recourse to Derrida or Benjamin and albeit perhaps with an emphasis on the cross-temporal moments of actual “encounter” over the haunting of future possibilities that the still affords in its citability, Schneider nevertheless clearly considers the latter’s pose as ‘call’ or ‘hail’ (her loose reference here is Althusser’s ‘reverberatory mechanics of interpellation’): ‘If the pose, or even the accident captured as snapshot, is a kind of hail cast into a future moment of its invited recognition, then can that gestic call in its stilled articulation be considered, somehow live? Or, at least, re-live? Can we think of the still not as an artifact of non-returning time, but as situated in a live moment of its encounter that it, through its articulation as gesture or hail, predicts? This is to ask: is the stilled image a call toward a future live moment when the image will be re-encountered, perhaps as an invitation to response? And if so, is it not live – taking place in time in the scene of its reception? Is it time deferred, finding its liveness in the time-lag, the temporal drag, “in your hands” at the moment of its encounter?’ The gesture of temporal drag, whether performed in-time or caught by the camera as out-of-time, Schneider suggests, allows for a ‘complicated leakage of the live (and the remain) across seemingly discrete moments’, ‘troubling the distinction between live arts and the still arts to which we have been habituated,’ and facilitating therewith what she calls the ‘inter(in)animation’ of the animate and inanimate, life and death, remaining and disappearing that is ‘ongoing by passing on’ [ibid, 140-142, 145 & 147].

say, the lived, live art experience as a problem' more evident than in the history of Judson Dance.³⁷² It is precisely here, then – but where, precisely? – in the *tension* resulting from a stretching *between* the singularity of an 'embodied' experience and 'something else,' or indeed somewhere and sometime else, some other place and time in (instead of) the first, that the structures of citation and citability begin to undermine mastery over a simple present. Techniques and devices such as stilling, quotation and repetition highlight the persistence of a past that signals in the time of the present, haunted by its more or less uncanny returns. Yet beyond such doublings of times and places, the spectrality of this structural scenario implicates at least another place and time. For in their clearly framed stillness, citational gestures find themselves always already affected by their own citability. Adhering thus to a spectral logic of inheritance turned toward the future no less than the past, citational gestures are always already held in virtual suspense and tension, stretched, not only towards the previous context of the repeated mark, but the possibility of its future repetition in another context to come.

In Benjamin's analysis of Epic Theatre, the relationship of the performance to its historiographic source takes on precisely such an emphasis. Benjamin calls gestures the prepared raw material of Epic Theatre that the latter puts to use. Each gesture, Benjamin insists, must be more or less compatible with the contemporary field of gestural possibilities. If historical, gestures must belong to a vocabulary that it is possible for contemporary men to execute. In other words, imitated gestures must themselves be imitable. Imitated gestures are worthless, Benjamin says, unless it is precisely their gestural process of imitation that is at issue.³⁷³ These gestures are never mere repetitions, but reckon with and expose their own repeatability. Rather than re-presenting, they repeat, in Kierkegaard's sense of the word, by 'remembering ahead'. For, as Kierkegaard suggests, '[r]epetition and remembrance are one and the

³⁷² Lambert-Beatty, 36 (my emphasis).

³⁷³ Benjamin, 'Studien zur Theorie des epischen Theaters', *Versuche über Brecht*, 31-33. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 31.

same movement but in opposed directions, for that which is remembered has been: it is repetition in reverse; whereas repetition in the proper sense is remembering ahead'.³⁷⁴

Towards an Attitude of Rehearsal

Without wanting to reduce the importance of an analysis of specific citational performance practices in Judson Dance or more contemporary performance practices in its wake – and here I am particularly thinking of Chicago based performance companies Goat Island (1988 – 2009) and Every house has a door – I would like to suggest that perhaps all performance structurally rests on the hauntological split of a remembering ahead. Particularly, that is, when performance, in whatever way, no longer seeks to fully separate itself as end product, accomplishment or realisation from its process of assemblage, that is, its rehearsal. For, as Samuel Weber points out in recalling the Kierkegaardian definition of repetition, the theatrical repetition implied by the word rehearsal involves something far more paradoxical than merely recalling the past.

Repetition – which in turn implies a certain memory just as memory for its part entails a movement of repetition – is still not simply the more or less symmetrical inversion of memory. For “remembering ahead”, as Kierkegaard writes, involves something far more paradoxical than merely recalling the past. As potentiality and possibility of the future, remembering “ahead” opens the way to the return of what has never been present as such and which therefore, in a certain sense, remains ever yet to

³⁷⁴ Samuel Weber, ‘Upping the Ante: Deconstruction as Parodic Practice’ in *Deconstruction is/in America*. ed. by Anselm Haverkamp, 60-77. (New York: New York University Press 1995), 63.

come. It should be noted that the French word, *repetition*, maintains this simultaneous reference to the past and to the future – as does the English word, *rehearsal*. To *rehearse* a play, for instance, entails more than the mere reproduction in the present of something that is past, once and for all.³⁷⁵

In Benjamin's analysis of Epic theatre, the repeatability of citable gestures similarly defies a conception of repetition as mere recollection. Here as elsewhere, when concerned with questions of temporality and historicity, Benjamin insists on the inscribed possibility of future alterities in every mark. The repeatability of a stilled and clearly framed instant, a spatialised time-fragment, cut or blasted out of the continuum, begins to signal towards such virtual alterities, splitting the mark in its "identity" from the start, not dependent on its actual repetition. In the suspended gap that opens qua interruption, time unhinges and finds itself doubly out of joint. Not only consisting of the spectral return of a past signalling in the present, but reckoning with the virtual spectrality of the present "itself," singularly extended. A time-fragment that 'only "is" in its possibility of becoming other, of being transported elsewhere'.³⁷⁶

The Trembling of the Contours

Everything here seemingly revolves around the various tensions that spring from a series of stretching exercises. Exercises, for instance, as those by which Benjamin figures Brecht's attitude towards the plot, to which 'his theatre relates [...] the way a ballet teacher to a pupil,' as he puts it, 'his primary task [...] to loosen up her articulations to the limit of

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 103.

the possible'.³⁷⁷ Everything revolves around issues of spacing and stretching to the point of unhinging the joints of bodies and their movement through time and space. The actor of Epic Theatre, Benjamin insists, must be able to block out his gesticulations as a typesetter his words.³⁷⁸ Such blocking, on the level of the scene, produced by the insistent interruptions of the plot, helps to reveal what Benjamin calls a *Zustand*, the fixed state, stance or condition marked by the relational syllable of a towards [zu-], literally, a standing-towards. *Zustände* are stilled image-scenes or frozen tableaux marked by the inner split of a spatio-temporal instant gesturing towards some other place and time. Cut off from the continuum of linearity, the *Zustand* no longer awaits its future resolution in the drama, the more or less seamless passing of a plot towards its final conclusion, but finds itself momentarily interrupted and suspended, as if by the blare of a ringing bell, before joltingly disappearing, not unlike the images of the *Kaiserpanorama*, 'to give to view, at first a gap and then a new one'.³⁷⁹ Fixed yet stretched between

³⁷⁷ Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater? (2)', 23.

³⁷⁸ *ibid*, 27.

³⁷⁹ Benjamin, *Einbahnstraße*, 81. In the Aristotelian conception of drama, to be sure, the plot moves far from simply seamlessly towards its conclusion. Instead, it finds itself interrupted at a single point by a sudden turn of events: *peripeteia*. A "reversal" that nevertheless has its key function in preparing the way for the recognition of the underlying unity of the plot. In this regard, as Samuel Weber has pointed out, Brecht and Benjamin repeat otherwise the inheritance of an Aristotelian tradition. Here, the dialectic tension of a sudden 'reversal' and the power of the negative no longer sublate into a final synthesis, but find themselves suspended at a standstill. The drama is no longer interrupted at a single point or joint but virtually at all of them. Weber relates this dialectic tension once again back to the motif of a certain stretching: "The "stretching exercises" of the ballet pupil thus become a model for the stretching of dramatic action in Epic theatre; such stretching, Benjamin adds, is intended to reveal the articulations that structure what is apparently a unified plot. It thereby reveals a *tension* very different from the conflict of tragedy. Unlike the latter, which derives from uncertainty about origins and "outcomes," that of epic theatre concerns "events in the singular." It is directed less at "ends" than at the middle," at the members, but in their singularity and not simply as parts of an organic whole' [Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 103].

itself and the possibility of returning otherwise, the *Zustand* exposes itself as

[...] a configuration that is not simply stable or self-contained but above all *relational*, determined by the *tension* of its *ex-tension*, by its relation to that which it has interrupted and from which it has separated itself. The result is a highly unstable state of affairs marked by what Benjamin, in a felicitous formulation, describes as the “trembling of its contours” (*das Zittern ihrer Umrisse*).³⁸⁰

The Secret Signal of the To-Come

To the organic whole of bodies and the teleological flow of plots, Benjamin, Brecht and Rainer oppose the singularity of the spatio-temporal fragment, clearly demarcated in its contours, but trembling. This trembling time-space [*Zeitraum*] is more or less haunted by both “its” past and future, its pre- and afterlife. The latter signals through it, makes itself known as unknowable alterity to come. Benjamin furthermore hints at such hauntings of an unknowable future in the present by employing another felicitous formulation that appears in a related theatrical context. In his ‘Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre,’ he links the repetitive mode of theatrical representation to the genius of variation at play in the gesture of the child, opposing therewith the pseudo-revolutionary demeanour of a propaganda of ideas with the truly revolutionary effect of what he calls, emphatically and somewhat mysteriously, ‘the secret signal of the to-come [*des Kommenden*] that speaks from the gesture of the child’.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 103-4.

³⁸¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters’, 769.

In Benjamin's conception of proletarian children's theatre, revolutionary, transformative potential is not to be found on the side of ideologemes – here, the ideas and contents of *what* is being presented on the stage, understood or consumed by performer and spectator alike – but rather in the modes and manners of the *how* of re-presenting: a presentation irreducible to a once and for all determinable content. For Benjamin, the gesture of the child must be in excess of its relative determinability as sign. Nevertheless, in its immediate inaccessibility as secret, in its withdrawal from or supersession of present sense and tense, its secret nevertheless signals, makes itself known as secret – not as the simple withholding of knowledge, but as the sharing of a certain kind of not-knowing – non-self-present, un-knowable, gesturing beyond itself towards the non-appropriable other of the to-come [*das Kommende*].

Earlier in the text, Benjamin insists that ideology as such, that is, in the context of a proletarian children's theatre, class-consciousness, is indeed of utmost importance to any proletarian education in general, yet runs the risk of only reaching the child as an empty phrase [*Phrase*]. To avoid such hollow arrivals, he suggests, one must reject the type of schooling that seeks to educate *towards* an idea. Instead of communicating readymade knowledge *of* a particular field, education, at least for children, Benjamin insists, must take place *within* a particular subject area of knowledge. Here, knowledge, ideas, ideologemes are no longer simply communicated from transmitter to receiver, for it is precisely the ideality of the content that would guarantee such effective repetitions as the instrumental transmission of a transportable content that is put into question. Instead, in Benjamin's model of education, the contents of a specific subject area are given up for and over to a repetition that no longer comes full circle. Here, repetition becomes subjected to what Benjamin calls the child's 'genius of variation'. Benjamin thus emphasises the mode of the repetition itself over the identity of a repeatable content. The latter becomes the contextual playground for variations to take place *within* or *upon*. The uncertain

locus for such non-complete taking place turns out to be the theatre, a place that cannot so easily be identified and secured once and for all.

When it comes to the education of the child, Benjamin furthermore insists, it is necessary that its whole life be encompassed. However, the genius of variation must still and somewhat paradoxically apply itself within or upon a circumscribed or framed [*begrenzt*] field or area. To overcome this impasse, the theatre, for Benjamin, turns out to be the dialectically destined place for the education of children, ‘as [...] the whole life in all its non-predictable fullness only appears as a framed [*gerahmt*] field in,’ or more ambiguously in the German, ‘upon [*auf*] the theatre’.³⁸² The theatre frames life and by doing so not simply re-presents it once and for all but renders it citable. It makes possible an education *within* life, a life framed and breached, detachable from “itself,” which has become rehearsable. As rehearsable life, theatre ‘calls upon the strongest force of the future in children’.³⁸³ The exact place or taking place of this calling becomes however difficult to locate. Benjamin insists that it cannot be found simply in the performance itself, at least not as the latter is often conceived, that is, as final end product. In Benjamin’s ideal conception of proletarian children’s theatre, the latter merely materializes, as he says, almost incidentally as a prank [*Schabernack*] of the children, only briefly interrupting their un-ending studies.³⁸⁴

Benjamin clearly favours an unfinished, improvisational aspect of the final performance over the ‘well-rounded achievement’ that has been, as he dramatically puts it, ‘tortured out of the children’.³⁸⁵ ‘Performance or Theatre,’ he tentatively suggests – displaying an uncertainty as to what precise topos or event he is in fact referring to – must form the synthesis of more or less improvised gestures that stand in a space of non-accidental singularity [*Einmaligkeit*]. Not the accomplishments of art [*Kunstleistungen*] that may fill the cupboards and memories of parents with souvenirs, not the “eternity” of products, but the “instant”

³⁸² *ibid*, 764.

³⁸³ *ibid*, 764-5.

³⁸⁴ *ibid*, 765.

³⁸⁵ *ibid*, 767.

[“*Augenblick*”] of the gesture is what constitutes the accomplishment of the child. Theatre, as a transitory art, says Benjamin, is the art form of the child. A transitoriness [*Vergänglichkeit*], however, of a moment of singularity – the instant of variation – that paradoxically depends on a structure of repeatability. The transitory moment of a singular gesture is not here linked simply to the latter’s absolute disappearance within the ephemeral temporal flux, but depends on its non-present remaining. As the gestures of Epic Theatre, as well as those of Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance, their momentary suspension as clearly framed time-fragments cut from the temporal flux of a linear continuum qua interruption, is always already affected by its structural relation to at least the possibility of repetition at some other place and time. As an instant of repetition that neither comes full circle nor strictly happens once and for all, the gesture of the child too remains open to a space of alterity qua repeatability. In the theatre more generally, such a space of alterity, as Samuel Weber describes it in a different context,

is always *provisionally* embodied in and, even more, *exposed* as an “audience” – singular noun for an irreducibly heteroclitite stand-in. The “audience” stands in for the others, those who were and those who will be – and perhaps even more for those who will never come to be.³⁸⁶

Echoing a concern also at work in Benjamin’s program for a proletarian children’s theatre pitched against its bourgeois variant’s emphasis on consumable end products and reified memorabilia, Weber continues:

Of course it is in the nature of our socio-economic system [...] to do everything possible to appropriate and domesticate such “standing-in” so that it seeks to fulfil itself in and as actual consumption.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

³⁸⁷ *ibid.*

Of Absent Masters

The facilitator of proletarian children's theatre, Benjamin says, retreats most fully before the moment of the performance, knowing that '[n]o pedagogical intelligence can predict how children combine with thousands of surprising variations the taught gestures [*Gebärden*] into a theatrical totality'.³⁸⁸ A not dissimilar retreat in facilitation seems to inform the formative pedagogical experiences of Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance. Describing the teaching style of John Cage student Robert Dunne's now notorious class in choreography taught at the Merce Cunningham studio in the fall of 1960, Steve Paxton admiringly relates:

Dunn himself managed to do something that I've admired ever since. He taught us ideas almost by neglecting us, by mentioning things but tending to disappear at the same time, leaving with a smile.³⁸⁹

Here, ideas are taught not to arrive in identical repetitions, but as the generative constraints within which a multitude of variations can be unleashed. In Benjamin's program for a proletarian children's theatre, following the process of its assemblage, the performance becomes precisely such an occasion for the radical unleashing of play. It makes sovereign the child's genius of variation, as he puts it, out of which gestures the secret signal of the to-come [*des Kommenden*].

Benjamin does not further explore this emphatic expression, which, like the secret itself, seems to signal only in its retreat, perhaps with a smile. On the nature of the signal, however, he says that it emanates from a world in which the child lives and rules as dictator.³⁹⁰ In

³⁸⁸ Benjamin, 'Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters', 767.

³⁸⁹ Banes, 10.

³⁹⁰ Benjamin, 'Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters', 766.

the absence of masters and mastery, the child is here given free reign in the repetitive practice of what elsewhere Benjamin describes as ‘citation as the sovereign usurpation of the encountered’.³⁹¹ Theatrical play unleashes phantasy and brings it to bear on the repetitions of an inheritance. Here, the child’s dictatorial reign perhaps resembles another Benjaminian figure of a related theatrical context. In his elaborate study of the German baroque Mourning Play [*Trauerspiel*], Benjamin discerns the role of the ‘plotter,’ a counter-figure to the tyrant’s despotic efforts at self-instituting sovereignty, of whom Samuel Weber says that he

[...] manipulates links and connections simply for the pleasure of doing so, not in the hope of accomplishing anything, least of all leaving behind a great work. [...Here], “power” changes its meaning: it is no longer transitive, the power to do or accomplish anything, but rather a mode of being that arranges and combines, manifesting itself in *virtuosity* rather than control.³⁹²

Like the instant of the gesture of the child, like the child’s genius of variation, virtuosity without control – a movement of arranging and combining that always comes up short – finds itself suspended in an experimental attitude, a mode of being that accomplishes nothing other than its own accomplishing.

Rainer, of course, in her famous No-manifesto, says no to virtuosity. She says so, and seemingly retreats with a smile, leaving generations of dance and theatre students in her wake to grapple with a positive response to her negative directive. Perhaps this structural retreat further invites us to re- and transvalue the concept of virtuosity itself, repeating it otherwise, no longer as the accomplished skill of trained bodies in traditional works of art, but as an experimental attitude of being-in-rehearsal, that is, a virtuosity of trembling.

³⁹¹ Manfred Voigts, ‘Zitat’ in Opitz & Wizisla ed. *Benjamin’s Begriffe*, 826-850. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2000), 830.

³⁹² Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 178 (my emphasis).

Benjamin's reading of Brecht discerns similar modes of positioning oneself insecurely in experimental attitudes of non-mastery. Modes of being committed to a certain practice or exercise – *Übung* – a relative of the rehearsal that is able to spill out of the institutions of theatre into an everyday life framed. Situating what Brecht calls attitude [*Haltung*] within a discourse on a performative political praxis, Benjamin opposes it to the constative convictions of knowledge and understanding.

"Not what one is convinced of is of importance. Of importance is what one's convictions make of oneself." This What Brecht calls: attitude [*Haltung*]. It is new. What is newest about it is that it can be learned.³⁹³

Brecht facilitates such a process of learning through his attempt [*Versuch*] to render gestures citable. To do so, he says, demands practice [*Übung*]. A practice, it seems, like that of the rehearsal, which is no longer fully subservient to an end, a final product or an accomplishment that accomplishes something other than its own accomplishing. Citation is no longer the end of citability, actuality no longer the goal of virtual possibility, for nothing ever gets accomplished here once and for all. The German word *Haltung* [attitude] resonates with the hold of *Halt*, the stoppage of *Anhaltung* and the stilled bodily pose of a particular way of holding oneself that interrupts the flow of the present as a stilled gesture severed from the telos of continuums of movement, plot and history. Standing thus exposed, attitude as gesture reckons with its own alterity qua repeatability. A strategy, then, not merely of dancing yesterday, as Lambert-Beatty so fittingly describes the use of citation in Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson Dance, but of dancing what is to-come [*das Kommende*] by holding on to the possibility of dancing yesterday and today otherwise. '[...T]he place of this future,' however, as Weber

³⁹³ Benjamin, 'Aus dem Brecht-Kommentar', *Versuche Über Brecht*. 34-38. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1966), 35.

reminds us, 'which cannot be reduced to a present that has yet to arrive, is, paradoxically, nowhere if not *now*'.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 105.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Virtuosity of Trembling: The Body and The Archive in Goat Island and Every house has a door

[...] And the “interiority” of a theatre is very different from that of a private home or a domestic house (a fact that worried Plato no end). In a theatre, on a stage, as part of a scene, subjects are no longer authentic, no longer at home, no longer fully in control. Inside and outside are no longer simply binary opposites. The space of the theatrical scene, which is not necessarily that of traditional drama, is no longer simply an interior space, since it is always directed outward, away, toward others. As already mentioned, theatricality can even be defined as *representation for others*. In this case, however, dramatic conflict and plot are not its constitutive ingredients.³⁹⁵

There is no house or interior without a door or windows.³⁹⁶

Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task. It remains before us.³⁹⁷

[...] but finally it will be up to you now, it will also be up to the others to decide this. The signatories are also the addressees. We don't know them, neither you nor I.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 246-7.

³⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby. (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 61.

³⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. trans. Peggy Kamuf. (London & New York: Routledge 2006), 54.

No To Virtuosity: An Amateur's Rehearsal of the Past as the Future to Come

Several possible trajectories of inheritance can be traced between the performance works of the contemporary Chicago based performance company Every house has a door (previously Goat Island) and the 1960s minimalist experiments of Judson Dance.³⁹⁹ For instance, as the companies' director Lin Hixon relates with regard to Goat Island, one such discernible influence concerns 'a certain respect for pedestrian movement,' as well as 'the use of *found movement* and *task-like activity*'.⁴⁰⁰ Here, the re-affirmation of a pedestrian movement style seemingly follows Rainer's call for a rejection of virtuosity in her famous 1965 "No Manifesto." Hixon's own example of 'Rainer pushing a vacuum cleaner as dance,' however, seems far removed, not so much from the modality of 'doing' but the type of found movement re-done or rehearsed by the performer's of Goat Island and Every house has a door. Instead of therefore identifying the modality of a certain pedestrianism with the quality of the found movement vocabulary of the everyday, one is perhaps better served to attend to the 'pedestrian,' that is, "non-skilled" or amateur *quality and attitude* of the task-like retracing of all manner of

³⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The University Without Condition', 237.

³⁹⁹ The Chicago based performance company Every house has a door was formed in 2008 by Lin Hixon and Matthew Goulish to create project-specific collaborative performances with invited guests. Hixon and Goulish had previously collaborated for twenty years as the founding members of the performance company Goat Island. Although the work of both companies is more or less distinctive in style, there is also much continuity between them. Before focusing more specifically on Every house has a door's 2013 performance *Testimonium* in the final part of the chapter, I will move freely between examples of and commentaries on performance works by both companies.

⁴⁰⁰ Stephen Bottoms & Matthew Goulish ed. *Small Acts Of Repair. Performance, Ecology and Goat Island*. (London & New York: Routledge 2007), 70. (My emphasis).

movements, 'found' in what are predominantly a variety of archival source materials.⁴⁰¹

The above evocation of a certain amateurism in the context of a 'pedestrian' re-enactment of 'found movement' is thus applicable both with regards to the quality of the "final" (re-)presentation, as well as the modality or technique of the process of its acquisition. This 'lover of' – for instance, contemporary dance – sees no limit to his or her desire to 'participate' by mimetically interiorizing and transforming the received (i.e. the found movement) into the return of a performed exteriorization. If the latter formulation here loosely recalls certain aspects of the work and idiom of Bernard Stiegler, it is to briefly evoke the latter's account of what I will call the cunning of the amateur as it resonates with the technique of (movement) appropriation demonstratively at work in *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*. For Stiegler, the figure of the amateur has an important role to play in resisting what he identifies as a general loss of participation that stems from a process of increased proletarianisation, that is, in brief, the loss of memory and know-how induced by the machinic grammatisation of the gestures of production and the radical separation of producers and consumers in hyperindustrial society. This strict separation is both the cause for an

⁴⁰¹ To be sure, although movement is at times literally found – for instance in Martin Figura's flat in Berlin, where the encounter with a documentary video of Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Tanztheater sparks the citational reinscription of a 45 second solo by Dominique Mercy from the performance *Die Fenster Putzer* – it is not always found as such. Instead, movement often results from a process of bodily translation and response to all manner of source materials. At its most extreme, the company follows a strategy of self-set tasks of (impossible) embodiments, for instance in 'the attempt to build the Hagia Sophia out of bodies, gestures and dance; an attempt,' as Jane Blocker fittingly puts it by emphasising the fragility of the endeavour, 'that the least giggle will destroy' [see Jane Blocker, 'The Lastmaker', *Parallax*, (2013) 19:3, 11]. A similar fragility of enactment also informs Goulish's attempt to resemble, if only for 45 seconds, Dominique Mercy - 'the male dancer [from *Die Fenster Putzer*] whom I felt I least resembled' [see, Matthew Goulish, 'Memory is this', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, (2000) 5:3. Accessed May 2016 <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprs20>].

initial disappearance of an amateur that finds himself increasingly reduced to the status of a mere consumer, as well as for his or her potential return by a cunning participation. The return of the amateur in hyperindustrial society could thus be said to figure both the symptom of a loss of participation *and* the desire for its coming recovery. On the one hand he is not a 'professional' producer, lacks a certain skill set or know-how (for instance, in Stiegler's privileged example, the ability to read or play music), and finds himself marginalized with regards to a position [*Stellung*, also: status or employment], that is, a public forum for his *Stellungnahme* [response]. Nevertheless resistant to a reduction to the status of a mere consumer that is unable to return the received (i.e. listening to music without knowing how to make it), the amateur seeks to rework the apparatus of production in order to participate in spite of a lack of classical know-how. In doing so, he begins to figure the necessary cunning for the coming of a renewed and increased interrelation between listening and creating, receiving and returning, perceiving and producing, consuming and participating beyond the virtuosity of specialist knowledge. For the amateur's cunning lies precisely in his or her ability of transforming a position of passive consumption into a reactive participation. Following a schema that perhaps resembles Derrida's account of 'Echo's ruse', the amateur becomes able to speak of and for himself under the tight constraint of having to follow the other. If Derrida's evocation of Echo's ruse, as Pleshette DeArmitt suggests, indeed constitutes a powerful interpretation of a seeming powerless figure, it would perhaps not be unwarranted to recast the figure of Echo, deprived of initiative by divine prohibition, in the role of a proletarian *avant la lettre*, who's resisting power resides in acting out an insatiable desire for production (and individuation) by the cunning of the amateur: she who seeks to produce (and thereby participate) by abiding to an inherited law otherwise.⁴⁰² In any case, for Stiegler, the possibility of an increased interrelation between receiving and returning, consuming and

⁴⁰² I will return to the figure of Echo in the context of Derrida's conception of exappropriation in more detail below.

producing, does not rest on a return to a more primitive stage of grammatization but the very technologies (i.e. analog and digital forms of reproduction) that have expropriated the producer of his knowledge of production in the first place. In other words, it is of the order of a *refunctioning* of their use. For instance, one of Stiegler's preferred anecdotal examples for an early use of 'symbolic repetitive machines' that might pave the way for 'a new epoch of repetition which is productive of difference' is Charlie Parker's invention of be-bop through 'listening to Lester Young's refrains on the phonograph (which he slowed so he could break down what the saxophonist was playing - [...])'.⁴⁰³ The description of this scene of an appropriative use of a technological reproducibility here begins to resonate with a similar method of appropriation that informs Goat Island performer Matthew Goulish's attempt to "interiorize" a particularly difficult movement sequence from Pina Bausch's performance *Die Fensterputzer*.⁴⁰⁴ Both Parker's and Goulish's techniques of learning decisively link a desire for appropriation (that is, of returning the received or consumed, of rejecting a reduction to the status of mere consumer) to the possibility of the interruption of the flow of temporal objects that a particular use of a (here, analogue) reproduction technology allows for. Having discovered a recording of

⁴⁰³ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery. Volume 2: The catastrophe of the sensible*. trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity Press 2015), 15 & 19.

⁴⁰⁴ Given music and dance's different relation to the history of grammatization and proletarianisation, the resonance between the respective scenes of appropriation in the context of Stiegler's wider context of analysis perhaps only goes so far. Choreo-graphy, although more or less dependent on external memory supports in the form of scores is unable to raise the latter to a level of standardization that would allow it to be read by anyone who has acquired a readily available know-how. Remaining to large degrees idiosyncratic, the dance score does not yield to the standardized skill of an acquired technique of reading. Professional (contemporary) dancers, albeit trained in a loose form of "repertoire" of possible movement, thus encounter similar problems to the amateur when faced with the task of movement acquisition qua repetition. What is of interest here is not primarily the more or less non-skilled performer's appropriation and "pedestrian" re-enactment of recordings of skilled movement, but more generally the model quality of a participatory desire to respond qua transforming citation to all manner of archival source materials.

Pina Bausch's *Die Fenster Putzer* as part of a documentary on the choreographer and the Wuppertaler Tanztheater, Goulish sets out to follow the task of a 'choreographic appropriation' by attempting to learn a 45 second solo dance by Dominique Mercier, 'the dancer that I least resembled'. During the ensuing struggle at mimetic interiorization, he finds himself compelled to watch a small extract of the video about twenty times, pausing it, rewinding it, playing it repeatedly until he is able 'to commit to memory a relatively accurate imitation of four sequential beats of the solo – about three seconds in length'.⁴⁰⁵ In this scene of a mimetic appropriation by the amateur, response-ability and participation increases relative to the slowing, stilling, interrupting and spacing of the temporal flow of the transmitted material. As such, as will become increasingly apparent, it also begins to anticipate the model *Haltung* of the interruptive appeal to response-ability that informs the compositional structure of the performances of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*. The latter, by demonstratively exposing "its" own dependence on counter-signatories through the repeated interruption of its flow, calls for the participatory coming of future appropriations. In the context of Stiegler's wider political concerns, the urgency of a call to resist proletarianisation in the face of the culture industries – what he elsewhere also designates as the 'memory industries,' and everything that is here put forward in relation to an attitude of appropriation of 'found movement' must be read in the larger context of an appropriative attitude towards an archival inheritance – in large parts seeks to respond to the danger of a loss of participation that springs from the coincidence of the flow of its products (i.e. cinema, music, TV) with that of the consciousness experiencing them. Particularly apt at harnessing the attention of viewers, the temporal objects of cultural industries become privileged instruments of control societies that seek to 'captur[e] the attention of souls so as to control the behaviour of bodies, with the intention of getting them to consume goods and services'.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Matthew Goulish, 'Memory is this', 8.

⁴⁰⁶ Stiegler, *Symbolic Mysery*, 9 & 12.

Participation, on the other hand, as a form of appropriative perception in which perceiving and producing inextricably entangle, rests on the interruption and spatialization of the flow of consciousness and its captured attention by retentional forms that allow for the possibility of repetition as the production of difference (*différance*). If the performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door, as we will see, finds itself intimately related to strategies of ‘repair,’ ‘response’ and compositional ‘interruption,’ such strategies might here be read as functions of its model character of a *resistance* to the stupefying flows of information of what Stiegler calls the control society. In other words, it presents itself as the model of an attitude [*Haltung*] of the amateur who overcomes his proletarianisation by the cunning and high spirits of a participatory desire. Here, a “pedestrian” quality of enactment, as we will see, which doubles up as a certain restraint of virtuosity and of performance – becoming what Goulish designates as ‘non-performance’ – is nothing but the *Haltung* of a demonstrative appeal to a coming participation in its structural rework-ability.

What is at stake, therefore, is a “pedestrianism” of non-virtuosity that relates to the mode of enacting rather than, as well as often in contrast to, the “found movement” that is being enacted.⁴⁰⁷ For Hixon, what is furthermore of interest in Rainer’s use of ‘found movement and task-like activity,’ is the concomitant objective of “removing the body from the gaze by returning it to an activity, to the condition of *always doing something*”.⁴⁰⁸ Put differently, lacking in virtuosity, the pedestrian, task-bound body refuses to turn itself into a spectacle that otherwise might direct the gaze away from the underlying material substrate of the source from which emits the call or task of re-inscription, as well as from the very labour of the (re-)enactment. A similar, more or less

⁴⁰⁷ Pedestrianism here relates to the automatic, non-expressive and task-like quality of the ‘doing.’ It does not however imply the absence of the physical effort of labour. To the contrary, if the spectacle seeks to hide the labour of its production precisely behind effortless virtuosity, here, given a lack of virtuosity thus construed, the hard labour of performance is all the more exposed for it.

⁴⁰⁸ Bottoms & Goulish ed., 40.

“pedestrian” style of (re-)enactment of archival source materials was of course already at work in Rainer as well as others at Judson Dance. Rainer’s frequent employment of stilled gestures as quotations of more or less recognizable mnemonic traces, as we saw, demonstratively entangled the live performing body in a dance with its historiographical source. Yet the exposed interrelation of the archive and the body – an exposition that turns inside-out the outside on the inside – is much more overtly at work as the predominant if not sole modality of performance in the work of Goat Island and *Every house has a door*. For the latter, history and its archival remaining are the prime ‘subject’ and material of the performative enactment. ‘What draws me repeatedly to the work of Goat Island,’ Jane Blocker relates, ‘is the group’s abiding interest in history, in the task of historicising by performing and referencing, the task of ‘self-conscious removal from the present so as to try to stand in the place of the past’.⁴⁰⁹ To be clear, these works never constitute concrete forms of historical re-enactment as they have come to be understood as both forms of popular past-times and current trends in a variety of aesthetic practices.⁴¹⁰ Whereas the latter usually revolve around the restaging of specific (art) historical events – whether a particular battle or live art performance – the work of Goat Island and *Every house has a door* assembles a wide array of more or less historiographic source materials spanning different times and places in

⁴⁰⁹ Blocker, 20.

⁴¹⁰ Here I am thinking both of contemporary art practices interested in historical reenactments as well as performance art’s interest in the reenactment of precedent performances. Whereas the former perhaps finds its most famous example in Jeremy Deller’s *The Battle of Orgreave*, the latter is most overtly at work in recent re-enactment practices of Marina Abramovic. *Every house has a door*’s performance *9 Beginnings Bristol/Chicago*, which restages the beginnings of nine historical performances by nine different artists or companies found in two respective performance archives, certainly falls within the broader remit of performance art’s engagements with its own archive. However, here the concern is never with exact repetition but rather with response. The emphasis on nine different beginnings that are ‘knitted into one’ already implies a process of transformative citation, which is further at work in the selected details of the reenactment of each single one (<http://everyhousehasaddoor.org/projects/9-beginnings>).

fragile compositions that carefully avoid the subsumption of its parts to the synthesizing logics of narrative or transcendent commentary. Due to the fragmented, discontinuous nature of the compositional assemblage, as well as the more or less overtly “unfaithful” translation rather than exact repetitions of underlying fragments of source materials – often resulting in a physical struggle that “fails” before the tasks of embodiments that tend toward the (physically) impossible – theirs is never a concern with the more or less exact (if equally failing) reconstruction of historical events. Instead, what is at stake is a selective weave of archival material in time and space in a manner that Goulish compares to the movement of an essay that ‘traces the journey of discovery that the mind makes through a subject’.⁴¹¹ The disjointed spatio-temporality of a live event that retraces an essay like path through its discovered material is complicated further by the long duration of the period of the latter’s assemblage. The process of path-forging that will allow for its performative retracing, which could be said to resemble a technique of ‘writing’ that Stiegler describes as the ‘[organisation] of thought by consigning it outside in the form of traces, that is, symbols, whereby thought can reflect on itself, *actually* constituting itself, making itself repeatable and transmissible,’ takes place over a period of up to two years long.⁴¹² Beyond the temporal dehiscence of an again-time of cited past and present re-citation (as well as, as it will be increasingly our theme here, future citability), the durational aspect of a path-forging (thought-)process qua repeatable marks has caused the latter to swell under the accumulated difference of their repeated return at different times and places during the process of their assemblage. Hixon relates the dizzying effect of the prolonged accumulation of material through a

⁴¹¹ Matthew Goulish ‘First, Second, Third’ *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, (2010) 15:2, 35. Accessed 11 April 2014 <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprs20>

⁴¹² Bernard Stiegler, ‘Anamnesis and Hypomnesis. Plato as the first thinker of proletarianisation’, <http://arsindustrialis.org/anamnesis-and-hypomnesis/> Accessed online May 2014.

series of directives, responses and counter-responses that make up the company's process as follows:

Our process could be described as a series of directives and responses. We curve forward, like whirling dervishes calling back and forth. I produce a directive. The members of the group present responses to the directive – acts in return. In response to the responses, I produce more directives, combine material into sequences, submit my own performative material, or do some combination of these. The performers, in turn, may present new material in response to the new directives, the old directives, the sequences, or other responses, which serve then, a secondary function, as indirect directives.⁴¹³

As a consequence, the organisation of thought finds itself challenged by the duration of its process. 'Now the revived activity of Mark, *retrieved from the long distance of stored time*,' Hixon relates,

sits next to the lecture activity of Bryan in the same performance space and the same performance time. Distance continues to separate the two, their origins coming from different lands and different times. Their divided-two-ness united seems contrary and disruptive. I cannot absorb them together. They delay their meaning. I will need to travel longer with this two-ness to discover in the performance, the logic that holds them together.⁴¹⁴

The divided two-ness of the spatial proximity of a temporal distance here brings to mind the spatio-temporal juxtapositions of *Häufung* in Walter Benjamin's description of the baroque *Trauerspiel*, that is, the piling up of previously temporal data into the 'stacked terraces' of spatial

⁴¹³ Lin Hixon in 'When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy: Reflections on the Process', *Frakcija Performing Arts Magazine*, No. 32 (Summer), no pagination.

⁴¹⁴ Hixon, *Frakcija* (my emphasis).

inauthenticity. However, the movement of ‘piling up’ here not only concerns spatial (synchronic) juxtaposition of previously temporal (diachronic) data, but a layering of other times and places within a single time. In this scenario, performed gestures begin to swell under the intruding echoes of a whole series of previous inscriptions. The aspect of such a swelling is reflected in and modelled by Goat Island’s interest in Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia, which serves as an impossible ‘score’ for a prolonged movement sequence and appears as a scaled model in the company’s final performance *The Lastmaker*. As Jane Blocker has pointed out, the former mosque, former church and current museum ‘functions [...] as a chronotope in Bakhtin’s sense: a structure that occupies different historical periods and culturally charged spaces simultaneously (mosque, church, museum). It is a spatio-temporal amalgam’.⁴¹⁵ Like the chronotope, Goat Island’s performances similarly constitute spatio-temporal amalgams in which difference not only appears in juxtaposition but also within singular gestures, haunted, not only by the again-time of re-enactment, but a whole series of layered previous inscriptions, more or less revealing a general historicity of the re-inscribed mark. ‘These three individuals,’ the company writes with regards to Simone Weil, Lillian Gish and Paul Celan, ‘a philosopher, an actress, a poet – appear in various forms enacted and *overlaid like transparencies atop one another* in our new performance *When Will the September Roses Bloom?*’.⁴¹⁶ The haunted bodies of Goat Island’s performers might thus be inhabited by a multiplicity of other times at a single time. A gathering and more or less transparent layering of different moments of time in the same time that in part springs, as I have tried to show here, from the prolonged duration of the performance’s process of assemblage during which repeatable marks continue to return otherwise, becoming saturated with traces of their previous inscriptions.

Whether by assembling a multiplicity of diverse sources through temporal montage, spatial juxtaposition or transparent layering, these

⁴¹⁵ Blocker, 8-9.

⁴¹⁶ *Frakcija* (my emphasis).

performances' engagements with the archive starkly differentiate themselves from the kind of practices aspiring to the exact repetition of a single historical precedent. Albeit thus falling outside the precise remit of Rebecca Schneider's seminal analysis of the syncopated time of performance re-enactment, the work of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door* must nevertheless impose itself on any scholar interested, as she puts it, 'in history's theatrical returns'.⁴¹⁷ For despite their differences, these performances are similarly concerned with what Schneider calls the 'replay of evidence (photographs, documents, archival remains) back across the body in 'gestic negotiation' 'in the *again* of a time out of joint,' or else, in 'the ambivalence of the live' in 'its inter(in)animation with the no longer live'.⁴¹⁸ If the 'subject' of these performances remains however 'largely absented from the finished work,' as *Every house has a door's* website describes it, the self-conscious removal from the present never amounts to an attempt to stand firmly in the place of the past but rather to stand-in for it, that is, to facilitate an encounter with an absent trace as it passes across bodies in again-time, or better, by the back and forth relay of an again-and-again time: an amateur's rehearsal of the past as the future to come.⁴¹⁹

The Performance as Model Notebook: *Hupomnēmata* and the Call to a Participatory Art of Living

In selectively assembling and rehearsing an array of heterogeneous archival materials replayed across the body in again-and-again-time, these performances, I want to suggest, begin in part to resemble a form of Self Writing as Michel Foucault has identified it in the practices of and discourses on the *hupomnēmata* of Greco-Roman times.

⁴¹⁷ Schneider, 1.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid*, 1 & 9.

⁴¹⁹ See website www.everyhousehasadoor.org/

Like those notebooks in which '[o]ne wrote down quotes [...], extracts from books, examples, and actions that one has witnessed or read about [...],' these performances are similarly put in the service of an 'exercise' or 'training' – or what we might here also call a *rehearsal* – of 'the art of living'.⁴²⁰ Not unlike the model or *Haltung* [attitude] of a training [*Übung*] to deal with an apparatus, what the performance as rehearsed notebook exercises is the body's participatory entanglement with the archive, of life with death, of *physis* with *techne*, of the flow of time with the movement of spacing that interrupts, disjoints and augments it. Here, the construction of the ethos, that is, of a however limited familiarity with oneself – and therefore of a certain style and indeed art, that is, *techne* of living – qua repetition and productive retracing of a path always already travelled depends on an archival principle of gathering together a selection of repeatable marks. If the collective endeavour of the companies' process of assemblage in part resembles that other technique of 'Self Writing' Foucault identifies as 'correspondence' – the process of construction made of a prolonged pursuit of chains of address (task), response and counter-response mirroring an epistolary practice – the final performance somewhat presents itself as a collectively written *hupomnēmata*, no longer inscribed on the pages of a notebook but "within" the bodies of performers moving through space in (repeatable) time. Construed as a *hupomnēmata*, the performance itself constitutes a 'record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation,' or else for rehearsal.⁴²¹ Joe Kelleher, in his reading of Goat Island's performance *The Lastmaker* makes a similar observation with regards to the treasure-like assemblage of archival materials when describing the work as 'some sort of physicalized meditation, based upon the remembering of hoarded, treasured, or picked up and patched up

⁴²⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Self-Writing' in *Ethics. The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley 207-222. (London: Penguin Books 2000), 208-9.

⁴²¹ *ibid*, 210.

material'.⁴²² That the rehearsed treasure is finally presented to a public makes of the performance a *model* of a practice of self-writing, that is, an exemplary rehearsal of the interrelation of individual bodies with a pre-individual fund of collective memory traces. Kelleher makes a similar observation when speaking of the public nature of its 'craft of thought' put in the service of a dissemination of structures for thinking.⁴²³ The performers physically re-trace or recall and thereby inscribe the body's encounter with an array of archival source materials that are quite literally rendered "near to hand," as Foucault puts it with regards to the *hupomnēmata*, 'not just in the sense that one would be able to recall them to consciousness, but that one should be able to use them, whenever the need was felt, in action'.⁴²⁴ What Foucault says of the *hupomnēmata* seems thus more or less applicable to a performance practice that gathers and mimetically interiorizes a selection of archival traces, namely, that the gathered 'must not simply be placed in a sort of memory cabinet but deeply lodged in the soul, "planted in it," [...] and they must form part of ourselves: in short, the soul must make them not merely its own but itself. *The writing of the hupomnēmata is an important relay in this subjectivation of discourse*'.⁴²⁵ A process of subjectivation, as Foucault specifies with recourse to Seneca, whereby the absorption of the gathered discourse is linked to the production of a difference.⁴²⁶ Yet at least with regards to the gestures of appropriative recall under consideration here, such physical absorptions of gathered external marks are decisively not without remainder: the remembering of treasured material never amounts to a full blown incorporation in the sense of a Hegelian *Erinnerung*, but rather remains precisely of a relay movement

⁴²² Joe Kelleher, 'Their Hands Full of Ghosts: Goat Island at the Last' *A Journal of Performance and Art*, (2009), 31:3, 100.

⁴²³ *ibid*, 101. I will return to Kelleher's observation and their relevance for a conception of the performance as *hupomnēmata* in more detail later on.

⁴²⁴ Foucault, 'Self-Writing', 210.

⁴²⁵ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

⁴²⁶ *ibid*, 213.

without end.⁴²⁷ The relay character of a process of rehearsing a gathered treasure of materials therefore remains demonstratively caught up in a retracing of an interval between the act of recall and the material recalled.

Like the notebook as *hupomnēmata*, the performance consists of a gathering of otherwise scattered archival remains and could be said to similarly seek to resist the distractions of an endless *flow* of reading as passive consumption. A flow that, as we have already indicated, inhibits the possibility of thinking as transformative return, appropriative reproduction and *differance* – repetition *and* difference – by dissociating reading from writing, consumption from production. Although Foucault's account of the use of *hupomnēmata* does not here literally talk of the distractions of a temporal *flow*, its employment in the effort to resist the distraction, mental agitation and anxiety of a consciousness perpetually turned toward the novelty of the future clearly relies on its ability of interrupting and stilling the flow of consciousness by '*fixing* acquired elements, [...] constituting a share of the past, [...] toward which it is always possible to turn back [...]'.⁴²⁸ 'This practice,' Foucault relates further,

can be connected to a very general theme of the period; in any case, it is common to the moral philosophy of the Stoics and that of the Epicureans – the refusal of a mental attitude turned toward

⁴²⁷ In a short interview, Derrida sketches the role of the concept of 'Erinnerung' in Hegel's philosophy as follows: 'The concept of "Erinnerung," which means both memory and interiorization, plays a key role in Hegel's philosophy. Spirit incorporates history by assimilating, by remembering its own past. This assimilation acts as a kind of sublimated eating—spirit eats everything that is external and foreign, and thereby transforms it into something internal, something that is its own. Everything shall be incorporated into the great digestive system—nothing is inedible in Hegel's infinite metabolism'. [Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson, 'An Interview with Jacques Derrida on the Limits of Digestion' *e-flux*, (2009), 01. Accessed online May 2016 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/an-interview-with-jacques-derrida-on-the-limits-of-digestion/>].

⁴²⁸ Foucault, 'Self-Writing', 212 (my emphasis).

the future (which, due to its uncertainty, causes anxiety and agitation of the soul) and the positive value given to the possession of a past that one can enjoy to the full and without disturbance. The *hupomnēmata* contribute one of the means by which one detaches the soul from concern for the future and redirects it toward contemplation of the past.⁴²⁹

Foucault's formulation here must recall Walter Benjamin's concern with the temporal predicament of the German baroque to which the *Trauerspiel* sought to find an appropriate response. Deprived of an institutionally regulated, more or less sovereign, that is, at least seemingly omnitemporal hold over the future, Benjamin depicts the experience of time during the German baroque as deeply in thrall of an anxiety before the future. Confronted with a general crisis of 'works' and an opaque means of "faith alone," isolated individuals find themselves precariously exposed to the unpredictable effects of their acts, helplessly as well as hopelessly exposed to the coming of time without any guarantees over the positive outcomes of their acts. In light of this dilemma, Weber notes, memory 'takes on a new function, that of consoling a world in which action is no longer the unquestionable pathway to grace'.⁴³⁰ What is more, the *Trauerspiel's* response to an epochal crisis of eschatology, as Benjamin relates, entails the movement of a conversion of previously temporal data into spatial inauthenticity (time becoming space). In the absence of an ostensible control over the coming of time, to ward of anxiety in view of a historical flow perceived to be moving towards catastrophe, temporal processes are brought to a halt by their spatial inscription. The piling up of previously temporal data on the showplace of *Trauerspiel* forms the condition and calls for a coming labour of its perpetual re-working qua allegorical theatricalization (space becoming time). Benjamin detects a very similar strategy described, as well as rehearsed and therefore demonstrated, in

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 194.

and by the work of Franz Kafka, who repeatedly returns to the image of a certain preference for the movement of a happy return [*Umkehr*] to the past over the unhappy pursuit of a future goal.⁴³¹ The resonance of Kafka's motif of *Umkehr* with the function of *hupomnēmata* as a 'means by which one detaches the soul from concern for the future and redirects it toward contemplation of the past,' as well as with its more literally embodied form in the performance practices of Goat Island and Every house has a door, is perhaps nowhere better evoked than in Benjamin's description of *Umkehr* as 'the direction of study [i.e. of Kafka's students] which transforms [*verwandelt*] being [*Dasein*] into writing [*Schrift*].'⁴³² Furthermore, if Kafka's parabolic work without doctrine more generally sets out to transmit an opaque tradition no longer in the service of continuity, but instead constitutes, as Werner Hamacher puts it, a 'clouding [*Trübung*] of Enlightenment' by its transmission of an opaque inheritance that belongs to the future no less than the past, the *hupomnēmata* could be said to serve a not dissimilar 'circumstantial use value' that is never simply given in advance or once and for all by the omnitemporal sovereignty of a doctrine but must be situated and in some ways always remains to come. For the tendency to counteract dispersal through the gathering of treasured materials, as Foucault relates, never amounts to subscribing to the doctrinal unity of their filial links. '[...W]hile it enables one to counteract dispersal,' Foucault relates with a formulation that resonates deeply with the "final" assemblage of archival source material in the performances of Goat Island and Every house has a door, 'the writing of the *hupomnēmata* is also (and must remain) a regular and deliberate *practice of the disparate*. It is a selection of heterogeneous elements'.⁴³³ 'It does not matter, says Epictetus,' Foucault notes, 'whether one has read all of Zeno or Chrysippus; it makes little difference whether one has grasped exactly what they meant to say, or whether one is able to reconstruct their whole argument. The notebook

⁴³¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', 435.

⁴³² *ibid*, 437.

⁴³³ Foucault, 212, (my emphasis).

is governed by two principles, which one might call “the local truth of precept” and “its circumstantial use value”.⁴³⁴ The order of such circumstantial use must therefore remain largely that of a test performance, perhaps not unlike the exuberant, cunning, probing, theatrical gestures of Kafka’s *Gehilfen* [assistants] – devoted amateurs in Kafka’s world of bogus professionals – their effects and effectiveness unable to be guaranteed in advance. Thus, ‘training’ in ‘the art of living’ never leads to a final accomplishment but may only ever secure an essentially precarious ethos, from time to time. ‘Skill as a result of learning or practice’ here does not amount to professionalism but a virtuosity of trembling.

The Outside Inside Out:

Non-Performance, Appropriative Restraint and The Double-Take.

In his reflections on the ‘role of the onstage performer as, to some degree, a non-performer’ in both *Every house has a door’s performance Sweet Movie* and Raimond Hoghe’s ‘essay performance’ *Bolero Variations*, Matthew Goulish re-inscribes the call for a debunking of virtuosity by linking it to the modality of a certain ‘restraint of onstage presence’ by which the performers begin ‘to occupy functional roles – as facilitators, translators, mediators, stage-hand[s and] stand-ins’.⁴³⁵ What they

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

⁴³⁵ Goulish, ‘First, Second, Third’, 34-6. Notwithstanding a possible confusion of the terms of my argument, I am here tempted to bring into contact Goulish’s call for a performative restraint with a not dissimilar ‘restraint’ that David Company identifies in the films of Robert Bresson. Bresson’s famous employment of non-professionals – a variant of the non-performer – equally sets out to avoid an excess of virtuosity – here of the (star) performer – that might distract, as Company puts it, from the part played. Eschewing what for him are the theatrical implications of the excess of the actor as spectacle, Bresson preferred the idea of the non-professional as *model*, a term, as Company states, that recalls the still photograph or the painter’s studio, but which here also must be brought

facilitate, translate, mediate or stand-in for is an array of 'pre-existing material' or 'traces of the past'.⁴³⁶ It is thus with regards to the material

into contact with the *model* character of a *Haltung* as Benjamin identifies it in the gestural theatre of Bertolt Brecht. 'He [Bresson] had his models drain their performances of theatre,' Campany relates, 'insisting they perform actions over and over in rehearsal. Finally they could perform before the camera without thought or self-consciousness.' Campany's description of Bresson's efforts to 'restrain' and thereby reduce performance to the repetitive, habitual mode of an automatism here further recalls Hixon's proclaimed interest in Rainer's objective of "removing the body from the gaze by returning it to an activity, to the condition of *always doing something*." In his own version of a sort of "No-Manifesto," Bresson, as Campany relates, writes:

No actors.
 (no directing of actors)
 No parts.
 (no playing of parts)
 No staging.
 But the use of working models taken from life.
 BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors).

Later he notes 'Nine-tenths of our movements obey habit and automatism. It is anti-nature to subordinate them to will and thought'. [See David Campany 'Posing, Acting, Photographing' in *Stillness and Time. Photography and the Moving Image*. ed. by David Green & Joanna Lowry, 97-113. (London: Photoworks 2005), 102]. Although the anti-theatrical register of this discourse seemingly jars with the terms of my argument, its own contradiction of terms nevertheless seem to allow for a comparative reading. For the movement of Bresson's 'models' display a lack of volition that can be similarly attributed to the non-performers of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*, each following the other-directed call of a habitual automatism that Bresson locates in the everyday and relates, if dubiously so, to 'nature' and 'being,' albeit – and thereby complicating the terms - of a habitual kind and model character. The latter inflections surely must make it difficult to relate the repetitive practice of habit to a proclaimed 'nature' of 'being.' The relationship of habit to the aspect of a however much sedimented theatricality of rehearsal, must complicate any recourse to the rhetoric of authenticity. Rather, stripping the performance of its narcissistic and fetishistic aspects as spectacle, Bresson's non-performers seem to expose a theatricality that was always already at work before the intervention of theatrical or cinematic artifice. In any case, Campany's description of the model's performance as "go[ing] through the motions,' as we say,' certainly resonates with the style of a 'pedestrianism' that is never far from the other-directed movements of the puppet as it is often attributed to the modality of non-performance and the restraint of onstage presence in the work of *Goat Island*.

⁴³⁶ Goulish, 'First, Second, Third', 35.

traces of the past that the non-performer takes up what we might designate as an attitude of appropriative restraint. Here, in the context of the 'non-performance' of an appropriative restraint, Goulish turns to the rhetoric of a rejection of virtuosity in seeking to undo what he designates as a general conundrum of theatre, namely:

[t]he way virtuosity of any sorts, once recognized, becomes the subject, at the expense of, or by way of replacing, or supplanting, the intended subject. This in turn points to a theatrical narcissism, a tendency of performance, or performing, to be about itself, while pretending to be about something else. The something else that the performance claims to investigate retreats to a sentimentalized background, lurking behind the foregrounded act and presence of the performers.⁴³⁷

The 'subject' for which the human presences on stage both stand in and retreat before, is here drawn, or better, selected from, the archive. 'Theirs is a dance with history,' Goulish exclaims.⁴³⁸ A dance, we might add, that hangs by the threads of an archival source that other-directs it. Leading the spectators as 'guides' – as Goulish also calls the non-performers – on an "embodied" trajectory through pre-existing material, the performers appear both devoid of agency and personality whilst seemingly possessed by the absented material they stand in for. The latter is never fully interiorized and only ever half-inhabited by the "embodiment", leaving a gap at all times between the demonstrated and the demonstration, the shown and the showing, the trace and its re-enactment. If, most generally put, memory and history are the 'subject' of the performed enactments, it is what Sally Baines calls 'the *demonstration* of the event of memory (as much as the memory of an event)' that prevents the remembered from appearing as simply *errinnert* [remembered/interiorized] or transparently recalled. Instead,

⁴³⁷ *ibid*, 36.

⁴³⁸ *ibid*, 35.

the presence of the performative act of recall and remembrance here coincides with a remembered trace that simultaneously remains distinctly non-present, neither present nor absent, but spectral, 'their hands full of ghosts'.⁴³⁹ A spectrality that is thus able to unhinge the spatio-temporal coordinates of the "live" act of performative recall and expose the inextricable interrelation of the outside and the inside, the archive and the body. The exposed bodily recall of an archival trace prevents body and archive from being perceived as either seemingly opposed or transparently confused, demonstrating the necessary eviction, as Derrida calls it, of the finite life of mneme by the dead sign of re-memoration.⁴⁴⁰ Thus, what Samuel Weber says about Epic Theatre is also and perhaps even more so at work for the 'non-performers' of Every house has a door, namely, that '[t]he representative, mimetic activity [...] splits and turns back on itself, retracing in this *double-take* an interval and a gap between the function of representing and that which is being represented,' as well as, we might add, between the function of remembering and that which is being remembered.⁴⁴¹ The represented and remembered is never fully absorbed into, or obscured by, the performance of remembering and representing, 'is never allowed to become fully identical with it'.⁴⁴² The demonstrated lack of identity between the remembered and the event of remembrance exposes the spatial opacity of a medium that is always bound to come between the ostensible self-presence of the flow of life – here, the life of the performer, which, as we will soon see, will seriously come into question by the attribute of a certain puppetry, as well as, in the context of the experience and analysis of the event of performance, the ostensible immediacy of the flow of the live event. The temporality of the living flow of the present finds "itself" dislodged by its entanglement with non-present remainders that facilitate both the intrusion of an absent past –

⁴³⁹ See Kelleher.

⁴⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. trans. Barbara Johnson. (London: The Athlone Press 1981), 109.

⁴⁴¹ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 106.

⁴⁴² *ibid*, 106.

the more or less specified source of enactment – as well as, following the logic of iterability, “its” possible future repetition *and* difference. Here, the half-inhabited, non-present source of a past tradition is bound to remain in excess of its present re-enactment, following a movement of spectral inheritance turned towards the future no less than the past. In other words, the cited mark remains “itself” citable, that is, able to break with its present context of re-inscription and engender infinite new contexts to come. Taking account of the possibility of this cut qua repeatability, the repetition begins to swell under the intrusion of a before and beyond, haunted by the past it repeats otherwise whilst signaling towards the unknowable coming of the future by an act of *teleiopoiesis*, a telephone call or message transmitted to distant others – ghosts from the future. The modality of acting here employed therefore begins to resemble that of a ‘theatrical iterability,’ for which, as Samuel Weber puts it, ‘[...] the “act” of an ‘actuality’ [...] must be repeatable in order to be *enacted*’. The “en-” of “enactment” is thus inseparable from the implicit “ex-” of an iterability that can never be self-contained’.⁴⁴³ What is exposed by the re-memorating bodies of Goat Island and Every house has a door is what Jacques Derrida has so rigorously analysed and described as the outside – the spatial interval of writing, the supplement of the archive – *within* the work of finite memory, bound to re-calling non-present, iterable signs in a movement of self-relation and communication that simultaneously binds and disjoins, secures and exposes.⁴⁴⁴ What is more, if the outside can no longer be rigorously

⁴⁴³ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

⁴⁴⁴ “The “outside,”” Derrida writes, ‘does not begin where what we now call the psychic and the physical meet, but at the point where the *mneme*, instead of being present to itself in its life as movement of truth, is supplanted by the archive, evicted by a sign of re-memoration or of commemoration. The space of writing, space *as* writing, is opened up in the violent movement of this surrogation, in the difference between *mneme* and *hypomnesis*. The outside is already *within* the work of memory. The evil slips in within the relation of memory to itself, in the general organization of the mnesic activity. Memory is finite by nature. Plato recognizes this in attributing life to it. As in the case of all living organisms, he assigns it, as we have seen, certain limits. A limitless

opposed to the inside, a body can no longer strictly be conceived – following a powerful Western tradition – as self-contained container, but instead finds itself stretched and trembling in an insecure spatio-temporal scene of augmented dis-containment.

The Puppet Body: Demonstrating a Way of Being Moved

In light of these reflections it is unsurprising that Goulish, when teasing out the effect of the performing non-performer, construes the performance of the body as secondary with regards to the primary performance of the more or less “embodied” material trace and, what is more, links it to the *reactive* modality of a certain puppetry.

Their performance appears secondary, as it allows for a primary performance by these traces of the past, in the form of objects, documentary sound recordings, and carefully calibrated, enacted gestures. [...]

Their dance, like an essay on the page, traces the journey of discovery that the mind makes through a subject.

Their non-performer performances in fact seem, as a style, necessary to bring about this relation with the material of the subject.

In a sense they perform a sort of puppetry, in which it is essential that they, the performers, do not overtake the subject.⁴⁴⁵

Goulish’s recourse to ‘a sort of puppetry’ when seeking to describe the modality of non-performance in *Sweet Movie* and *Bolero Variations* here

memory would in any event not be memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to recall the non-present, with which it is necessarily in relation. (See Derrida, *Dissemination*, 109).

⁴⁴⁵ Goulish ‘First, Second, Third’, 35.

recalls a similar comparison made by Stephen Bottoms and Adrian Heathfield when describing the modality of performance in the work of Goat Island. These observations furthermore link the ontological quality of the puppet – here marked by the appearance of dispossession and a general lack of volition – to Goat Island’s use of facial blankness as an indicator of its filial link to Judson Dance. A facial blankness that furthermore seems not at all unrelated to the quality of a certain ‘pedestrianism’ of non-virtuosity at work in the retracing of found source materials as it has been one of our guiding threads. ‘Like so much else in the company’s aesthetic,’ Bottoms begins his reflections,

a link can perhaps be traced back to the Judson Dance Theatre (based at Greenwich Village’s Judson Memorial Church from 1962-1964): Steve Paxton’s choreography was emphasizing facial blankness as early as 1963. Goat Island’s work, however, retrieves and redevelops the often-neglected Judson experiments in rigorously awkward new directions. If the performers often seem devoid of individual agency and even personality – somewhat “besides themselves” – it is in part because of the impossible tasks they are charged with, but also in part because of the way their movements are so often plagiarized from other sources, models that they cannot quite live up to. Thus, they are not quite “in possession” of themselves or their activities. As Adrian Heathfield notes of the extensive copying of Pina Bausch’s choreography in *It’s an Earthquake in My Heart*:

It’s no accident that the performers occasionally seem to be moving like puppets, or rehearsing a set of moves that they do not yet know. The movement is exposed as a repetition. We are watching them learn how to move. That the performers only “half-inhabit” the movement is crucial to the work since it creates a question over the source of the movement and the performer’s volition. *Their*

physicality seems to originate simultaneously from outside and inside the performer: from some notional instruction, pattern or plan, but also from a psychic force, which grips the performer within a repetition of a gestural form. ⁴⁴⁶

The lack of volition Heathfield ascribes to the performers of Goat Island clearly sets them apart from what Samuel Weber describes as the modern conception of the autonomous subject, whose privileged site since the Reformation, as he puts it, has been ‘the body understood as *embodied individual*’.⁴⁴⁷ It is with regards to the latter’s principle of containment that the performing bodies of Goat Island and Every house has a door come undone. An undoing that exposes the body, in Weber’s words, as

no longer demarcated from its surroundings [and] inevitably raises the question of its relation to place which is no longer simply its exterior. Rather, this body can itself be a place, a stage or staging area for effects whose scope is not clearly predictable.⁴⁴⁸

No longer self-determining and autonomous, these exposed bodies are ‘rather determined by their “ties” to what they are not,’ performing motion that ‘does not appear as the *act* of an individual but rather *bears* [them] along in a movement that has its origin elsewhere.’⁴⁴⁹ ‘Neither passive nor active [...], they demonstrate, quite literally, a *way of being moved* that confounds such oppositions’.⁴⁵⁰ Weber links the *reactive* modality of such acting to ‘the skill of the performer’ – and therefore, curiously, back to a certain virtuosity, only this time, perhaps, a virtuosity of trembling – that ‘allows a movement to be deployed that can never be

⁴⁴⁶Bottoms & Goulish ed., 74 (my emphasis).

⁴⁴⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 317.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid*, 51

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid*, 27 & 318.

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid*, 27.

reduced to the property or product of an individual *qua individual*'.⁴⁵¹ These reflections on the dispossessed modality of acting bodies take place in a variety of contexts that include a performance of Peking Opera, Brecht's Epic Theatre, as well as a spout of popular films from *The Body Snatchers* through *Alien* to the *Terminator(s)* and beyond, which 'bear witness to the becoming-uncanny of what seems most familiar, the (not always human) body [...]'.⁴⁵² It is in this latter context that Weber turns to a more recent example of this general theme as it resurfaces in the film *Being John Malkevitch*. Here, the paradigmatic example of a body that is determined by its "ties" to what it is not turns out to be, precisely, a puppet. It is the other-directed movements of the puppet that for Weber 'reveal a constitutive heterogeneity that [the Western tradition of a modern conception of the autonomous subject] is obliged to deny or combat'.⁴⁵³ Thus, if the modality of non-performing performers resembles the appearance of puppets, it is because they similarly appear to be 'suspended on threads; their movements com[ing] from elsewhere. They *respond*[,]' Weber says with a formulation that deeply resonates with the method if not ethics of the performance practices under consideration here, 'they do not initiate'.⁴⁵⁴ What Weber says of the

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁵² Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 51.

⁴⁵³ *ibid.*, 319.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.* Weber's account of puppet-bodies that *respond* but do not initiate, here not only recalls the style of non-performance as Goulish describes it, but furthermore resonates strongly with the overall ethos and method that informs both companies' working processes, its outcomes deriving from a long series of response and counter-response. Such an ethos or attitude of reaction over initiative further informs the strong educational agenda that accompanies their work through extensive workshops, talks and publications often aimed at other, younger practitioners. Perhaps theirs, like Benjamin's 'author as producer,' is also an endeavor to provide others with an improved apparatus by emphasizing a call to response-ability inscribed in the 'model' character of their *Haltung*. In any case, one indicator for the centrality of an attitude of responsiveness amongst many others comes in the form of Hixon's and Goulish's writings on their performance processes, which more often than not begin with the small threads of an anecdote, the coordinates of a specific time and place of a chance encounter with a source material that had not been actively sought out.

puppet, therefore, can here be more or less equally applied to the non-performers of Goat Island and Every house has a door:

Although they can hardly be said to “act,” [they] nevertheless “embody” the essence of the *acting* in which the body itself becomes a stage upon which forces that come from elsewhere play themselves out; such remote bodies are always defined by their relation to the place they occupy without ever possessing. Puppets never take place, and in this they are at odds with *humans* in the specific sense accorded that term by a powerful Western tradition: namely, that of an independent, autonomous, self-conscious subject. Puppets, by contrast, repeat, respond, react, re-move without ever reaching or aspiring to self-consciousness. They are both before and beyond it. Correlatively, their “bodies” never *embody*: not a soul, nor a mind, nor an identity. Their bodies are nonhuman in the extreme, and yet no less “bodily” for it. Their articulations, joints, and members take

Whether the discovery of rare footage of a Pina Bausch performance in Martin Figura’s flat at Fidicinstrasse 32a in Berlin, the encounter with the 1970s British repair manual *Around the Home* in a physicist’s apartment at Aberystwyth’s seafront in November 2001, or the out-of-print two volumes of *Testimony* by the Jewish American poet Charles Reznikoff – which, as Goulish relates, ‘a friend gave me some years ago’ – an attitude of reactiveness surrounds these non-intended chance encounters. [Goulish, ‘Memory is this’, 6; Lin Hixon, ‘Small Acts of Repair’ *frakcija* 32, 2004, no pagination; Matthew Goulish & Lin Hixon, ‘Poetry, Document and Objectivity’, Transcript of Lecture held at LICA, Lancaster University, November 2014.] Perhaps the recurrent motif of dates and addresses that mark the event of an unexpected arrival must not then be reduced to the habit of a stylistic device, but instead be read as evidence of something of an ethico-political stance, that is, the affirmation of a dis-contained subject as a ‘stage upon which forces that come from elsewhere play themselves out’ [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 319]. Or else, of a concept of identity as ‘house’ that is able to contain only insofar as it ‘gives up a passage to the outside world [*l’etranger*].’ An insight, that is furthermore reflected in the citational practice of their latest company name, which reinscribes Derrida’s assertion that ‘there is no house or interior without a door or windows’. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 61.

their cue from elsewhere, and their being, reiterative and inconclusive, always hangs on a thread.⁴⁵⁵

In the theatre, one way to figure the cue that comes from elsewhere has of course always been the more or less overtly exposed crack [*Sprung*] in the boards of a stage in which is located the technology of the prompter: ‘mechanical ruse (mekhane),’ as Derrida puts it, ‘or mistaking a person, repetition upon the perverse intervention of a prompter [*souffleur*], *parole soufflée*, substitution of actors or characters’ (*Specters* 5). The prompter exposes the primary repetition of the theatrical “event” in the shape of an opening – not unlike that of a door or window – that doubles that of the mouth of the performer, stealing in advance the performance of speech. In our context, however, it is not exclusively nor primarily the speech of actors that finds itself stolen in advance, but the gestures of bodies *borne* along by a movement that has its origin elsewhere. In Every house has a door’s performance *Sweet Movie*, the mechanical ruse of the prompt is figured overtly by two lap-tops – their screens turned away from the audience – playing the feast scene from Dusan Makavejev’s 1974 film *Sweet Movie*. The latter prompts the ‘re-enactment of some, any, or all of the roles simultaneously,’ as Goulish relates, which the audience encounters as ‘an elaborate wordless lip-synch’ facilitated by the performer as stand-in.⁴⁵⁶ The performers stand-in for an absent ‘subject’ (theme) without, as Goulish points out, ‘hoping to ever inhabit it.’⁴⁵⁷ Although the absence of the source is here figured by the lap-top prompt, the resulting effect of dispossession that informs the style of non-performance in no way relies on the use of such a theatrical device. For repetition, as Heathfield’s account of the performers of Goat Island has sought to describe it, is always already exposed by the uncanny mode of a half-inhabited enactment.

⁴⁵⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 319-20.

⁴⁵⁶ Goulish, ‘First, Second, Third’, 34-5.

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid*, 37.

Rehearsing The Future To Come

In contrast to Goulish's outright rejection of a hope to ever fully inhabit the repetition, Heathfield's description continues to link the repetitive and repeatable modality of the rehearsal to a more or less goal-directed, progressive movement of a process of learning ('we are watching them learn'). Here, a present state of not-knowing ('rehearsing a set of moves that they do *not yet know*') is rehearsed in view of the horizon of a *not yet*, that is, a however much deferred and projected (possibility of) final acquaintance.⁴⁵⁸ Particularly however in view of Goulish's recourse to the notion of performative restraint when describing the modality of non-performance, the aspect of rehearsal that

⁴⁵⁸ Heathfield's commentary, which is concerned with a particular moment of citation of a difficult found movement sequence in Goat Island's performance *It's an Earthquake in My Heart* is of course only implicitly related to the wider questions of the body and the archive, as well as of the temporal dehiscence of the event of performance qua iterability as it informs the much broader, structural remit of my theoretical analysis. Therefore, I am not concerned with a critique of the reading and description that it offers of this particular scene on its own terms – which indeed would be difficult to divorce from a horizon of possible acquisition on the level of mere physical skill – but rather to render explicit its potential relation to the philosophical and political stakes of my argument by a slight displacement – for instance, by situating the repetition of 'found movement' more overtly in a scene of spectral inheritance, that is, the citational practice of retracing the sedimented marks of a 'tradition.' The latter is never merely a physical but also symbolic practice. In this context of bodily citation as the labour of cultural inheritance and transmission, the performance, experience and testimony of not-knowing at play in a half-inhabited repetition must then also concern the production of socio-cultural significance. It is precisely in this excess of an in- and over-determination, the becoming opaque of the *Vorstellung*, that the movement of repetition as rehearsal, instead of being submitted to a teleologic project of accomplishment, begins to signal in secret to the possibility of "its" coming alterity. Therefore it is only in the context of this slight citational displacement of Heathfield's remarks, rather than within their own remit, that more precise attention must be paid to the conception of a half-inhabited repetition as an instance of rehearsal. In this context, it becomes necessary, as Derrida puts it, 'to free the value of the future from the value of 'horizon' that traditionally has been attached to it – a horizon being, as the Greek word indicates, a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future'. [See Derrida & Ferraris, 20].

pertains to the half-inhabited (re-)enactment must be severed from the structural residue of such a teleological perspective. Here, the performance of non-mastery and not-knowing cannot be reduced to a structural logic of the *not yet*. To avoid doing so, the structure of rehearsal that exposes the performance as repetition must be differently construed. No longer constituting a rehearsal *for* the future, following a repetitive practice that seeks to be rid of its very coming by the skilful instituting of continuity through exact repetitions of the past, what is at stake in the appropriative restraint of the enactment is a more paradoxical logic of a repetition of what is indeed always yet to come. The enactments of rehearsal no longer merely stand-in for an absent 'subject,' source or prompt, but for the very possibility of "their" future alterity. The dislocated nature of such standing-in is without proper place and actual taking-place and therefore only ever radically half-inhabited both with regards to the past and (possible) future of the "present" enactment. Linking the unknowable coming of the future to the repetitive, that is, repeat-able, modes of the rehearsal, the latter begins to describe never merely a mode of re-institution, but a movement of repetition that maintains a *simultaneous* reference to the past *and* to the future. No matter how much it might desire mastery and identity qua repetition, its structural repeatability exposes the rehearsal to the future's uncontrollable coming. Repetition or *repetition* – the French word for the rehearsal – must either account for and begin to swell under a future alterity that always at least potentially awaits it, or else seek to disavow its coming, whether through the more or less violent appeal to omnitemporality or by re-inscribing the modality of a present dispossession or temporal (as well as ethical) disadjustment into a teleologic narrative of its eventual overcoming. Attitudes with regards to the structure of rehearsal as *différance* – that is, as a repetition both altered and alterable – may thus be twofold: on the one hand, in a gesture of disavowal, one may seek to put the rehearsal in the service of a teleological trajectory of mastery over the future – rehearsing *for* it by more or less seeking to control its coming through the skilful repetitions

of the past, laying down, as it were, the law, for other times and places to come – or, on the other, one may seek *to rehearse the future to come*, in a gesture that repeats an inheritance otherwise whilst remaining open to the unpredictable and uncontrollable coming of “its” future transformation. ‘[..B]ecause there is a future,’ Derrida says, ‘a context is always open’.⁴⁵⁹ In the context of the style or modality of performance employed by the performers of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*, what Goulish describes with recourse to the performative restraint of the stand-in must thus be read as an “active” engaging of this opening, in other words, a “passive” modality or attitude [*Haltung*] of placeholder as *model* of response-ability: ‘signifying hospitality for what is to come,’ ‘enact[ing] a kind of opening [...] of the place left vacant for who is to come, for the *arrivant*,’ as Derrida puts it.⁴⁶⁰ This ‘zone of disacquaintance, of not understanding,’ as Derrida further relates, *prevents the present from being consumed immediately*. In doing so it ‘is also a reserve and an excessive chance – a chance for excess to have a future, and consequently to engender new contexts’.⁴⁶¹ For Derrida, here speaking in the context of his own writings and a paradoxical demand ‘for this excess even with respect to what I myself can understand of what I say,’ such a marking of an empty place for someone absolutely indeterminate is similarly related to a form of restraint, namely, what he calls with recourse to a Christian tradition from which he radically parts in repeating it otherwise, the *kenosis* of the messianic ‘that does not necessarily have to be the object of a mystical exercise or ascetic despoilment’.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Derrida & Ferraris, 20.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid*, 30.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid*.

⁴⁶² *ibid*, 21. In Christian theology, *kenosis* describes the ‘self-emptying’ of one’s own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will.

An Economy of Narcissism

[...] and, like all inheritors, we are in mourning. [...] *To be* [...] means [...] to inherit. All the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance. [...] That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or not.⁴⁶³

We are undeniably the heirs or legatees [...] of this word [here: democracy, but later also: archive] that has been sent to us, addressed to us for centuries, and that we are always sending or putting off until later. This sending or putting off [*renvoi*] gestures toward the past of an inheritance only by remaining to come.⁴⁶⁴

In the above description and analysis of the entanglement of the body and the archive in the performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door, the latter has emerged out of a series of “enacted”, but at most half-inhabited appropriations of carefully selected archival remains. As such, it participates and intervenes, in however small a way, in an archival scene of historiographical transmission and the formation and transformation of collective schemata of inheritance and commemoration. The bodies of the performers enact or repeat an embodied journey through an array of outside traces that at the same time they explicitly avoid to incorporate through the non-performance of an appropriative restraint. This more or less explicit “refusal,” that is, the demonstration of a constitutive failure to interiorize, might be described by what Derrida designates as the structure of exappropriation, whereby ‘each and every movement of appropriation is, in effect, an “ex-appropriation” or a “finite appropriation”’ and thus a double movement

⁴⁶³ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 54.

⁴⁶⁴ Derrida, *Rogues*, 9.

involving ‘both an inescapable gesture of (re-)appropriation and the necessary failure to interiorize that which remains outside, over there, always out of reach’.⁴⁶⁵ The com-memorative aspects of these performances, which seek to contribute to the precarious survival and transmission of more or less neglected or forgotten archival remains, could be said to make of it a work of mourning as the constitutively failing project of introjection, a mimetic interiorization caught up precisely in a double movement as well as a double bind of exappropriation – both the desired recovery and safekeeping of a neglected archival trace, as well as a simultaneous “refusal” to make the dead other a living part of one. Such a “refusal,” however, can never simply be of the order of a choice, but merely of the order of a demonstration of a necessary, structural impossibility at the heart of every desire for appropriation. It is therefore of the order of a modality or style in the form of a gesture of ‘putting off’ the very desire for appropriation.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism*, 131.

⁴⁶⁶ In anticipation of what, beyond a naïve rejection of narcissism will soon be called an economy of narcissism, we might thus here similarly speak of an economy of desire and never of an outright rejection to appropriate. Appropriation, interiorization, ‘eating well,’ as Derrida insists, is never an option. “One eats [the other] regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him” [Derrida in DeArmitt, 129]. ‘Of course,’ DeArmitt relates, ‘we should hear this Derridian declaration as extending far beyond any empirical consumption of food or drink to “the very concept of experience” itself, because the law of need or desire – the “it is necessary [*il faut*]’ that I want the thing to be mine” – is equally at work in all experience, from eating and perceiving to loving and mourning’ [DeArmitt, 129]. What is more, Derrida’s conception of desire (to appropriate) is conditioned on its constitutive failure. As De Armitt puts it:

[A]lthough the absolute alterity of the other, time and again, thwarts or bars our attempts at appropriation and hence limits our insatiable desires, this is what we desire. Whether we are conscious of it or not, [Derrida] contends, we “desire” that the other “remain foreign, transcendent, other.” Indeed, for there to be desire at all, [...] it is essential that the other remain sufficiently other so that one still has an interest in making it one’s own [DeArmitt, 131].

A similar reading of the Derridian conception of desire informs the discernment of what Martin Hägglund calls the 'radical atheism' of deconstruction. Here, in the context of a contestation of the religious ideal of immortality, the unscathed and salvation, the failure of desire's fulfillment no longer describes a negative limitation but the necessary opening for a continued process of re-appropriation intrinsic to the movement of life itself. [See Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism. Derrida and the Time of Life*. (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 8-11]. Derrida, Hägglund argues, 'relies on the desire for mortal life in order to read the most religious ideas against themselves' (ibid, 11). For instance, bringing to bear the resources of the French idiom on the deconstruction of the religious idea of salvation, Derrida shows that every desire for salvation (*salut de*) must be compromised by the greeting address to the other (*salut a*). As Hägglund puts it:

Derrida's strong claim is that the greeting of the other is incompatible with the very hope for salvation: "the *salut a* presupposes a renunciation of the *salut de*. To address a greeting to the other, a greeting from one's own self to the other as other, for this greeting to be what it must be it must break off all hope of salvation or redemption, all return and restitution of the 'safe.'" The radicality of Derrida's argument emerges if one bears in mind that greeting the other is not a matter of choice. Whatever one does, one is greeting the other, since nothing can happen without the coming of the other. Thus, in spite of Derrida's recourse to voluntary metaphors, the "renunciation" of the hope for salvation is concomitant with the advent of life as such [ibid, 128].

I will return to this context in more detail later on, particularly with regards to the question of the desire for and promise of justice as it surfaces in Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium* and resonates with the work of both Benjamin and Derrida. My interest with regards to the general structure of desire thus construed here lies in probing for a (didactic) value of *the demonstration of the structural limit and constitutive failure of appropriation* in the context of a theatrical *Vorstellung* [representing-before]. For to demonstrate, that is, to actively avow the quasi-transcendental structure in a particular bearing of a style or modality of a *Haltung* remains of the order of a choice. In this scenario of an exposed movement of appropriation, the demonstration of its interruption and failure, I want to suggest, not only keeps alive the desire to re-appropriate for those representing, but also induces it for those witnessing. The latter are thereby activated in their (limited) ability to appropriate, respond, participate, contribute and make their own. The double movement of an exposed exappropriation as a simultaneous gesture towards the past and the future, or more precisely, towards the

In the context of the com-memorative scene of performance practices actively engaged in the task of inheritance, the half-inhabiting modality of an appropriative restraint can thus no longer be inscribed in a teleologic trajectory of a projected successful introjection. Instead, the concomitant gesture of ‘putting off’ the movement of appropriation is at the same time a gesture of ‘sending’ a “saved” inheritance towards the unpredictable possibility of its othered return. A saving that is always only provisional and more or less precariously exposed. Here, the double movement of the exappropriated enactment – ‘inseparable from the implicit “ex-” of an iterability that can never be self-contained’ – must reject and demonstratively ward off the seeming acquisition of “skill,” “professionalism,” or “know-how” in favour of what I have called a virtuosity of trembling.⁴⁶⁷ The *Haltung* [attitude] of non-performance is thus also one of an *Anhaltung* [stoppage] of *its own movement of re-appropriation*, self-interrupting and immediately parting with itself by a passive sending or putting off [*renvoi*] that, as Derrida puts it, ‘gestures toward the past of an inheritance only by remaining to come’.⁴⁶⁸

past as to come, in turn appeals to an audience to follow Echo’s ruse, that is, a mimetic interiorization that counter-signs in its own name.

⁴⁶⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

⁴⁶⁸ Derrida, *Rogues*, 9. The movement of this simultaneous ‘gesture’ to the past and the future – a repetition of the past as to come – is precisely that of the ‘citability of gesture’ as Benjamin describes it, and as it has been our privileged mark of return throughout. Even if it does not always explicitly appear here by name, it nonetheless informs the present context. The citable gesture describes a process of ‘saving’ by a movement of time becoming space, retention, the leaving of (external) traces and the possibility of return and re-appropriation, as well as the structural exposure to the future qua iterability as both threat and chance. For Derrida, whether on the level of a subject or a collective, the breached interiority of self-identity, the intrusion of alterity that springs from the spacing of time as the condition of every relation, including the relation to self – *the structurally necessary opening to the future in general* – is of course never limited to a specific style (i.e. of non-performance) or at any point subject to choice, decision and the possibility of a successful avoidance. Instead, it is, as Martin Hägglund has so convincingly argued, a quasi- or ultra-transcendental condition from which no ethical norm can be derived. Nevertheless, in contrast to its however futile disavowal, as well as to its mere description, I am here probing for a didactic and political value of its ‘demonstration’ [see Hägglund, 75]. For it is the

The half-inhabiting, restrained appropriation of non-performance resembles this double gesture towards a past that is still to come. Goulish, as we saw, links the restraint of non-performance to a critique of what he calls a theatrical narcissism, that is, 'a tendency of performance, or performing, to be about itself, while pretending to be about something else'.⁴⁶⁹ Yet as the mediated encounter with the absent material of the performance through the body of the performer as stand-in demonstrates, the withdrawal of the performer before the material must necessarily be incomplete. Instead, the performer half-inhabits the embodied trace – retracing thereby an interval and a gap between the function of representing and that which is being represented – in a movement of an always limited, finite appropriation. As such, following the modality that Derrida referred to with the term exappropriation, non-performance must not here be read in terms that oppose narcissism and non-narcissism, but instead can be said to pursue what Derrida calls 'the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more *open to the experience of the other as other*'.⁴⁷⁰ Hixon, speaking in the context of the sober style of appropriation of American poet Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony: The United States (1885-1915) Recitative* – the primary material of Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium* (2006) – hints at her own methodological efforts at exercising what resembles such an economy of narcissism in her style of directing: 'I have always found the way forward by *restraint* and by the *particular*,' she says, '– the particulars of a walk, a fall, a specific name, a death or saying goodbye'.⁴⁷¹

Haltung of such a demonstration that would be able to provide other producers and, what is more, receivers as producers, with what we might here call with Benjamin on Brecht an 'improved apparatus,' namely, one that foregrounds the possibilities of its perpetual transformation through participation qua response-ability.

⁴⁶⁹ Goulish 'First, Second, Third', 36.

⁴⁷⁰ DeArmitt, 96.

⁴⁷¹ Goulish & Hixon. I will return in more detail to the context of Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium* below. In this context, it will be a matter precisely of linking a sobriety of style, that is, an appropriative 'restraint' before the particular, to the promise of an

In the context of an economy of narcissism beyond a naïve denunciation of narcissistic appropriation, it becomes possible to reinscribe the other-directed, passive-active or re-active modality of enactment of the non-performer in proximity to what Pleshette DeArmitt calls Derrida's strategic employment of the figure of Echo 'in order to elucidate a deconstructive notion of the "self" and its relation to the other'.⁴⁷² Particularly, that is, if one does not limit the structure of individuation through call and (limited) response-ability to that of an inter-subjective scene. For, in Derrida, the figure of the other, on which the limited movement of (Echo's) individuation both depends and by which it comes undone, is never limited to that of another subject, but instead must be read as the auto-immune self-relation of the living body with 'whatever is not the body but belongs to it, comes back to it: prosthesis and delegation, repetition, difference'.⁴⁷³ The possibility of return qua re-appropriation is thus at the same time the impossibility of the purity of this return, in other words, an exposition to the necessary possibility of non-return and a movement of simultaneous gathering and dividing, individuation and disindividuation. To avow the necessary possibility of non-return in the limited movement of re-appropriation by a gesture of putting-off, sending, leaving or allowing [*Lassen*],

impossible justice beyond the subsuming generality of any given law. For the (impossible) act of justice, Derrida states in his article 'Force of Law', 'must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives, the other or myself *as* other, in a unique situation'. [Derrida, 'Force of Law', 947].

⁴⁷² DeArmitt, 98.

⁴⁷³ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 177. 'To protect its life,' Derrida continues, 'to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself, it is necessarily led to welcome the other within (so many figures of death: differance of the technical apparatus, iterability, non-uniqueness, prosthesis, synthetic image, simulacrum, all of which begins with language, before language), it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*' [ibid, 177]. See also Hägglund: 'In Derrida "the other" does not primarily designate another human being. On the contrary, alterity is indissociable from the spacing of time. Such spacing is irreducibly violent because it breaches any interiority and exposes everyone – myself as well as any other – to the perils of finitude' [Hägglund, 75].

demonstrates the expansion or augmentation of the self by a process of infinite exappropriation in the entanglement of the ego with the archive of hypomnemata. Here, it is my contention that the other-directed bodies of the non-performing performers of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*, which physically forge an essay-like path through a subject by the more or less mimetic interiorization of archival traces, *demonstrate* their hypomnesic augmentation, visibly stretched across the assembled – whether successively laid out or stacked on top one another – array of half-inhabited external marks. Albeit therefore eschewing a theatrical narcissism by demonstratively leaving the interiorized other as other, one might nevertheless identify the non-performer (on the level of his or her unique performance), or indeed the performance itself (on the level of the work as unique signature), following DeArmitt’s reading of Derrida’s recourse to the figure of Echo, as

a “little narcissist” who is responsible to the other by answering and returning his call. Yet, while echoing the words of her other, [...] is resourceful enough to speak of and for herself, signing in her own name.⁴⁷⁴

The figure of Echo, who by divine prohibition has been deprived of her ability to initiate speech, is bound by law to speak only after and thus to forever follow the other. Her speech-act resembles that of an actor’s, stolen in advance by the mechanical ruse of a prompter. Yet Echo, seemingly deprived of all initiative, is nevertheless capable of herself playing a ruse on a mechanical ruse. Condemned to repetition, she feigns to repeat whilst repeating otherwise, signing in her own name. Iterability – for instance of Narcissus’ (self-)address – renders a process of appropriation possible, that is, to identify, recognize, repeat and repeat otherwise (respond). At the same time, however, given the structure of ex-appropriation that stems from the (re-)iterability of the appropriated mark, Echo’s ruse of a counter-signature, as well as that of the

⁴⁷⁴ DeArmitt, 98.

performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has door, must be exposed to the coming of other respondents. If Derrida's discernment of Echo's ruse as that of an ability to speak of and for herself by following the other, as DeArmitt suggests, constitutes a 'powerful interpretation of this seeming powerless figure,' it does not however rid this reactively productive scene of individuation of a constitutive precariousness. Even when powerfully appropriating an external prosthesis, this active ruse remains passively or indeed powerlessly exposed to the future. Echo, as DeArmitt suggests, offers us another narrative of narcissism, 'which does not disavow mourning but instead opens itself to the experience of the other as other'.⁴⁷⁵ This experience of a limit of appropriation must concern both the past – the other as what precedes and produces a unique body and voice through what resists repetition - as well as the future – the other of an already inscribed coming loss or ruin in the present of (re-)appropriation. The present ruse of a limited appropriation is ambiguously *exposed*, both in the sense of an however limited narcissistic movement of re-appropriation (a showing never far from that of a showing off) as well as that of an 'open, vulnerable position of a person or thing, [...] thus bring[ing] together the notions of putting on show [as well as] the presentation of ideas with the danger of such exposure'.⁴⁷⁶ The work of mourning, as DeArmitt's reading of Derrida shows, is therefore caught in a double bind, demanding 'that the mourner "must and must not take the other into [her]self"'.⁴⁷⁷ If the performances of Goat Island and Every house has a door seem largely driven by a counter-archival impulse of safekeeping the neglected and forgotten – demonstrating a concern with *what* must be appropriated and kept safe – the modality of restraint in non-performance furthermore bespeaks a concern with *how* one ought to appropriate the other, that is, with the ethical aporia of determining the most respectful way of relating to the other that is to be mimetically interiorized. This unresolvable aporia

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid*, 99.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.104.

⁴⁷⁷ DeArmitt, 115.

describes an impasse of undecidability between respect and disrespect (violence) for the other.⁴⁷⁸ The archival marks that are taken up and appropriated in the performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door – but are only ever half-inhabited – not only precede but also exceed the time of their (re-)enactment. The demonstration of this precedence and excess of a repeatable mark on which a singular yet finite appropriation qua counter-signature depends, calls for the coming of “its” future appropriations, or else, the reply or response from the one who comes to sign in his own manner. ‘It is the ear of the other that signs,’ Derrida says.⁴⁷⁹ The demonstrated possibility of the coming of a counter-signature by way of a passive attitude [*Haltung*] of place-holding as *model* of response-ability ‘signif[ies] hospitality for what is to come.’ ‘[E]nacting a kind of opening [...] of the place left vacant for who is to come, for the *arrivant*,’ is also the *Haltung* of an appeal to a mode of reception that cannot so easily be reduced to the order of a mere consumption. For in order ‘to hear and understand [...],’ Derrida states further, ‘one must also produce’.⁴⁸⁰

Every Archive Has a Door

When speaking of the primary material of Every house has door’s 2013 production *Testimonium* - a selection of ‘objectivist’ poems based on the law reports of US court cases between 1885-1915 from the two out-of-print volumes of *Testimony* by the American poet Charles

⁴⁷⁸ Geoffrey Bennington relates the impossibility of a non-violent relation to the other in the context of reading the texts of a tradition as follows: ‘[...] [T]here could be no reading absolutely respectful of a text, for a total respect would forbid one from even touching the text, opening the book, so there could be no countersignature absolutely respectful of the signature it countersigns, for in that case it would become confused with that first signature and would no longer sign at all’. [Bennington, *Derridabase*, 165].

⁴⁷⁹ Derrida quoted in DeArmitt, 137.

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid*, 138.

Reznikoff – Goulish describes Reznikoff's endeavour as one of imagining 'an alternate history of the United States, one that would include voices omitted from the history books'.⁴⁸¹ In doing so, he could easily be speaking of the company's own small efforts at constructing what Jane Blocker describes with regards to Goat Island's performance *The Lastmaker* as 'an archive forever being made and remade'.⁴⁸² For when selecting the contents for these seemingly open-ended archival or *hypomnemic* endeavours, the company often sees itself drawn to the historically or critically neglected, as if, in some small way, as Hixon relates, to make amends.⁴⁸³ In thus gathering the forgotten and neglected, the archival aspect of the performances could be said to construct a counter-archive to a historical record that has always been skewed towards the privileged and powerful. As critical interventions into a preceding archive, in however minute a way, the performances of Goat Island and Every house has a door seemingly concern themselves with the question of a politics of the archive. That question, as Derrida reminds us, is never to be determined as one political question among others insofar as '[t]here is no political power without control of the archive [...]'.⁴⁸⁴ 'Effective democratization,' Derrida states, 'can always be measured by this essential criterion: the *participation* in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation'.⁴⁸⁵ Thus, the companies' concern with aesthetic participation through compositional as well as discursive appeals to response-ability here doubles up as a concern with a politics of archival co-production. Yet besides contributing to the necessary redrawing of inherited limits and trends of exclusion and inclusion – an endeavour that is never itself without the violence of new or repeated exclusions and can only ever raise the stakes of responsibility in face of a necessary aporia of selection – these

⁴⁸¹ Goulish & Hixon.

⁴⁸² Blocker, 10.

⁴⁸³ Goulish & Hixon.

⁴⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*. trans. Eric Prenowitz. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1996), 4.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*, (my emphasis).

performances are not simply concerned with *what* is being gathered, but furthermore with the *how* of the gathering, that is, the manner of the facilitated transmission. If the manner of its assemblage differs with respect to dominant archival structures – for instance by carefully avoiding the consignment of its parts to a totalizing system ‘in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration’ – the counter-archival performance practice must not however strictly be opposed to the archive that precedes it. In contesting existing limits of inclusion and exclusion, as well as an archontic principle that wants to seal a tradition by putting it under ‘house arrest,’ as Derrida puts it, by consigning the gathered to a *permanent* dwelling under the guardianship of a privileged hermeneutic right and competence, the performance as counter-archive *demonstrates* an essential dividedness and open-endedness to which ‘that re-producible, iterable, and conservative production of memory, [...] called the archive’ was always already structurally destined.⁴⁸⁶ The counter-archive, however, not simply redraws the borders of exclusion and inclusion and contests what Derrida calls, with reference to Benjamin, the archive’s ‘force of law’ – the violence of a power [*Gewalt*] which at once posits and conserves – by reinstating a reconfigured archontic authority (however marginal), but instead seeks to interrupt, in so far as possible, the movement of oscillation between institutive and conservative violence by the open-ended gesture of a gathering that stands-in as placeholder for “its” coming alterity. Exposing the structural opacity and dividedness of language as the scene rather than instrument for the exploration of the past, the performance as counter-archive indeed demands to be read, as we have heard Blocker suggest, as ‘an archive forever being made and remade’.⁴⁸⁷ What is more, any such reading inevitably begins to participate in the labour of archival deconstruction, ex-appropriating the performance as *hupomnēmata* by further augmenting its archival materials. The demonstrated impossibility of consigning the gathered, essentially divided,

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid*, 2 & 26.

⁴⁸⁷ Blocker, 10.

heterogeneous marks of a secret, spectral inheritance to the unity of an ideal configuration makes for an unmasterable structural complexity and compositional fragility that at once overwhelms the flow of immediate reception and evokes a participatory, appropriative desire in the long duration of its aftermath. 'The whole thing is excessive. It is too much. There are too many[,] Jane Blocker exclaims before embarking on her reading of *The Lastmaker*. For Blocker, the cluttered, extremely dense and layered web of assembled references of the performance leads her to declare the failure of the performance as archive.⁴⁸⁸ Yet the performance as archive could be said to "fail" only if the concept of the archive would essentially depend on the power of its arresting authority. Given however that the concept of the archive was always already menaced by essential contradictions – i.e. that the possibility of keeping the past that the archive seeks to facilitate at the same time exposes the impossibility of keeping the past unscathed – as Derrida's analysis seeks to formalize it, the failure of the authority of the archive, here as elsewhere, never befalls as an avoidable accident from the outside what would otherwise have been *saved* undamaged, 'in a hard and lasting way [...] so as to ensure in this way salvation and indemnity'.⁴⁸⁹ 'To have a concept at one's disposal,' Derrida notes with regards to the concept of the archive as well as any other concept that presents itself as archivable in a lasting way, 'to have assurances with regards to it, is to presuppose a closed heritage [...].' And although '[...] the notion of the archive seem[s] at first [...] to point toward the past, to refer to the signs of consigned memory, to recall faithfulness to tradition,' as iterable *hypomnemic* retention it must remain in excess of any given finite schemata, thereby becoming a question of the future and a question of a *response*.⁴⁹⁰ 'The archive,' Derrida says, 'if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come,

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid*, 9.

⁴⁸⁹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 26.

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid*, 36.

later on or perhaps never'.⁴⁹¹ To expose the structural unknowing of the gathered is to demonstrate the essential failure of archival authority. An avowal and demonstration that exposes and aggravates the archive's essential opening to the future, its augmentation and living-on, for better and/or for worse.⁴⁹² Structurally taken into account, the coming of the

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁹² That an archive's essential opening to the future is necessarily for better and/or for worse springs from what Derrida designates as the law of contamination. Speaking in the context, amongst other things, the necessary possibility of contamination of Nietzsche's texts by Nazi ideology, Derrida gives the following account of a logic of contamination as both threat and chance:

There is a time and a spacing of the "yes" as "yes-yes": it takes time to say "yes." A single "yes" is, therefore, immediately double, it immediately announces a "yes" to come and already recalls that the "yes" implies another "yes." So, the "yes" is immediately double, immediately "yes-yes." This immediate duplication is the source of all possible contamination [...] The second "yes" can eventually be one of laughter or derision at the first "yes." It can be the forgetting of the first "yes." [...] With this duplicity we are at the heart of the "logic" of contamination. One should not simply consider contamination as a threat, however. To do so continues to ignore this very logic. Possible contamination must be assumed, because it is also opening or chance, our chance. Without contamination we would have no opening or chance. Contamination is not only to be assumed or affirmed: it is the very possibility of affirmation in the first place. For affirmation to be possible, there must always be at least two "yes's." If the contamination of the first "yes" by the second is refused – for whatever reasons – one is denying the very possibility of the first "yes." Hence all the contradictions and confusions that this denial can fall into. Threat is chance, chance is threat – this law is absolutely undeniable and irreducible. If one does not accept it, there is no risk, there is only death. If one refuses to take a risk, one is left with nothing but death [Derrida quoted in Hägglund, 34].

More closely related to the question of memory and archival reworking, Derrida asserts in another interview, that there is no historical progress in general without the threat of a return of the worst. 'Yes, a ghost can return as the worst, but without this revenance, and if one challenges its irreducible originality, one is also depriving oneself of memory, legacy and justice [...]'. [Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations. Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*. trans. & ed. Elisabeth Rottenberg. (Stanford California: Stanford University Press 2002), 106]. Here, counter-

future suspends in the conditional the very possibility of present knowledge, causing the a priori 'failure' of every attempt at 'reading' the archive – or the performance as archive – as Blocker suggests with regards to the archival clutter of references in Goat Island's *The Lastmaker*.⁴⁹³ To designate the frustration of reception as a 'failure' of 'reading,' however, would be appropriate only if it would be possible to know in advance what its success might constitute. Reading would thereby begin to designate a process of following a readymade programme, the ability to hermeneutically decode without difference and remainder.⁴⁹⁴ Such an ideal conception of communication as a

archival remembrance as the unsealing of dangerous capitalizations of silence within various economies of memory – ('My immediate feeling is that what took place in France well before and during World War II – and still more, I would say, during the Algerian War – has reinforced, and therefore overdetermined, the layers of forgetting') – is designated by Derrida as 'contradictory, in both its effects and its motivations [...]. The moment one remembers the worst (out of respect for memory, the truth, the victims, etc.), the worst threatens to return. One ghost recalls another. [...] The two memories relaunch each other [*se renflouent*]; they exacerbate and avert each other; they wage war on each other, necessarily, over and over again. Always on the brink of all possible contaminations. [...]' [Derrida, *Negotiations*, 107, my emphasis].

⁴⁹³ Blocker, 9-10.

⁴⁹⁴ Speaking in the context of reading as an act of translation that facilitates the "living on" [*sur-vie*] of texts *because* they are at once translatable and untranslatable, Derrida gives a brief account of his engagement with the "failure" of translation as the defeat of 'the program of the passage into philosophy' as an absolute transparency of mediation. [Jacques Derrida, *The Ear Of The Other*. ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf. (New York: Schochen Books, 1985), 119-20].

The program of the passage into philosophy signifies in this context [...] that the philosophical operation [...] defines itself [...] as the fixation of a certain concept and project of translation. Let's imagine that it's possible to ask such a question: What does philosophy say? What does the philosopher say when he is being a philosopher? He says: What matters is truth or meaning, and since meaning is before or beyond language, it follows that it is translatable. Meaning has the commanding role, and consequently one must be able to fix its univocality or, in any case, to master its plurivocality. If this plurivocality can be mastered, then translation, understood as the transport of a semantic content into another signifying form, is possible. There is no philosophy

coincidence of coding and decoding able to traverse unscathed a spatio-temporal interval here brings to mind the Aristotelian conception of the medium as a means to an end and the transparency of its scenic variant that renders possible the act of taking in the spectacle with a single view in the final recognition of the unity of action and life.⁴⁹⁵ Or else, the immediacy of consumption by the mere coincidence of the flow of consciousness with the flow of temporal objects of which Bernard

unless translation in this latter sense is possible. Therefore the thesis of philosophy is translatability in this common sense, that is, as the transfer of a meaning or truth from one language to another without any essential harm being done. Obviously, this project [...] has taken a certain number of forms which one could locate throughout the history of philosophy [...]. The origin of philosophy is translation or the thesis of translatability, so that wherever translation in this sense has failed, it is nothing less than philosophy that finds itself defeated (*Derrida, The Ear Of The Other*, 120).

Hinting at a possible transfer between his use of a conception of *sur-vie* and Benjamin's rhetoric of *Überleben* and *Fortleben*, Derrida gives an account of Benjamin's conception of the structure of original texts as survival and the task of the translator that here resonates with the open-ended nature of all archival gathering and living-on of archival remains through their reworking:

A text is original insofar as it is a thing, not to be confused with an organic or a physical body, but a thing, let us say, of the mind, meant to survive the death of the author or the signatory, and to be above or beyond the physical corpus of the text, and so on. The structure of the original text is survival. [...] To understand a text as an original is to understand it independently of its living conditions – the conditions, obviously, of its' author's life – and to understand it instead in its surviving structure. [...] Given the surviving structure of an original text [...] the task of the translator is precisely *to respond* to this demand for survival which is the very structure of the original text. [...] To do this, says Benjamin, the translator must neither reproduce, represent, nor copy the original, nor even, essentially, care about communicating the meaning of the original. Translation has nothing to do with reception or communication or information. [...] [T]he translator must assure the survival, which is to say the growth, of the original. Translation augments and modifies the original, which, in so far as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and grow [*ibid*, 122. my emphasis].

⁴⁹⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 100.

Stiegler speaks in the context of an increasing proleterianisation of producers and consumers by the culture industries.⁴⁹⁶ Yet if reading, to the contrary, precisely implies the hetero-affective encounter with an only partially appropriable other as well as an attitude of resistance to the concatenated continuity of the flow of diverse forms of mediation in order to participate in the intermittent production of meaning qua counter-signature, the facilitated encounter with language as excess – far from foreclosing the possibility of reading – appeals to its very task. What then fails in the facilitated encounter with language as excess is not reading, but the immediacy of consumption. Whereas in the present context the facilitated encounter with language as excess springs from an absence of the unity of an ideal configuration and the subsequent fragility, complexity and bewilderment of the orders of (compositional) gathering, in what follows we will further see the demonstrated failure of consumption closely linked to a compositional strategy of interruption. Such strategies of interruption, as explicitly put to work in Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium*, relaunch, whether knowingly or not, the role gesture plays in the exposition of a non-consumable, divided and exposed present of Epic Theatre in Walter Benjamin's account.⁴⁹⁷ It

⁴⁹⁶ See, Stiegler, 'Anamnesis and Hypomnesis'.

⁴⁹⁷ Interruption, in the context of *Testimonium*, is precisely employed to bring to a halt the flow of the performance along a 'horizontal axis of time without pause' in order to provoke a 'recognition' of the present of performance as the zone or *Schwelle* of a structural disquietance and unknowing. Speaking in the context of the compositional employment of transitional gaps in *Testimonium*, Hixon relates:

Erasure is one approach to transitions. Using this device, the performance tumbles across the horizontal axis of time without pause. One event flows into the other. There are no transitions. If this dynamic forward motion is interrupted with a temporary stop in action, where the performers stop performing, a gap opens up. Those watching become aware of themselves watching and the others in the room watching. Perhaps this is one of the remaining powers of the live event, a recognition of each other, however uncomfortable that may be. The experience of the event follows the logic of its composition. The logic of the composition is facilitated by the guidance of the poet. A performance emerges that provides a place of recognition – a place of recognition as

is thus a failure of consumption that forces the spectator to negotiate the structural division, secrecy and opacity of language as medium by the labour of a process of reading that Samuel Weber fittingly describes as a movement of groping, stumbling and interrupting oneself that may only consider the aftermath of divided marks.⁴⁹⁸ The task of reading thus construed, which here or indeed always doubles up as the task of inheriting, must reject the possibility of a simple consummation and consumption of a given, knowable content. In other words, the failure of consumption opens the chance for reading. Henceforth, the suspense of knowability, the secrecy of an unknowable weight, which, as Derrida reminds us, the concept of the archive must inevitably carry in itself, 'does not weigh only as a negative charge,' but makes of archivization 'a movement of the promise and of the future no less than of recording the past'.⁴⁹⁹ The demonstration of its essential indetermination exposes the counter-archival performance practice as '*dependen[t] with respect to what will come, [...to] all that [which] ties knowledge and memory to the promise*'.⁵⁰⁰ To avow of an archival dependency with respect to the future by rejecting an idea of the archive 'determined as already given, in the past or [...] determinable and thus terminable in a future itself determinable as future present,' Derrida says, is to suspend the very order of classical knowledge.⁵⁰¹ The demonstration of such structural secrecy, Derrida seems to suggest, must seek to 'let' spectral archival marks speak by the performance of a certain restraint or retreat, a 'stepping aside' that is 'the sign of a respect before the future to come of the future to come'.⁵⁰²

acknowledgement of the unknowing of events, people, time, and its passing. [Goulish & Hixon].

⁴⁹⁸ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 299.

⁴⁹⁹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 29.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid*, 29-30 (my emphasis).

⁵⁰¹ *ibid*, 51-2.

⁵⁰² *ibid*, 70. Speaking in the context of a commentary on certain aspects of the writings of the Jewish History scholar Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Derrida notes: '[...] what is at issue for him is letting the images speak in a book of photographs, that is, another species of archive. But each time a

Here, in the context of his development of a messianic structure of archivization, Derrida, with recourse to Walter Benjamin's evocation of 'the "narrow door" for the passage of the Messiah, "at each second,"' in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, is tempted to designate the 'affirmation of the future to come as opening' by the name of door.⁵⁰³ Consequently, if 'the meaning of "archive,"' as Derrida notes, '[...] comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded[,] another way of designating its necessary structural exposure to an uncontrollable future would be to say that every archive, like every house, has a door. Derrida's cautious references to and citations of Benjamin's discourse – a performative repetition and enactment of, if not secret encounter in the figure of the door as metonymy for the structure of the messianic – augments, as we might put it with Derrida on Derrida, a Benjaminian archive that finds itself thereby engrossed whilst simultaneously loosing 'the absolute and meta-textual authority it might claim to have'.⁵⁰⁴ In what follows, I would like to further augment both Benjamin's and Derrida's "archive" by facilitating their secret encounter within the figure of the door and the structure of the messianic. I will begin to do so by attending to the resonances

historian as such decides to "step aside and let... speak," for example to let a photographic specter or Freud's phantom in the monologue speak, it is the sign of a respect before the future to come of the future to come. Thus he is no longer a historian. Good sense tells us there is no history or archive of the future to come. A historian as such never looks to the future, which in the end does not concern him. But meaning something else altogether, is there a historian of the promise, a historian of the [...] door?' [Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 70].

⁵⁰³ Derrida makes a similarly sparse reference to the work of Benjamin in the context of a previous development of the structure of the messianic – a spectral logic of inheritance turned towards the future no less than the past – in a footnote of *Specters of Marx*. There, the reference to the "door" appears, albeit in a different translation, in Derrida's appeal for the necessity to quote and reread, as he emphatically puts it, Benjamin's 'dense, enigmatic and burning' theses 'On the concept of History' '[...] up to the "strait gate" [door] for the passage of the Messiah, namely, every "second"' [Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 228].

⁵⁰⁴ Derrida uses these terms when discussing Yerushalmi's relaunching of the archive of Sigmund Freud. [See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 68].

between the Benjaminian concept of *Rettung* and the Derridian notion of *renvoyer* as we have already encountered it, before addressing the messianic structure figured by the opening of a door in Benjamin's conception of the citability of gesture in Epic Theatre.⁵⁰⁵ For just as the concept of *Rettung* describes a particular relation to the past as future to come, the gestures of Epic Theatre are inextricably linked to the structure of the messianic by the disadjusted time of their citability. Furthermore, the conceptual field of *Rettung* and *renvoyer*, as particular modalities of inheriting that facilitate the living on of an inheritance by augmenting and transforming it, as well as by exposing its essential dehiscence through the virtualisation of "its" future possibilities, here find themselves closely linked to the returning figure of 'repair' in the

⁵⁰⁵ An insightful summary of the conceptual field of relaunching – both *relancer* and *renvoyer* – in the context of the task of inheritance can be found in Samir Haddad's *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy*:

First, *relancer* carries the sense of keeping the inheritance in play, of launching it in one's turn. When an inheritance is received, it is the heir's turn to do something with it. And since the command here is to do this "otherwise," what is to be done is not just a simple repetition of the past. This attests to the active dimension of inheritance, in which the heir has a role to play in making a difference to what is transmitted. At the same time, the "other" in "otherwise" also marks the fact that this first meaning of *relancer* does not imply that inheritance is left solely up to the heir. That one inherits in one's turn signals the place of this action in a historical chain of actions. Others have inherited before, and others will come to inherit after. This takes place beyond the heir's control and is an irreducible part of the inheritance relation. In this way there is an important place occupied by alterity in inheritance, and the activity of relaunching is balanced against the passivity this entails.

The relation to alterity is both amplified and given a more specific articulation in the second meaning of *relancer*, as *renvoyer*. This term, which appears across Derrida's oeuvre, means a sending away, sending back (to the source), and/or sending on. It thus reinforces the first meaning's image of inheritance as constituted in a chain of actions, where a legacy is both acknowledged as given from a past other, and passed on to another to come to live on. [Samir Haddad, *Derrida And The Inheritance of Democracy*. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2013), 33-4].

work of Goat Island. Finally, by returning to a more detailed consideration of certain aspects of Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium*, I seek to show how similar politico-compositional strategies of interruption, suspense (of knowledge, of judgement, of action) and virtualisation are employed in view of an appeal to the coming of an (archival) participation qua response-ability as justice- as well as democracy-to-come.

Relaunching the Archive: Repair, *Rettung*, (Salut).

1. Repair

Perhaps the two most potent if not frequent words used with regards to the work of Goat Island are *response* and *repair*. We have already had ample recourse to the former, whether in the context of the company's performance processes or their accompanying educational programme. The latter term appears, for instance, in the title of the only book-length study on the work of Goat Island – *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* – and plays a major role as an underlying thematic in the performance *When will the September roses bloom/Last night was only a comedy*, which began its development with the question: *how do you repair?* Drawing on a variety of source materials that range from household repair manuals to the poetry of Paul Celan 'the piece questions,' the company states, 'our place in a damaged world and our aptitude at repairing it'.⁵⁰⁶ Although the semantic field of the

⁵⁰⁶ Goat Island *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy. a double performance* [online]. Accessed January 2013, www.goatlandperformance.org/perf-septemberRoses.htm. 'We began this latest work with the question of repair. We looked at repair manuals from the 1950s for we could not find any current repair manuals in Chicago bookstores. The United States no longer repairs. It "disposes of" instead' [See Bottoms & Goulis ed. 31]. 'Celan had been brought into rehearsal by Matthew around the idea of repair – Celan took

word repair may find itself quickly inscribed in a theological narrative of the Fall and its prospective overcoming as salvation or redemption – that is, as the task of healing, curing or remedying what has been damaged, of restoring, rehabilitating, rebuilding or retrieving an originary plenitude and absolute indemnity – it cannot and must not here be reduced to it. Similarly, notwithstanding the redemptive logic of repair inscribed in the injunction of justice construed as the task of putting right, correcting, redressing and adjusting some form of past or present dis-adjustment, that is, the bringing into alignment or straightening out of a time that is crooked or ‘out of joint,’ the call for justice qua repair can and must here be differently construed. To be sure, not everything in the work and discourse of Goat Island can perhaps be fully distinguished from a struggle for justice in the name of absolute justice. Despite its clearest efforts to raise the stakes of complexity, absolute justice might at times indeed remain the distant horizon, as Bottoms’ seems to suggest, of what he subsequently confusingly calls with recourse to Derrida the company’s systematic engagement with ‘the possibility of the impossible’.⁵⁰⁷ If so, my reading is concerned with all aspects of the work that might allow us to think otherwise. Bottom’s recourse to the Derridian logic of impossibility is confused in the context of his own argument as far as for Derrida impossibility precisely describes the structural impossibility of an absolute – whether of presence, self-containment, identity, closure, or indeed the ethical ideal and regulative idea of justice as total repair – from which he is seemingly unable to fully disentangle his account of the ethico-political stance of Goat Island’s practice. Derrida’s account of a structural impossibility of anything ever being in itself seems irreconcilable with what Bottoms continues to call ‘the responsibility of artists to at least attempt to seed a more redemptive environ/mental system’.⁵⁰⁸ Unless, that is, seeding would here amount to a gesture of dissemination (rather than the embryonic

on the project, through his poetry, of “repairing” the German language after the holocaust’ [ibid, 139].

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid*, 25.

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid*.

origin of a process of ripening) that can only ever facilitate a *more or less* redemptive future, without any guarantees. Although Bottoms clearly situates Goat Island's engagement with impossibility in the 'contradictions' and 'blind spots' of responsibility that warrant his recourse to Derrida's conception of the latter as "a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible*," he nevertheless and almost within the same breath remains within a logic of the horizon of a postponed possibility when he conceives of the smallness of the act of repair as a minimal starting point in face of the scale of the problems confronted: 'Perhaps we *need* to start small,' he says, 'given the scale of the problems confronting us'.⁵⁰⁹ Impossibility, however, as "the *condition* of possibility of this thing called responsibility," as Bottoms' quotation from *The Other Heading* itself seems to suggest, is never reducible to a problem of scale, but instead constitutes an essential, paradoxical condition of possibility: of responsibility as much as of justice and thus of repair.⁵¹⁰ Martin Hägglund sums up this structural condition of impossibility with regards to justice as follows: 'the possibility of justice is [...] the impossibility of absolute justice. Justice is and *must be* more or less unjust, since it must demarcate itself against a future that exceeds it and may call it into question'.⁵¹¹ It is not here a matter of discrediting the call to justice – whether Bottoms' or indeed Goat Island's – for its relation to an however much postponed absolute horizon, but rather to reveal its logical incoherence, particularly in light of what throughout we have identified as the distinct political "power" of theatre and theatricality more generally, as well as certain aspects of the work of Goat Island (and Every house has a door) in particular. In short, it is precisely what I have discerned – with Benjamin, Weber and Derrida – as the demonstrative power at exposing the structural impossibility of closure and self-containment qua (critical) response-ability, which links these acts of repair to what Derrida describes, as Hägglund puts it, 'the

⁵⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*, (my emphasis).

⁵¹¹ Hägglund 42-3, (my emphasis).

negative infinity of justice as an infinite perfectibility, which is the same as an infinite corruptibility and undercuts the regulative Idea of final perfection'.⁵¹² The gesture of the rehearsal, or else, the rehearsal of a gesture, repeats otherwise whilst at the same time more or less demonstratively appealing to the coming possibility of "its" transformed repetition, whether by others or the self as other. Put in another code, it is a demonstratively democratic posturing [*Haltung*] that exposes its non-identical dehiscence, reckons with its own principle of ruin and calls for being further called into question: revised and transformed in the aftermath [*Nachwirkung*] of a participatory [*Mitwirkung*] afterthought [*Nachdenken*] that facilitates the afterlife [*Nachleben*] of "original," that is, originally split marks of an inheritance. The act of repair thus construed facilitates survival through transformative repetitions that are themselves exposed as transformatively repeatable. Its "power" is that of a weak force, which is not the same as a small force, and cannot be described as a compromised small first step on route to a however distant consummation.⁵¹³ Instead, it is the demonstrated mark of an

⁵¹² *ibid*, 169.

⁵¹³ Calling for a necessary if fragile distinction between "sovereignty" and "unconditionality" in *Rogues*, Derrida links the renunciation of sovereignty as the opening to the singular coming of the other to the notion of a 'weak force.' What is more, he hints at the relation of what we might call a gesture of letting or restraint, that is, a certain passivity in the active taking up of an inheritance – the figure that comes closest to describe such a gesture in *Rogues* is that of the *renvoi*, 'this sending or putting off,' which 'gestures toward the past of an inheritance only by remaining to come' (Derrida, *Rogues*, 9) – to the participatory call for distribution or sharing.

But through certain experiences that will be central to this book, and, more generally, through the experience that lets itself be affected by what or who comes [(*ce qui vient*), by what happens or by who happens, by *the other to come*, a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty is required a priori. Even before the act of a decision. Such a distribution or sharing also presupposes that we think at once the unforeseeability of an event that is necessarily without horizon, the singular coming of the other, and, as a result, a *weak force*. This vulnerable force, this force without power, opens up unconditionally to what or who *comes* and comes to affect it. The coming of this event exceeds the condition of

essential vulnerability, an unconditional opening to the coming of time on which the possibility of a structurally impossible –possible impossible – justice depends. Although absolutely severed from any form of guarantee (i.e. of justice), its structural impossibility of plenitude, as Hägglund continues, is nevertheless ‘not a privation but the possibility of change at any juncture, for better or worse’.⁵¹⁴ The impossibility of absolute repair marks the act of repair with an essential disadjustment as the condition for a justice, as well as a democracy (qua participation), which, as Derrida repeatedly stresses, albeit unable to wait must paradoxically always remain to come. If the act of repair transforms as much as it restores, we might say that it is always already of the order of a response by its selective and inventive reworking of an inheritance. What is more, the participatory (critical, “creative”) response to or reworking of a given inheritance (i.e. a given social organisation, an available apparatus, a more or less accessible archive) is in turn breached in its integrity, carrying within it a principle of ruin that opens it to the coming of its ongoing participatory transformations. It is thus

mastery and the conventionally accepted authority of what is called the “performative.” (ibid, 14).

In our context it seems necessary to at least point towards the resonance between Derrida’s conception of a ‘weak force’ of messianicity and Benjamin’s notion of ‘a weak messianic power.’ I will return to this theme in a little more detail later on. In any case, the degree of consonance or dissonance between Derrida’s and Benjamin’s respective conceptions of the messianic are widely contested and any detailed analysis hampered by Derrida’s sparse references to the Benjaminian inheritance and the latter’s dense and enigmatic style. A detailed consideration of their difference perhaps exceeds the scope and also the tenor of my project. Certainly at times this amounts to a violently selective reading that more or less unjustly homes in on their compatibility rather than differences, particularly with regards to a reading of Benjamin that focuses on those elements of his texts that allow for a deconstructive assimilation. Of course, a similar thing can indeed always be said for those arguments that seek to discern if not protect a simple and neat division between the two. For a detailed, patient and nuanced comparative reading between Benjamin’s and Derrida’s conceptions of the messianic see Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory. History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida*. (New York: State University of New York Press 2005).
⁵¹⁴ Hägglund, 169.

active and passive at the same time, interventive if not inventive and simultaneously vulnerably exposed. Acts of repair may therefore be proffered only provisionally from time to time, severed from all recourse to a horizon of consummation, in order to constitute what Derrida calls ‘a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible*’.⁵¹⁵ To repair is to facilitate a precarious survival through a gesture of relaunching (or the relaunching of a gesture) of (archival) marks, objects and rituals that seeks to ward off the forgetting or mere consumption of an inheritance, recasting its dominant interpretations, interrupting the flow of its sedimented transmission and dispensing with a horizon of consummation of what we might here designate its (re-)work of mourning.

If a culture of repair is able to *resist* – and it is precisely a matter here of a with-standing the force of a flow of continuity, a stoppage, halt and stance more or less firm – a passive consumerist cycle of consumption, waste and replacement, this is because its constitutive impossibility at restoring an original plenitude calls for a continued participatory reworking. Here, a look at the practical realm of things, in which repair constitutes a process of mending as *reworking*, might fittingly illustrate such a non-redemptive movement of repair.⁵¹⁶ The act of repair that *reworks*, and thereby facilitates the living-on of things, neither hides a preceding damage nor its own intervention, giving second (third, fourth, fifth...) life whilst giving to view an object’s historicity.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Derrida quoted in Bottoms & Goulsh ed. 25.

⁵¹⁶ In our context it is perhaps of interest to call attention to John Mowitt’s suggestion to translate the Brechtian concept of *Umfunktionierung* as “re: working”. “Refunctionalization” has emerged as the standard translation of *Umfunktionierung*. While not dissatisfied with this, I propose the perhaps rebarbative alternative “re: working” because it has the advantage of keeping work, working, and workers in focus, while, through the prefix set off by a colon, underscoring both work, working, and workers are under reconstruction and that the term is about itself, its own reworking. [...]’ [John Mowitt, *Radio. Essays in Bad Reception*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press 2011), 207].

⁵¹⁷ Goulsh hints at this multiplication of lives when considering the repair of an object. ‘A repair,’ he says, ‘gives an object a triple life, and

What is reworked may only ever be ‘as good as new’ or indeed simply ‘patched up’ by a more or less transformative reconstruction.⁵¹⁸ What here counts for the practical realm is also at work in the symbolic, where the effort to “repair” – for instance Celan’s – of a certain cultural inheritance, may leave in place and thereby expose the historicity of the “found” or inherited gestural, image or textual material retrieved from the historical world. Phil Stanier, when reflecting on Goat Island’s *When will the September roses bloom/Last night was only a comedy*, situates the latter squarely within such a non-redemptive tradition of repair. In Stanier’s reading, the performance proffers small acts of repair as an alternative both to ‘the accelerated cycle of replacement common within capitalist culture,’ as well as a desire for ‘recovery wherein the original state of being is restored and the fault or loss is forgotten’. In doing so, Stanier suggests, the work employs acts of repair that leave an awareness of the fault in place.⁵¹⁹ Once again, a look at the construction of the material world of these performances might here give us an insight into the handling or gestural bearing of its symbolic material. In response to the question ‘how do you repair?’ Goat Island member Mark Jeffrey relates, the company considered working with principles of lightness, fragility, collapse, falling and uncertainty: constructing tables out of cardboard, chairs missing legs and forever unbalanced, crutches of wood and cardboard to hold people up. ‘In states of repair,’ Jeffrey states, ‘tables teeter, topple, collapse. Repairs are made with parcel tape and cardboard. *Lightness creates its own weight*. As more weight and pressure is applied, rigid temporary states become states of fragility. Objects are

makes that tripleness visible. [...] We see three [objects] at once – whole, damaged, repaired’ [Bottoms & Goulsh ed. 175].

⁵¹⁸ Joe Kelleher’s account of Goat Island’s ‘The Lastmaker’ relates the impression that the material submitted to rehearsal in gestural recall has the feel of something hoarded, treasured, picked up and *patched up*, that is, found and often *repaired* objects retrieved from the historical world [see Kelleher, 100].

⁵¹⁹ Bottoms & Goulsh ed. 95.

always in a state of imbalance, instability'.⁵²⁰

⁵²⁰ *ibid*, 42 (my emphasis). The fragile material 'world' that these performances construct out of acts of repair might here be designated as a minimal *resistance* to the destructive *flow* of a culture of consumption. 'Today we are continually consuming things,' Stiegler says, 'which, because they are always new, become increasingly difficult to establish as things, so much so that they are increasingly without place, and less and less do they give rise to that for which things exist, which is to say, a world' [Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, 86].

Although Stiegler's recourse to the affirmative rhetoric of a relative stability of place might at first here appear to be in contradiction with everything we have thus far put forward under the rubric of a general uncertainty of place and taking-place in the structure of iterability, it is nevertheless not irreconcilable with it. For the structure of iterability as we have discerned it, is made of a double movement, both dependent on a minimal security and stability of place, of identity and abode – in short, of the construction of a more or less sharable 'world' – that springs from the interruptive movement of time becoming space, the possibility of return, repetition and transmission, as well as an immediate impartibility that undermines the very ground that makes it possible by the concomitant movement of space becoming time. An always necessary but limited security of place here finds itself immediately and paradoxically without place, marked by an essential precariousness: a place without place, held in place merely by what we might here designate a fragile weight of lightness.

Stiegler's comments on the necessity to resist a culture of consumption through the establishment of things, places and worlds are here perhaps particularly apt if read in the wider context of his own reflections on the reduction of symbolic reception to a proletarianised consumerism that is unable to participate in the re-production of culture. In this context of a resistance to symbolic consumerism, as we saw in brief, it is also a matter of interrupting the flow of temporal objects that coincide with the flow of consciousness. Here, interruption and spacing is able to facilitate participation qua after-thoughts that are able to consign their movements to repeatable, transmissible spatial marks that give rise to an (however secret) sharing of a 'world.'

The relationship between spatial resistance and the movement of thought also plays an important part in Joe Kelleher's reflections on the work of Goat Island. Kelleher underscores the importance of the underlying image material of its rehearsed gestures of repetitive recall by figuring them with reference to Mary Carruther's study of the techniques of medieval monastic meditation as 'machines (i.e. devices for lifting things up and constructing things) that enable the lifting and construction of complex thought' [Kelleher, 100]. For Kelleher, thinking takes place in these performances as 'some sort of physicalized meditation, based upon the remembering of hoarded, treasured, or picked up and patched up material' [*ibid*]. Kelleher's description of a hoarded treasure serving as the memory support for a physicalized

meditation here recalls our comparison of the performance works of Goat Island and Every house has a door to Foucault's description of the use of the *hypomnemata* for a practice of self-writing. A comparison that is perhaps further warranted by Kelleher's account of the necessarily unfaithful relation to the imitated material, which is never merely recuperated, he says, so much as put to use 'as a way of thinking "through" and "into," so that what the performance exhibits [...] is something like a "craft knowledge," what the historian of medieval monastic intellectual practices Mary Carruthers has called a "craft of thought" [...] [ibid]. 'All of which is to say,' Kelleher concludes, 'that there is *no* thinking in this work that is not a matter of moving through and into the architectures that support the thought' [ibid, 101]. This, of course, can be said of all thinking, which always requires, as Carruthers puts it, some mental tool or machine. The particular value of these performances is to be found in the exposition of such dependencies, that is, the *model* character of the labour and technique of thinking it performs. If their demonstratively mnemonic thinking, as Kelleher relates, seeks 'to marry a respect for the primacy of the object of thought [...] – a respect that here must recall everything we have said about a performative and appropriative *restraint* with regards to the mimetically appropriated material – 'with the integrity of a subjective response, a creative remaking or reuse[,] the demonstrative distance between the two is partly employed in view of what we might designate as the desired 'open source' nature of their craft of thought. For 'this craft of thought is also,' Kelleher states, 'essentially, social and public. By that I mean that it is rhetorical, having to do with the production, dissemination, and exchange of structures for thinking: persuasive structures, inventive structures, structures that we too may recall and re-inhabit, the morning after the performance or ten years after the performance, using these as our own thinking devices, our own tools for invention' [ibid]. Finally, when Kelleher seeks to reconcile his reading of the performance as such a shared craft of thought with the curious difficulty of remembering it in any detail, he precisely foregrounds the general model character of the kind of work it performs rather than the specifics of its instantiation. Much could perhaps be said here about the complex relationship between the performance as an event that is always already, to put it in a Derridian code, (demonstratively) dislocated, disjointed in a time outside itself, beside itself, unhinged, not gathered together in its place, in its present etc. – that is, split between a respected object recalled, a responsive, inventive act of recall, as well as a future called – and its memory that will always already be augmented across different times and places, like the specifics of a witnessed labour of enactment and its archival elsewhere: i.e. the constellations of proper names and fragments of textual, image and gestural material before which the unique gestures of citational recall at all times also retreat. Here, the clear separation of the retraced material and the physical retracing, between the remembered and the act of remembering, or else between the object of thought and its reworking, problematizes easy consumption and calls for

Put more generally, Karen Christopher sums up what we might here designate as a non-redemptive act of repair: 'As part of our effort to approach the idea of repair, *September Roses* attempts to perform incompleteness, to force a kind of fracture that does not automatically heal itself'.⁵²¹ In the context of a gesture of remembrance of historical damage or dis-adjustment, the effort of repair that does not seek to install health once and for all, begins to constitute a work of mourning *against consolation*.⁵²² It is the effort to 'save' and keep "alive," or better, to facilitate a survival and living-on of the memory of an injustice without the prospect of its final redemption. Resisting a loss of world brought on by the cycle of consumption and waste, it exposes the historicity of its own intervention by appealing to a coming response-ability. Yet even a culture of repair thus construed, albeit no longer concerned with an absolute recovery and restoration, seems nevertheless difficult to fully disentangle from the status of an original accident that the act of repair somewhat seems to nevertheless imply. Thus, in order to divorce it more

the interruptive, participatory, transformative reuse of its hypomnemic assemblage. In any case, Kelleher, who perhaps too hastily divorces the performance's participatory call from the specifics of its *hypomnemic* treasure-chest, nevertheless makes a convincing case for its call for a labour of the after-thought ('the next morning,' 'ten years later') that is no longer tied to anything remembered in detail, but a more general exemplarity of what we might here suitably call the model character of a *Haltung*: 'Except... [...] I don't remember anything in detail. [...] Rather, the bits seem to get pulled back as they appear into the "what goes on," back into the communal human operation that performs its way of thinking in front of you, so that what you might take away is the memory of a sort of imageless theatre that offers itself, above all, as a re-iterated *example* of its own practice, an example that I reiterate in my remembering of the work, a practice we can borrow from and imitate certainly (and in our classrooms many of us have been doing that for some time) but only by way of a rehearsal that – in the context of an attempt to remember what it was like and to follow the way – risks engaging in a form of betrayal' [ibid].

⁵²¹ Bottoms & Goulish ed. 106.

⁵²² I am taking the latter phrasing from the title of Martin Jay's essay 'Against Consolation: Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn' in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 221-239. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999).

fully, not only from the horizon of a telos of recovery but the belief in the purity of an origin, I would like to recast the 'act of repair' in light of Benjamin's notion of *Rettung*. Like repair, the word *Rettung* also finds itself inscribed in a semantic field of a saving redemption, as one possible translation of the term would have it. Yet in Walter Benjamin's hands *Rettung* undergoes a decisive transformation. Employed to describe an interruptive intervention into the violently subsumptive transmission of a *course* of history and the seeming transparency of the flow of its mediation, *Rettung* precisely saves from the closure of a phantasmatic self-identity by exposing the originary crack [*Sprung*] of finite phenomena. Following this logic, the origin was always already breached and exposed, swelling under the future of "its" transformative survival. The act of *Rettung*, seeking to expose an original dehiscence by interrupting its abstracted, sedimented transmission, returns to the crack [*Sprung*] in the origin [*Ursprung*] in order to re-launch it, that is, in order to return to the originary leap [*Sprung*] at play in the crack of the (word) origin "itself."

2. *Rettung*

Walter Benjamin's writings famously reveal an acute awareness of the entanglements of power with the closure of a cultural heritage that he famously likened to 'the spoils carried along in the triumphal processions in which today's rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot.' In resistance to a closure of inheritance qua tradition, much of Benjamin's scholarly efforts draw their palpable pathos from the necessity, as he puts it, to brush history against the grain of its transmission.⁵²³

Benjamin's concept of *Rettung* perhaps constitutes an attempt to describe a technique, modality and style of such a brush. In a scene of inheritance and self-inheritance, he employs and reemploys the term *Rettung* – a word that can be widely translated as rescue, salvation, salvage, redemption, retrieval or saving – at several instances throughout

⁵²³ Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', *Illuminationen*, 254.

his work. Benjamin thereby relaunches a concept of *Rettung* as another name for the very gesture of *relaunching* and inflects it with the play of difference that it itself seeks to expose. In Benjamin's writings, *Rettung* finds itself linked not only to the different strands of its etymology and historical use – but furthermore to the shifting contexts throughout the development of his own thought. For instance, he appropriates the concept of *Rettung* from German romanticism, where it seeks to describe a critical reconsideration of a work's reception history by an effort to recover an original work from its distorted transmission, yet notably complicates the relation of a history of reception to the “original” work.⁵²⁴ A complication, as the inverted commas in the previous sentence suggest, that will largely centre on a quite different conception of the origin as well as that of an original (work).⁵²⁵ In its widest sense, as

⁵²⁴ Opitz & Wizisla, 627.

⁵²⁵ If the Benjaminian gesture of *Rettung* entails, like that of the Romantics, a movement of return to the “origin,” the latter must however no longer be conceived as a final point of (de-)termination. The “origin” [*Ursprung*], for Benjamin, is never simple but finds itself divided by a ‘crack’ [*Sprung*] that splits its present into a pre- and a post-history. ‘[I]t is less a self-contained phenomenon,’ as Samuel Weber relates, ‘than a complex relationship that is described as a “rhythm” (see Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 89). In this dynamic scenario, an ‘original movement of restoration or reinstatement remains forever incomplete and never reaches its goal,’ making of every work that is no longer self-contained or lasting, as Weber puts it ““only” the stopping-place of an ongoing movement’ (ibid, 91). ‘In origin,’ Weber says, ‘the goal ends up as interruption’ (ibid, 136). Calling a word back to its origin by summoning it by its name, as Benjamin will say with regards to the citational writing practice of Karl Kraus, far from recovering a secure place and time of an absolute beginning, exposes the dynamic aspect of a structural failure of institution, and thus the possibility of ongoing historical transformation qua necessary reinstatement of a divided origin. The latter is ‘from the start, as it were, caught up in a process of repetition that involves alteration and transformation, dislocation and displacement’ [ibid, 90]. In other words, citation exposes an originary virtual historicity qua (historical) citability. The same principle of a structural virtuality is at work in all of Benjamin's –abilities. He develops his reflections of the relation between an “original” (work) and its afterlife or survival most elaborately in the context of his reflections on translation. There it is also a matter of identifying an originary translatability of works as a potential that can be realized but that always already splits (*teilt*) a non-identical original in the process of departing from itself before or beyond any such

Heinrich Kaulen relates, for Benjamin the term *Rettung* takes on the role of a counter-concept [*Gegenbegriff*] to the concept of myth as the inextricable course of a fated life and as resistance to abstract right 'to which it opposes the *attention* to the non-conceptual substrate of experience, the unique [*das Besondere*] and non-identical'.⁵²⁶

realizations). Returning a contextually congealed mark to its "original" potentiality thereby describes a movement that is simultaneously directed towards the future and the past. It exposes the origin's structural historicity, which, as Weber relates, 'resides not in its ability to give rise to a progressive, teleological movement, but rather in its power to return incessantly to the past and through the rhythm of its ever-changing repetitions set the pace for the future' [ibid, 89]. To return to the origin of an inheritance is thus more akin to a movement of relaunching it that entails difference as much as repetition. Furthermore, it exposes or aggravates its historical potentiality by wresting it from the congealment of its transmission history. The irreparable fissure or crack in the origin, Weber suggests, both 'impairs the possibility of history ever being written or thought of in a full and authentic manner,' and 'constitutes the chance of history to be something more than the mere registration and reproduction of what has been' [ibid, 138-9]. Such a chance we might here also designate as an originally inscribed potentiality of participation qua response-ability.

⁵²⁶ See Opitz & Wizisla, 625, (my emphasis). The latter part of Kaulen's description of an 'attention to the unique and non-identical' here recalls Hixon's exclaimed interest in 'the particulars' as we have seen it linked to the non-performance of an appropriative restraint in the performance work of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*. Elsewhere, Hixon furthermore links *attention* – which is always an attention to the particular, that is, to what exceeds the congealed schemata of perceptive processing – to a necessary restraint of intentionality. She does so by relating 'a thought on bewilderment as a way of entering the day, a movement forward that is actually a catching up of what is coming toward you and the reversal of intention into attention' (Companion, *When will the September*). Bewilderment here describes perhaps nothing other than a non-conceptual experience of an excess of the particular, which will always be linked to affect (i.e. bewilderment, shock, astonishment) as a form of recognition that does not simply reproduce a prior cognition. In the context of these remarks, namely *Goat Island's* performance *When will the September roses bloom/Last night was only a comedy*, it seems fitting to further relate Hixon's statement to the thought of the philosopher, mystic and factory worker Simone Weil, of whom Hixon says that she does not fit easily into the usual histories of modern philosophy and perhaps appears precisely for that reason as a figure in the performance. "'We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them[.]" Hixon quotes Weil elsewhere, 'but by waiting for them. This way of looking is, in the first place, *attentive*. The soul *empties* itself

In Benjamin's early work on a philosophy of language, as Kaulen notes, rescue [*Rettung*] from abstraction is put into play by an act of

of all its own contents in order to receive the human being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only one who is capable of *attention* can do this.” [Hixon in *Live Art and Performance*. ed. Adrian Heathfield (London: Tate Publishing 2004), 131, my emphasis]. Bringing into relation Hixon's evocation of Weil's description of attention as an emptying of the soul's contents with her own thought on bewilderment as a way of entering the day, that is, with a particular attitude [*Haltung*] towards the coming of time, might return us to Derrida's recourse to the concept of *kenosis* as the passive act of leaving an empty place for the coming of someone absolute indeterminate in a disadjusted present. However, the aspect of Weil's discourse that speaks of an encounter with the 'truth' of being ('just as he *is*') of the human being, for which attention is said to prepare in waiting, somewhat jars with Derrida's conception of the coming of an event. One aspect of what underlies this difference may concern two diverging conceptions of the 'unique' as either singular or individual. 'If the latter generally involves the claim of being *indivisible*,' as Samuel Weber relates, 'singularity by contrast is accessible only through its constitutive divisibility' [Samuel Weber, 'Feel of Today' presentation at The London Graduate School Summer Academy in the Critical Humanities, 26th of June, 2014]. As such, the experience of singularity is irreconcilable with that of plenitude – for instance the encounter with a proper and properly unique subject, just as he or she *is*. Instead, 'constituted by an intrinsic split, by a constitutive division that prevents it from ever being strictly contemporaneous with itself' [...] singularity, Weber says, 'can only be experienced through a certain absence, difference or perhaps better, as a certain *resistance*' [ibid]. Whereas individuality describes a uniqueness that would be able to more or less remain the same over time, singularity emerges precisely as what resists a repetition on which it nevertheless depends. For Weber, in an account that here begins to resonate with Hixon's thought on the link between the passivity of attention and the affect of bewilderment, it is precisely what resists the plenitude of a repetition that no longer comes full circle that exceeds a conceptual grip on phenomena and ties it to the experience of feeling. 'Since it emerges only in and through withdrawal,' Weber says, 'it [the singular] can never constitute a stable and identifiable object of cognition. The singular, then, belongs to the experience not of knowledge but of acknowledgement through affect, as a form of recognition that does not simply reproduce a prior cognition' [ibid, 5]. Finally, Weber's reflections are nevertheless able to return us back to another aspect of Weil's terminology by relaunching the figure of a 'truth' of the unique. For given that its characteristic mode of emergence is that of withdrawal from determinate repetition, Weber is able to describe singularity as the reappearance of the Heideggerian motif of truth as *aletheia*, albeit, as he adds, in a more temporal or "temporized" mode [ibid].

naming that frees ‘the unique signature of objects’ from the assimilating grip of a concept [*Begriff*]. A similar constellation of *Rettung* and naming informs Benjamin’s discussion of the citational writing practice of Karl Krauss.⁵²⁷

In this context, the activity of naming qua saving [*rettende*] citation finds itself inextricably related to an endeavour to interrupt and prise open the concatenated flow of sentences and words in order to free fragments from their linear contextual subsumption. Krauss’s citational polemics, Benjamin emphatically relates, apply a crowbar to the most delicate joints of the concatenated text, breaking and slashing into the syllables.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ In our context, it is non-fortuitous that Benjamin’s portrait of Kraus’s citational writing style is notably held in theatrical terms. “‘I am’,” says Kraus, says Benjamin, “‘perhaps the first case of a writer who experiences his writing like an actor [*schauspielerisch*]’ [Benjamin, ‘Karl Kraus’, 364]. Kraus’s ‘mimic genius,’ says Benjamin, ‘copies and makes faces’ in commentary and polemic. It ‘unleashes ceremonially in the public readings [*Vorlesungen*] of dramas who’s authors non-fortuitously take up a curious middle position [*Mittelstellung*]: Shakespeare and Nestroy, poet and actor; Offenbach, composer and conductor’ [ibid]. Here, the reference is to Kraus’s one-man public readings of plays and operettas. Yet beyond the latter, his ‘mimical’ style of writing that ‘creeps into [its] material’ – staging it qua transforming citation – seems never far from the modality of a theatrical performativity itself. What is therefore non-fortuitous about Kraus’s choice of literature for his public readings and their author’s so-called middle position [*Mittelstellung*] is that it echoes Kraus’s own taste for the middle, lodged somewhere in the interstices between text and performance, archive and staging, signature and counter-signature, writing and reading. We are thus never far from what we might designate as an aspect of demonstrated ‘performativity’ that exposes the illusory stability of congealed identities by exposing their divided origin [*Ur-sprung*] upon an arche-stage.

⁵²⁸ The polemic aspects of Kraus’s citational writing style perhaps somewhat jars with the relationship of the modality of citation to the cited material in the works of *Goat Island* and *Every house has a door*. It is for this reason that I am here avoiding the overtly violent rhetoric by which Benjamin at times describes it. For instance, Kraus, according to Benjamin, not only takes recourse to a crowbar but a ‘crowbar of hatred’ – its breaking and slashing of syllables in so many ways out to do harm or in any case ‘punish’ the context of its intervention. Upping the ante on a theatrical register, Benjamin furthermore repeatedly evokes the image of a citational cannibalism, which interiorizes its adversaries – like an actor would a part – in order to destroy them [Benjamin, ‘Karl Kraus’ in

Gesammelte Schriften Band II. 334-367. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag), 365, 372 & 375]. Thus, not unlike a certain aspect of Brechtian distanciation, here, a citational repetition may appropriate a detested source in order to reveal a critical distance of the performance to the performed. Such a violently critical relation to the cited source is absent from the work of Goat Island and *Every house has a door*, which is notably unpolemic, displaying instead an overtly loving relationship to its source materials. As such, it resembles the gesture of the amateur, if the latter, as Stiegler notes, 'is the name given to one who loves works or who realizes him- or herself in traversing such works' [Stiegler, 'Anamnesis and Hypomnesis']. The amateur's participatory or contributory relation to the work that is loved, however, implies and opens the possibility of the latter's critique. In our context, it is furthermore of note, that Stiegler, in contrast to the consumer, links the critical, participatory relation of the amateur to the work loved to the capacity of a careful attention. 'To love anything at all,' Stiegler says, 'is like loving nothing at all, and to love nothing at all is to be no longer capable of careful attention: the amateur can no longer love wherever consumption has killed attentiveness to what is consumed' [ibid]. In any case, the relevance of Kraus's citational polemics for our present consideration imposes itself in this context not through its ability to 'punish' but to 'save' [*retten*]. Benjamin himself exclaims a preference for the 'saving' [*rettende*] aspect of the Krausian citation. Albeit impossible to strictly separate it from violence altogether, as well as always also at work in every punishment, *Rettung* here nevertheless distinguishes itself from 'punishment' by its primary concern with the future of an uncontrollable afterlife rather than the mere critique of a previous context. Relaunching an inheritance by upping the ante on its withdrawal from knowledge into the secret of irony and overdetermination, a 'saving citation' exposes the structural breach [*Sprung*] and disadjustment at the origin [*Ursprung*] of the mark in order to aggravate and multiply its potential afterlife. Echoing a theme that Derrida developed at length in *Specters of Marx* and 'Force of Law' – and that will become increasingly relevant in my reading of *Every house has a door's* performance *Testimonium* – Benjamin hails the exposed structural disadjustment of a language 'saved' from contextual closure as 'the matrix of justice.' See for instance the following extract from Benjamin's essay on Kraus, which touches on the relationship between citation, naming, interruption, destruction, punishment, *Rettung* and justice as I have evoked them here:

From within the linguistic compass of the name, and only from within it, can we discern Kraus's basic polemical procedure: citation. To quote a word is to call it by its name. So Kraus's achievement exhausts itself at its highest level by making even the newspaper citable. He transports it to his own sphere, and the empty phrase is suddenly forced to recognize that even in the deepest dregs of the journals it is not safe from the voice that swoops on the wings of the word to drag it from its darkness. How

They do so in an effort to wrest language from its reduction to pure instrumentality. In Benjamin's account, Kraus's saving gesture is thus performed in view of an encounter with language as excess. Language, for Benjamin as well as Kraus, is fundamentally non-instrumental. Even where it is treated in the most instrumental way possible – Kraus's privileged and abhorred example is the newspaper – it will have been citable. As citable it will carry the deferred trace of a difference that a saving, transforming citation is able to expose. Therefore it is never merely a question of opposing one possible use of language with another, but rather of exposing, despite all appearances to the contrary, the structural failure of the purity of language's instrumentality. The more or less destructive, if not deconstructive force of *Rettung's* interruptive intervention is thus necessarily of the order of a demonstration of what is already structurally at work by itself before and beyond it. To actively intervene qua punishing and saving citation is to expose the false appearance of a transparent instrumentality of language. As the power of this illusory appearance always turns out to be related to a certain 'flow,' rescue [*Rettung*] from the reduction to instrumentality qua citation implies the movement of an interruption and subsequent suspense. In Benjamin's essay on Kraus, two interrelated types or orders of an illusory flow can be identified. On the one hand, as the wielding of a citational crowbar indicates it, it is from the semantic linearity of the 'idyllic con-

wonderful if this voice approaches not to punish but to save [*retten*], as it does on the Shakespearean wings of the lines in which, before the town of Arras, someone sends word home of how in the early morning, on the last blasted tree beside the fortifications, a lark began to sing. A single line, and not even one of his, is enough to enable Kraus to descend, as saviour, into this inferno, and insert a single italicization: "It was a nightingale and not a lark which sat there on the pomegranate tree and sang." In the quotation that both saves and punishes, language proves the matrix of justice. It summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin [*Ursprung*]. [Benjamin, *The work of Art*, 384; Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, 379].

text of sense' that the word as name must be roused.⁵²⁹ Here, to cite is to prise open the successive, concatenated 'pseudo-logic of the discourse' – to recall an expression of Roland Barthes speaking in the context of Brecht's interruptive techniques of distancing marks from an elaborate layer of contextual codification – 'links, transitions, the patina of elocution, in short *the continuity of speech*' that produces the effect 'of a kind of force, [...] an illusion of assurance'.⁵³⁰ Or put in the rhetoric of Benjamin's study of Baroque language-dismemberment [*Spracherstückelung*], to interrupt and suspend the joint, connection, conjunction of sense [*Sinnverbindung*] is to orphan fragments – words, syllables, phonemes – from every conventional connection of sense, inducing a fracturing of language into pieces [*Stücke*] or 'things' [*Ding*] that allow for their 'allegorical exploitation'.⁵³¹ 'Language is broken up,' Benjamin says about certain Baroque texts, 'in order to lend itself to a transformed and enhanced expression through its pieces'.⁵³² On the other hand, Kraus's citational practice seeks to interrupt a different order of flow – encompassing the first but also somewhat raising its stake – namely, of 'information' gathered and distributed by newspapers as the dominant apparatus of news production and distribution of his time. In

⁵²⁹ Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', *Illuminationen*, 380.

⁵³⁰ Roland Barthes. 'Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity' in Brecht, *The Rustle of Language*. 212-222. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1992), 216 (my emphasis).

⁵³¹ Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1978), 183-4.

⁵³² *ibid.* Roused from idyllic sense, the isolated fragment or name does not thereby strictly become non-sense. Instead, the failure of determinate sense is indeterminate only in as far as over-determinate. It is precisely for the increased potential of sense that the fragment lends itself to allegorical exploitation. In one of Benjamin's examples of a Baroque text, it is what Benjamin calls the remainder of sense [*Bedeutungsrest*] that imbues the fragment with a menacing, that is, affective quality. Languages 'enhanced expression' may thus refer to the affective quality of what resists but also multiplies the possibility of determination. The reception of dis-contextualised language-fragments thus finds itself linked to both the experience of affect as well as desire. For its multiplied (allegorical) potential of meaning – or what we might also call the exposure of its increased response-ability – calls for the (historical) participation in the production of sense.

Benjamin's account, newspapers structurally enhance the reduction of language to the status of an instrument in their accelerated endeavour to take hold and disseminate 'any area of life, politics, economy and art.' As accelerated production and distribution times call for an increase in the gathering of information to be made readily available for consumption, every kind of material taken from any area of life, Benjamin says, has to be quickly reached and 'journalistically processed.' Such processing amounts, as he puts it, to the 'making tradable of thought' [*den Gedanken verkehrsfähig macht*].⁵³³ Rendered more literally, what is evoked by the latter expression is a preparation for the road or the flow of traffic [*Verkehr*]. In short, what is at stake is a reduction of language to an instrumental economy that is able to withstand the demands of a changing public sphere.⁵³⁴ A demand for a certain lightness, compactness and unequivocality of language as a transparent means to inform and communicate best met in what Benjamin with Kraus calls the 'empty phrase.'⁵³⁵ Benjamin's Krausian appeal to interrupt the accelerated flow of 'information' induced by the modern press apparatus in order to free language from its reduction to the instrumentality of an 'empty phrase' perhaps finds an echo in Derrida's demand for vigilance and resistance in face of the determining speed of contemporary media in the construction of actuality, 'in the sense of "what is timely" ["*ce qui est actuel*"] or rather, in the sense of "what is broadcast under the heading of *the news* [*sous le titre d'actualités*]. Derrida fittingly designates this general and necessarily artificial construction of time and actuality by the term

⁵³³ Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', *Illuminationen*, 337.

⁵³⁴ Benjamin's rhetorical use of traffic metaphors when discussing the accelerated movement of 'information' by the modern press apparatus of course takes on another resonance in light of what for some time at least would have been often referred to as the information *superhighway*.

⁵³⁵ Benjamin, as we have seen, uses the same formulation when discussing different methodological attitudes towards the transmission of educational contents in his reflections on a proletarian children's theatre. There, in line with his critique of an instrumental use of language, he alerts to the danger that an idea that is merely transmitted but not rehearsed (i.e. class consciousness), runs the risk of merely reaching the child as an empty phrase [*Phrase*].

artificiality. In an interview with the French journal *Passages*, which like so many others begins with a critique of the ‘rhythm’ of its temporal conditions, that is, its complicity in the artificial production of the time of a public speech that, given the temporal constraint of the interview form, must not go to waste and surrender to what we might here call the ‘making tradable of thought,’ if not a reduction to the empty phrase – Derrida gives the following description of the production of actuality:

It is not given, but actively produced, sifted, contained, and performatively interpreted by many hierarchizing and selective procedures – *false* or *artificial* procedures that are always in the service of forces and interests of which their “subjects” and agents [...] are never sufficiently aware. The “reality” (to which “actuality” refers) – however singular, irreducible, stubborn, painful, or tragic it may be – reaches us through fictional constructions [*facture*]. The only way to analyse it is through a work of resistance, of vigilant counterinterpretation, etc. Hegel was right to remind the philosopher to read the newspapers everyday. Today, the same responsibility also requires us to find out how the newspapers are *made*, and *who* makes them, the dailies, the weeklies, and the television news.⁵³⁶

Derrida’s call for vigilance, *resistance* and counterinterpretation in face of the flow of artificiality – the latter finding its apotheosis in the production of the illusion of presence through the device of a teleprompter, or else, more generally, in the ‘live effect’ of a seemingly immediate transmission of images and its concomitant production of belief – here resonates with the interruptive intervention of a punishing and saving citation in Benjamin’s account of Kraus’s critique of the newspaper and its instrumental reduction of language to the status of

⁵³⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Deconstruction of Actuality’, *Negotiations*, 86.

mere information.⁵³⁷ Although Derrida's account of the structural changes of the public sphere are largely concerned with what he calls the new 'resources of "live" communication and "real time" transmission,' the latter seem to remain in a relation of continuity to the accelerated production times of newspapers of which Benjamin speaks in the context of Kraus. Furthermore, in what Derrida is soon to more or less designate himself as a Benjaminian injunction, he calls for the task to make use of 'new [technological] resources while continuing to critique their mystifications'.⁵³⁸ To do so, he asserts, must never remain a matter of merely 'pointing out,' that is, of *describing* the impurity of a more or less illusory transparency, immediacy and neutrality of mediation, but must involve its necessary *demonstration*. It is necessary to 'continu[e] to point out, and *demonstrate*,' Derrida says, 'that "live" communication and "real time" are never pure: they permit neither intuition nor transparency, nor any perception unmarked by interpretation or technical intervention. [...]'.⁵³⁹ The Benjaminian gesture of citational *Rettung*, as we have seen thus far, similarly seeks to expose an illusory assurance of the informational flow by its interruption and suspense – that is, by the *Anhaltung* [stoppage] that doubles up as a particular *Haltung* [pose, attitude] towards the coming of the other. It is thus always of the order of

⁵³⁷ With regards to the media apparatus in general and the technology of the teleprompter in particular Derrida says: 'We would need to look at them [newspapers, television] from the other side: from the side of the news agencies as well as from that of the teleprompter. And let us never forget what such a statement implies: whenever a journalist or a politician appears to be addressing us directly, in our homes and looking us straight in the eye, he (or she) is actually reading on the screen at the dictation of a "prompter" and reading a text that was produced elsewhere at another moment, possibly by other people or even by a whole network of anonymous writers' [Derrida, *Negotiations*, 86]. For another discussion of artifactuality in general and the 'live effect' of so-called "live" images and its profound transformation of the field of perception and of experience in general see Jacques Derrida & Bernard Stiegler. *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. (Cambridge: Polity Press 2002) 39-43.

⁵³⁸ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 88.

⁵³⁹ *ibid*, (the emphasis on demonstrate is Derrida's but would have also been mine).

what Benjamin elsewhere calls with Brecht the ‘refunctioning’ or ‘reworking’ of an available media apparatus, that is, the demonstrated exposure of its opacity and possible transformation (for instance, in view of its democratization qua response-ability).⁵⁴⁰

Although it could seem as if this reading of Benjamin’s account of Kraus’s interruptive citational practice in the context of Derrida’s discussion of artifactuality has drifted afar from the modality of archival exappropriation of Goat Island and Every house has a door as outlined above, there nevertheless remain clear resonances between the respective movements of resistance to consumption and a participatory call to rework qua ‘repair’ and *Rettung*. To be sure, these performance practices, albeit citational, do not take their mimetic material from the realm of the artifactuality of current news production, nor seek to reveal or ‘punish’ its hidden ideological substrate.⁵⁴¹ However, to begin with, they can nevertheless be read as a self-consciously *indirect* response to

⁵⁴⁰ As part of the same interview, in a brief discussion on the changing stakes of political commitments of intellectuals, Derrida distinguishes between the attitudes displayed by Hugo or Sartre to that of Benjamin. The brief reference recalls our previous discussion of Benjamin’s reflections on the Brechtian concept of ‘refunctioning’ in ‘The Author as Producer’ and puts forward an extended concept of the apparatus that resonates with what is there called ‘the transformation of the *forms* and *instruments* of production’ by taking into account both the institutional structures of a public space – with all the macro-political questions of access to power – as well as the intimate ‘experience of language.’ ‘I am not saying that Hugo or Sartre never questioned or transformed the form of the engagement that was available to them. I am only saying that it was not a constant theme or a major concern of theirs. They did not think, as Benjamin suggested, they needed to begin by analyzing and transforming the apparatus; they simply began by supplying it with a content, however revolutionary this content might be. The apparatus in question involves not only technical or political powers, procedures of editorial or media appropriations, the structure of a public space (and thus of the supposed addressees one is addressing or whom one should be addressing); it also involves a logic, a rhetoric, an experience of language, and all the sedimentation this presupposes. [...]’. [Derrida, *Negotiations*, 113].

⁵⁴¹ A prominent example of a contemporary literary practice for the theatre that much more overtly follows and relaunches Kraus’s gesture of a citational ‘punishment’ of contemporary mass media can perhaps be found in the work of fellow Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek.

current events and political urgencies – for instance, the question of how to repair arises in the aftermath of 9/11 as an alternative to the ill-judged immediate military and political responses of the time – that demonstratively resist the rhythm of the latter’s appropriation by a media saturated public sphere, ‘in order that the debate,’ as we might put it with Bottoms, ‘reorganise itself on a higher level of complexity’⁵⁴² Yet what is more, their *hypomnemic* intervention into an archival scene of inheritance is never far from the problematic of a selective construction of artifactuality by what Bernard Stiegler, in conversation with Derrida, suggestively calls the “memory industries”.⁵⁴³ By designating the apparatus of production of artifactuality a memory industry, Stiegler seemingly alerts us to a field of continuity between the production of actuality (artifactuality) and history. Indeed, Derrida’s account of artifactuality more or less resembles his own description of an archontic principle that similarly depends on the many hierarchizing and selective procedures of sifting, containing, and performatively interpreting in the service of certain forces and interests.⁵⁴⁴ In short, a field of continuity

⁵⁴² Bottoms & Goulsh ed., 25.

⁵⁴³ Derrida & Stiegler, 41.

⁵⁴⁴ In *Echographies of Television*, a ‘filmed interview’ with Stiegler, Derrida further generalizes the necessary structure of an ‘interpretative sifting,’ which, as he puts it, ‘is not confined to the news or the media,’ but ‘is indispensable at the threshold of every perception or of every finite experience in general’ [ibid, 42]. Stiegler, in a later text, similarly retraces the structural logic of artifactuality in its relation to the general ‘plight of memory’ – strikingly figured in Borge’s famous story of Funes the Memorius – whilst alerting to the field of continuity between history and artifactuality: ‘The daily and industrial fabrication of time by a press agency is not a mere account of the news: the industries of current events are not satisfied with recording “what happens,” for then everything happening would have to be recorded. But this “what happens,” happens only in not being everything, by distinguishing itself from all the rest, and information has value only as result of a hierarchisation in “what happens”: by selecting what deserves the name of event, these industries co-produce, at least, the access of “what happens” to the status of event. This is the plight of memory in general, that it (must be) a selection in the present, and that its passing, its becoming past, is its diminution. This is the theme of Funes or memory by Jorge-Luis Borges. But here, the criteria of selection become industrial – and the selection takes place in real time, and not through this work of time that is history qua *Historie*

opens up between the mnemonic construction of history and the mnemonic construction of artifactuality as that of a selective, interpretative and abstracted survival and transmission of finite events. In turn, the flow of artifactuality, which *Rettung* seeks to interrupt, must be read in a field of continuity to another order of flow, namely, precisely the congealed, interested and abstracted transmission of tradition Benjamin has in mind when calling for the necessity to brush history against the grain. What concerns Benjamin about the construction of a historical continuum, which, as he puts it, covers its revolutionary moments – revolutionary “moments” that Benjamin always associates with the interruption and suspense of the historical continuum – is not only the outright denigration, exclusion or marginality of what falls out of the archives of a more or less monumental historiography (it does that also), but the abstracted, partial transmission of an unequivocal appraisal of works entered into tradition.⁵⁴⁵ ‘Appraisal or apologia,’ Benjamin says,

and *Geschichte*. The conservation of memory, of the memorable (the selection from within the memorisable which is the retention of this memorable constitutes it as such) is always already its elaboration as well: it is never the sheer reporting of “what takes place”, and what takes place only takes place in not quite taking place: one memorizes only in forgetting, in effacing, in selecting what deserves to be retained in what could have been – [...] [Stiegler, ‘Anamnesis and Hypomnesis’].

⁵⁴⁵ Benjamin was of course also concerned more simply with what Martin Jay calls ‘the imperative to *rescue* what had been *forgotten* by the victors of history’ [Jay, ‘Against Consolation’, 229, my emphasis]. The privileged and biographically informed example of Jay’s account is the social remembrance of WWI casualties by a reparative narrative that necessarily prescribes the forgetting of Benjamin’s close friends’ Fritz Heinle and Rika Seligson anti-war suicides. ‘For the suicides of the two teenagers vainly protesting the outbreak of hostilities[,]’ Jay notes, ‘cannot have had the same meaning as the deaths of the soldiers who were assumed to have gallantly fought for their country’ [ibid, 228]. Devoted to their memory, Benjamin brushes against the grain of history in pursuit of a melancholic work of mourning that cannot so easily be assimilated to the movement of a healthy working through that seeks to make sense of or ‘repair’ the deaths of his friends. If forgetting is here linked to the mnemonic preference and selection of some traces of history over others – *what* is being remembered – it might however also concern a selective *kind* of remembrance. It is this second order of ‘forgetting’ in remembrance that primarily informs our discussion of a gesture of *rescue* that seeks to repeat otherwise an inheritance in resistance to the flow of

strives to cover the revolutionary moments in the course of history. It has the production of continuity at heart. It attaches importance only to those elements of a work that have already entered its aftermath [*Nachwirkung*]. It evades the cliffs and prongs that provide a foothold [*Halt*, also: halt, stop, support, purchase, hold] to the one who wants to progress beyond it.⁵⁴⁶

Cliffs or prongs, as what *resists* the movement of an institutionalised transmission, providing a foothold [*Halt*] that doubles up as the stoppage [*Halt*] – interruption, suspense and *Schwellung* – of a flow of continuity that merely appeals to its non-participatory consumption.⁵⁴⁷ Yet this

“its” congealed transmission history. Both these aspects of resisting a selective remembrance (i.e. between different marks, between different transmissions of the “same” mark) are seemingly at work in Benjamin’s description of the task of remembrance as what ‘must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper depths’ [Benjamin quoted in Jay, 229].

⁵⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin ‘Zentralpark’, *Gesammelte Schriften Band I*, 655-690. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), 658.

⁵⁴⁷ Reflecting on Benjamin’s critical inheritance of Marxist concepts, Matthias Fritsch relates how in his critique of a historicism that suppresses ‘the ‘drudgery of the nameless’ in order to reduce a heritage ‘to a dead possession or inventory whose origin in labor and a history of expropriation is forgotten,’ Benjamin seeks to reveal how a heritage takes on a fetishistic aspect. Fritsch’s admittedly very general comment that, ‘moreover, commodity fetishism in general is said to hamper active intervention into political processes in that it contributes to the melancholic boredom characteristic of modernity’ here nevertheless resonates with what I have identified as the non-participatory tendencies of the *flows* of historical transmission and artifactuality. Benjamin emphasizes the danger of the seemingly apolitical nature of such a flow when seeking to put forward his concept of historical materialism as an alternative model of historiography. The latter, Benjamin insists, must question the flow of historical transmission. The historical materialist, as Fritsch relates,

must ask above all about the origin of the developmental process unified in a “stream of transmission [*Strom der Überlieferung*]”:
 “Whose mills are driven by this stream? Who utilizes its rapids?”

foot-hold [*Halt*], albeit the minimal ground for a sharing of world qua participation in its infinite reworking, is essentially anything but secure. Precisely eschewing a conceptual [*begrifflich*], instrumental grip [*Griff*] on the essence of phenomena, it describes the minimal and limited identity of a *Halt*, *Haltung*, *gesture* that begins to swell and tremble under the virtual intrusion of the possibilities if “its” living-on. *Rettung*, which performs a gesture of interruption qua citation, relaunches an inheritance otherwise to reveal its structural dehiscence and historicity, upping the ante on a constitutive disadjustment:

From what are phenomena to be saved? Not only, and not so much from the disrepute and contempt into which they have fallen as from the catastrophe that a certain kind of tradition, their “valorization as heritage,” very often entails. They are saved through the disclosure [*Aufweisung*] of the breach [*Spung*: leap, crack] in them.⁵⁴⁸

In other words, what is disclosed or exposed by *Rettung* is the impossibility of self-containment and self-identity of the cited material. In doing so, the interruptive intervention prises open the relative closure of a transmission that tends towards non-participation.⁵⁴⁹

Who contained it? – thus asks the historical materialist.” [Fritsch, 166].

For Benjamin, the dead inventory of a fetishized heritage – a stream of transmission that hampers active intervention – ‘does not allow any “genuine, that is, political experience.” [...] Overcoming the fetishistic, historicist notion of cultural history, in the crafting of a new historiographical method,’ Fritsch sums up Benjamin’s efforts to reactivate political experience, ‘contributes to a memory of suffering that, in turn, motivates political resistance against those who profit from the fetishism’ [ibid].

⁵⁴⁸ Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities*, 139.

⁵⁴⁹ I say *tends*, following Derrida’s account of the “logic” of sovereignty that can reign only for a limited time by not sharing. ‘As soon as there is sovereignty, there is abuse of power and a rogue state. Abuse is the law of use; it is the law itself, the “logic” of a sovereignty that can reign only by not sharing. More precisely, since it never succeeds in doing this

**Every Theatre Has a Door:
Exposing the Unknowing of Events, People, Time, and its Passing**

Samuel Weber, as we have seen, reads the theatre (whether as such or more broadly construed) as a privileged space or zone for the scene of such an exposure of the limit of self-containment. For the space of the theatre finds itself 'internally split, divided into spectacle and spectators, stage and audience, inseparable and yet distinct'.⁵⁵⁰ A space, as we might put it, that embodies the very division, breach or crack of every mark that is structurally bound to part with itself qua opening towards future iterations that will transform it.⁵⁵¹ Nowhere does it do so more overtly than in the interruptions of its own continuum, for instance those of a plot. In Benjamin's reflections on Brecht's Epic Theatre and the citability of gesture, the future intrudes as the virtual swell of a coming alterity in a proliferation of gaps that open in the compositional joints of the performance. These gaps demonstratively inscribe into the experimental, trembling conditions [*Zustände*] of Epic Theatre's test-performances the appeal to an audience's response. Yet in as far as the citability of the suspended gesture or scenario [*Zustand*] also marks the opening to other times and places, the appeal of response-ability is never simply addressed to the immediacy of the present or merely to those in attendance [*die Anwesenden*]. Instead it addresses itself to the future of after-thoughts, the coming response of others or the self as other, for which an exposed present [*des Anwesenden*] may merely stand-in. Confronted with the limit of contextual saturation, a situated audience

except in a critical, precarious, and unstable fashion, sovereignty can only *tend*, for a limited time, to reign without sharing. It can only tend toward imperial hegemony' [Derrida, *Rogues*, 102].

⁵⁵⁰ Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 235-6.

⁵⁵¹ 'Theatrical representations cannot be framed by a complete, self-contained, meaningful *narrative* [...] since the actualization of theatre involves a temporal repetition that is suspended in a divided space. It is the simultaneity of this division, of actors acting before and to an audience, which both distinguishes theatrical representation from other kinds and makes it difficult for it to be enclosed within the stable structure of a *work*' [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 259].

experiences a tension between an intrinsically overdetermined and open-ended relational network of signification and the finitude of experience.⁵⁵² Reduced to seeing without knowing just what one is seeing, the audience “recognizes” ‘that the irreducible secret of whatever one sees is that it could mean something entirely different from what one expects’.⁵⁵³ In this context, Hixon’s assertion that, within the gaps of the composition, ‘those watching become aware of themselves watching and the others in the room watching,’ becomes suggestive of a “recognition” of what Weber calls ‘the complexly *relational* structure of cognition’ by which ‘the significance of events, persons, and things depends not just on their intrinsic qualities but on their situation, which is to say, on their relation to what is external to them’.⁵⁵⁴ ‘[..S]uch situatedness,’ Weber continues, ‘can never be internally defined, never finished in the sense of being completed, but only interrupted’.⁵⁵⁵ An interruption that doubles up as a suspense of significance qua understanding, exposing the theatre,

⁵⁵² Perhaps a not dissimilar tension is at work in Benjamin’s experience of the limit of contextual saturation in the interrupted encounter of the images of the *Kaiserpanorama*. Benjamin’s promise of repetition (the desire ‘to come again the next day’) furthermore constitutes a commitment to the response of the appeal to the after-thought.

⁵⁵³ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 264.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid*, 263. Kelleher, in his account of attending a Goat Island performance, describes an experience that here comes very close to a recognition of the relational structure of cognition that is closely linked to what Hixon designates as the becoming aware of the others in the room watching. Although with regards to the work of Goat Island such a recognition is quite literally facilitated through the traverse seating arrangement, as Hixon’s comments in the context of *Testimonium* show, they do not depend on it. Speaking of ‘the associative leaps that we spectators are able to make across the spirals and through the strata of the composition as our thought seeks *its way, its ductus*, among the possibilities on offer[,]’ Kelleher notes: ‘These possibilities, though, are strung out across a range of very different, even contradictory, approaches to the same thing; so that it is never quite possible to only “go” in one direction at a time. There is always another view opening up – like anamorphosis – another perspective from which the object before you might be seen and understood differently [...], if only you were coming at it not from here but from over there, where the other people are, and have been all this time, the other people who appear to be watching the same show as you’ [Kelleher, 106].

⁵⁵⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 263.

as Hixon and Goulish evocatively describe it, as ‘a place of *recognition* as acknowledgement of the *unknowing* of events, people, time, and its passing’.⁵⁵⁶

Nowhere in Benjamin’s writings on Epic Theatre is the opening to other times, places and respondents more overtly figured than in the self-titled primitive example of a literal opening of a (stage) door onto a familiar scene from bourgeois life: the wife was just about to grab a bronze bust in order to launch it towards the daughter; the father about to open the window to call for an officer. In this very moment, Benjamin

⁵⁵⁶ Goulish & Hixon. The rhetoric of “recognition” at work in Hixon’s and Goulish’s exclamation here re-inscribes, whether consciously or not, a tradition that goes back to the founding text of western theatre. In any case, it is this inheritance of the Aristotelian concept of *recognition*, which in the *Poetics* follows on the heels of the *interruption* of a sudden turn of events in Aristotle’s account of the complex tragic plot, that Weber has in mind in the above reflections. Yet whereas for Aristotle “recognition” signifies the repetition or return of cognition after the shock of the unexpected turn, as well as the passage from a state of wonder and even ignorance to a state of insight, Weber’s reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus* (as well as, as we saw elsewhere, of Benjamin’s reading of Brecht’s Epic Theatre) seeks to displace the spatio-temporal dynamic of interruption and recognition by which the latter becomes an overt problematization of the assurances of understanding. In doing so, recognition begins to resemble the interruption from which it sought to set itself apart qua resolution in a way that recalls Hixon’s potent formulation of a *recognition of unknowing*. Not being able to reproduce Weber’s analysis in more detail we must here content ourselves with one of its conclusion:

What one “learns” in beholding a tragedy such as *Oedipus* could therefore be that as a mortal being, one always *sees* without *knowing* just what one is seeing. And therefore that the irreducible secret of whatever one sees is that it could mean something entirely different from what one expects. This secret but ubiquitous possibility is not only responsible for the theatrical *peripeteia* – it makes it indistinguishable from the *anagnorisis* that Aristotle sought to separate from it. The *peripeteia* is the *anagnorisis*. But that means that what is thereby *recognized* is the possibility of a “turn” whose singularity can never be stabilized or exhausted in a predication, in a “this one is that,” which in turn suggests that *anagnorisis* always contains the possibility of turning out itself to be *peripeteia*. [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 264].

suggests, the stranger appears at the door. Suddenly, the image-scene comes to an abrupt halt and exposes itself before the eyes and ears of a stranger.⁵⁵⁷ A gap opens up qua door through which a passage is carved to the *outside world* – *l'etranger* – as Derrida fittingly names the latter when designating its constitutive role within the architecture of every house, structured by the door in such a way that what constitutes a space of controlled and circumscribed property is just what opens it to intrusion.⁵⁵⁸ Perhaps here, in Benjamin's primitive example of an interrupted theatrical scenario, a door then not merely opens onto and exposes the represented interior of a house, but furthermore, the time and place of the performance with all those gathered in a theatre.

Benjamin, as we saw, calls the interrupted action of Epic Theatre a gesture, the interrupted scenario a *Zustand*. A *Zustand* describes a condition or state, but also a stance and position [*Stand*] advanced by the relational syllable of 'towards' [*zu-*], a state of things that is never simply given in advance and by itself, readily representable, but which, as Benjamin says, must be discovered by those that attend to it.⁵⁵⁹ A discovery that doubles up as a becoming strange (*Verfremdung*) and thus as a resistance to knowledge, the flow of comprehension and the consumption of the ostensibly self-identical and familiar.⁵⁶⁰ Never merely representing a given repeatable scene, the *Zustand*, as the result of an interruption, finds itself exposed before an audience as stand-in. The arrival of the stranger in the door literally figures this structural possibility of the coming and going of other respondents, or else, the pre- and afterlife of the image-scene in other contexts, past or to-come.

Far from the Aristotelian project of rendering the scenic medium of theatre transparent in the service of synoptical vision – subsuming the shock of the unexpected turn by the *recognition* that is able to facilitate

⁵⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (1)', 522.

⁵⁵⁸ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 59.

⁵⁵⁹ Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (2)', 26.

⁵⁶⁰ 'This discovery (alienation) [(*Verfremdung*)] of conditions [*Zustände*],' Benjamin says, 'unfolds by means of the interruption of the flow [*von Abläufen*]' [ibid].

‘the passage from a state of wonder and even ignorance to a state of insight’ – a theatre of interruption exposes the scenic medium of theatre as opaque medium and *Vorstellung*, a representing-before or staging rather than the mere alternation of concrete representations.⁵⁶¹ Severed from the linear pull of a telos, the interrupted scenario appeals to be read ‘against the grain of meaning,’ as we might paraphrase it with Weber, so that the scenario does not disappear into it but remains as figure, scenic medium, gesture or writing-image. In the absence of a coincidence between endings and meanings, each audience member is more and more forced to position her or himself with regards to the halted and exposed scenario. Benjamin, as we saw, calls such positioning a *Stellungnahme* [also: response]. Between *Vor-stellung* and *Stellung-nahme*, a structure resembling that of appeal and response, everything “is” only on the basis of its relation. The task of spectatorial positioning, the taking up of a particular relation with regards to the *Vorstellung*, exposes the heterogeneity of an audience’s point of view, in space as much as in time. The stranger’s gaze of Benjamin’s primitive example of interruption figures this heterogeneity and its effect of othering [*verfremden*] the image-scene in such a way that it can only be experienced as overdetermined. What his arrival on the doorstep brings home, so to speak, is the recognition of equality before language and the other’s right of response. Such a right and indeed responsibility to respond, Samuel Weber relates, ‘opens the way to a different conception and indeed, practice of theatre [than Aristotle’s], in which the *medium* reemerges as of decisive significance.’ A re-emergence, as Weber further insists, that is ‘marked by the importance of the response: [...]’.⁵⁶² The eyes and ears of Benjamin’s ‘stranger’ embody the possibility of such an uncalculable response exceeding any contextually determined convention of a context that can never be fully saturated or closed upon itself. The context of a particular time and place of performance finds itself thereby exposed as historically determined and open. The space of

⁵⁶¹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 261.

⁵⁶² *ibid*, 107.

a controlled and circumscribed property must give up a passage to the outside. Every theatre, like every house, has a door. Its 'present is exposed in being placed before "us," before our eyes,' Weber says,

but in a way that can never simply be seen, because it is never fully there. Rather, such presence is overdetermined by being situated in a space that is limited and yet never fully closed or defined. It must be seen, heard, commented upon, and responded to, yet without being entirely comprehended in any of those responses.⁵⁶³

If the crack and opening in the stage floor in which sits the prompter figures the exposure of the theatrical scene as repetition – the haunting of history in the live event of performance – the figure of the door here opens it to a future repeat-ability, that is, "its" coming reworking qua participation (*Mitwirkung*). Following this spatio-temporal schema, the 'act of repair,' the relaunching of the archive as a re-work of mourning that simultaneously puts off its movement of appropriation is always already an act of '*teleiopoiesis*, a telephone call or message transmitted to distant others – ghosts from the future'.⁵⁶⁴ Repeatability implies the possibility of a coming response [*Stellungnahme*] (response-ability) by the after-thought of others – as well as the self as other, whether tomorrow or ten years from now.

The eyes and ears of the stranger at the door hold in suspense the possibility of the alterity of her, his or its response. This *actual* appearance of a stranger at the door in Benjamin's self-designated 'primitive example' of the interruption of a plot is of course here only a figure for the structural necessity of an opening to the future, or else, for the necessity of a door within the technology of the house and home that must keep open the possibility of such intrusions in order to provide a limited security of the accustomed place of the ethos. What Benjamin

⁵⁶³ *ibid*, 109-10.

⁵⁶⁴ Derrida in Lavery & Hassall, 112.

says of the basic attitude of the writer of epic theatre towards the plot – namely that ‘it could happen this way, but it could also happen any other way’ – is here figured by the gaze of the stranger as stand-in, this one or indeed any other who would be wholly other. Like the audience, who’s conventional grip on the perceived scene finds itself thereby interrupted, the stranger’s embodied presence stands-in for a space of alterity that by far exceeds those gathered in a particular space and time. ‘In the theatre,’ as we have heard Weber state in a potent formulation that has become a sort of refrain for our concern, ‘such a space of alterity is always *provisionally* embodied in and, even more, *exposed* as an “audience” – singular noun for an irreducibly heteroclitite stand-in. The “audience” stands in, Weber says, for the others, those who were and those who will be – and perhaps even more for those who will never come to be’.⁵⁶⁵

In the context of Derrida’s reflections on the structure of the messianic, we might then say that the door as opening to the coming of time exposes a disjointed present to the possibility of the question and response as the condition for an injunction of democracy- as justice-to-come beyond any given right or law. Before finally turning to a reading of Every house has a door’s performance *Testimonium*, in which a concern with the relations of testimony, law, justice and theatre will come to the fore, I want to briefly outline, in view of its increasing relevance for our analysis, Derrida’s conception of the messianic structure of an impossible justice as justice-to-come.

Temporal Disjointment as the Condition of an Impossible Justice

The citability of gesture, as a result of the interruption of the continuum of a plot here figured by the opening of a door and the literal intrusion of the outside on the ostensibly self-contained, renders the time of its suspended occurrence out of joint. Swelling under the intrusion of a

⁵⁶⁵ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

possible living-on qua iterability – ‘the irreducible *possibility* of indefinite repetition as alteration,’ ‘the other time in the first’ – any given context of judgement and determination must necessarily remain dis-adjusted, out-of-joint and over-determined, that is, open toward the future coming of the question and the response.⁵⁶⁶ A structurally necessary dis-adjustment and hospitality for what is to come – temporal alterity as the nonethical opening of ethics – that constitutes the condition and limit of justice, not as calculable and distributive, but ‘as incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others’.⁵⁶⁷ Derrida thereby links iterability to a thought of justice as the structure of a messianism without messiah, that is, to ‘the coming of the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant* as justice’.⁵⁶⁸ Justice, for Derrida, can never be fully guaranteed in any given law or decision, nor hoped to ever be achieved in however remote a future, but instead – following what Hägglund describes as ‘the deconstructive idea of justice [as] the idea of the *negative infinity* of time, which will always disjoin the present from itself and expose it to the unpredictable coming of other circumstances’ – must remain always to come, promised beyond what it actually is.⁵⁶⁹ The ideal of a (falsely desired) totalizing justice, as

⁵⁶⁶ Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 60 & 120.

⁵⁶⁷ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 26. Hägglund relates the impossibility of absolute justice as the condition for the promise of justice as follows: ‘[...] Derrida maintains that there can be no justice without the coming of time. The coming of time makes justice possible, since there would be no question of justice without unpredictable events that challenge the generality of the law. But by the same token, the coming of time makes absolute justice impossible, since it opens the risk that one has made or will have made unjust decisions. When Derrida argues that the coming of time is the undeconstructable condition of justice, he thus emphasizes that it is a “de-totalizing condition,” which inscribes the possibility of corruption, evil, and mischief at the heart of justice itself. If this impossibility of absolute justice were to be overcome, all justice would be eliminated. [...] Absolute justice is thus incompatible with the coming of time, since the coming of time exceeds any totalization. But by the same token, absolute justice entails that nothing can happen to cause the concern for justice in the first place’ [Hägglund, 122].

⁵⁶⁸ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 33.

⁵⁶⁹ ‘Derrida describes the negative infinity of justice as *infinite perfectibility*,’ Hägglund recalls further, ‘which is the same as an *infinite*

Hägglund's reading of Derrida insists, would annul the irreversible past and the unpredictable future. It cannot even therefore be the case 'that there ought to be an ideal justice that can encompass and do justice to all [...] others'.⁵⁷⁰ Instead, Derrida's argument, as Hägglund relates,

is [...] that any given decision or definition of justice can be called into question, since it is preceded and exceeded by innumerable finite others that it excludes. Accordingly, Derrida connects his use of the term *justice* to a principally endless questioning by defining "the possibility of the question" as what "we are calling here *justice*." If justice is inseparable from *the coming*, it is not because anything or anyone will come and ordain a final justice. On the contrary, it is the possibility of the question that always comes, the possibility of yet another question that always opens anew and "questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come. Turned toward the future, going toward it, it also comes from the future, it proceeds *from* the future. It must therefore exceed any presence as presence to itself".⁵⁷¹

Responsibility in the face of an injunction of justice beyond right or law, Derrida says with a formulation that here begins to echo Weber's account of a spectral audience of ghosts from the past and the future, rises up in the very respect owed to whoever *is not*, no longer or not yet, living, presently living,' in other words, as we might here put it, whoever might come to appear or return in the door to interrupt and suspend the securities of a house, home, archive and theatre.⁵⁷²

corruptibility and undercuts the regulative Idea of final perfection. The impossibility of such an absolute state is not a privation but the possibility of change at any juncture, for better and for worse' [Hägglund, 169]. The conception of an infinite perfectability has also played a part in my reading of Benjamin's reflections on the reproducible work of art's 'capacity for improvement.'

⁵⁷⁰ Hägglund, 169.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷² Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 121.

Testimonium: Relaunching the Archive as Justice-to-Come

Throughout the analysis of the theatre practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door I have discerned a concern with the demonstrated exposure of the structural impossibility of closure and self-containment through response-ability's appeal to a coming participation that strongly link it to the messianic structures of a democracy- and or as justice-to-come. Here, the *Haltung* [attitude, pose] of a limited appropriative restraint was employed both with regards to the demonstrated structural opening to the future, as well as a concern with a limited respect paid before the "singularity" of an inheritance that necessarily must be corrupted in order to be 'saved' or repaired in the first place. By employing a gesture of repair as re-work of mourning, such a *Haltung* was furthermore seen to implicitly lay bare a previous and coming historicity of survival of the 'patched up' and exappropriated material. Read in this way, its necessarily violent re-workings of an inheritance might be said to follow the aporetic task of working out 'strategies for a "lessor violence" that are essentially precarious'.⁵⁷³ A precariousness that, as we saw, is ubiquitously palpable in the constructed fragility of the performance as *hupomnēmata*, counter-archive and world: the more or less accustomed place of a demonstratively deconstructable ethos. Furthermore, as we have seen, via an account of Benjamin's concept of *Rettung*, the gesture of 'relaunching' the archival marks of an inheritance qua strategies of *repair/response* could at least tentatively be read as put in the service of returning a sedimented transmission of archival remains and historical contents to a state of greater in- as over-determinacy; making amends, in so far as possible, for the violence of forgetting qua (critical) neglect and distorted recognition by a dominant tradition (i.e. Benjamin's history of the victors), as well as demonstratively opening the door for an (ex-)appropriative participation to come. In the context of the work of Bernard Stiegler, the latter aspect of an aggravated response-ability as

⁵⁷³ Hägglund, 101.

the call for a participation to come through the interruption of the flows of (sedimented) historical transmissions and artifactuality can be further said to *resist* or *stand in the way* – exposing, to put it within the rhetoric of our analysis and not the terminology of Stiegler, the necessarily relational stance of *Vorstellung* [representing-before] and *Stellungnahme* [response] – of the tendency to oppose producers and consumers by the flow of the memory industries. With the industrial production and passive consumption of memory, as Stiegler warns, comes the risk of a hyper-synchronisation of the time of consciousness that leads to a symbolic misery as the ruining of a pre-pathological narcissism of appropriative desire. Whereas ‘tertiary retentions such as the alphabet,’ as Stiegler asserts, ‘are those things that undergird every collective and psychic individuation’s access to pre-individual funds’ and ‘condition individuation as symbolic sharing [...] made possible by the externalisation of the individuated experience in traces,’ ‘[h]ypersynchronisation leads to the loss of individuation through the homogenisation of individual pasts by ruining primordial narcissism and the process of collective and psychic individuation’.⁵⁷⁴ All this is to say, that with the cursory recourse to the latter context, an emphasis on a general (re-)activation of an (ex-)appropriative attitude towards the archive of pre-individual funds has at times imposed itself. In other words, an imposition of the privileging of the *cunning* and *exuberant* modalities of taking up the task of inheritance by the ‘amateur,’ to which the performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door both appeals and stands-in for as model. Given the emphasis on defending or reigniting an appropriative desire in view of a danger of its drying up, questions concerning the impossibility of “just” modalities of appropriation (the aporia of mourning as an impossible respect before the singularity of an inheritance) as well as the political stakes of counter-archival subversions of an ‘archontic principle’ or ‘victor history’

⁵⁷⁴ Bernard Stiegler, ‘Suffocated Desire, Or How The Cultural Industry Destroys The Individual: Contribution To A Theory Of Mass Consumption’ trans. Johann Rossouw, *Parrhesia* (2013) 13, 57 & 58.

has at times perhaps moved into the background. Both these latter aspects however return to the foreground in Every house has a door's performance *Testimonium*. Whereas in Kelleher's account of the work of Goat Island, as we saw, it was the performance as *hypomnemic* model, as a 'machine for thinking' or 'craft of thought' divorced from the specifics of *what* it gathers in the operation of its appropriative reworking of an inheritance that was privileged, *Testimonium* seemingly invites us to consider in more detail the specificity of the relation between the modalities of the performance's process, composition and appropriated material. As the latter revolves around a concern with relaunching documents of courtroom testimonies – provoking, as we will see, a consideration of what Goulish calls the difference between a courtroom and a theatre as analogous to the difference between law and justice – it becomes clear that the question of justice and the structures of the messianic must return to the fore of our analysis. Both, that is, in the sense of an impossible respect paid before the singularity of an absolute past and the messianic coming of an absolute future in general, as well as a more specific concern with the precarious re-construction of alternative versions of history that are responsive to the tradition of the oppressed. Thus, in a closer reading of certain aspects of Every house has a door's 2013 production *Testimonium*, alongside an accompanying lecture presented by the company's dramaturg Matthew Goulish and director Lin Hixon, I here aim to reinscribe several of the major concerns raised in the above analysis under the explicit heading of an impossible justice as justice-to-come.

In the context of *Testimonium*, the relevance of a conception of the structural necessity of justice's impossibility arises both with regards to the performance's relation to the (appropriated) archived past as well the latter's relation to the future. Whereas the first concerns a precarious ethical demand for an impossible respect before the singularity of an inheritance – here, largely of the testimonies of an injustice – that can only be remembered, 'saved,' repaired and re-launched by being more or less violently subsumed to a generality in order to remain legible, the

second springs from the relation of any call to justice to the coming of time and the absence of a determinate ethics as law in light of an essential limit of absolute justice as the necessary opening for a justice to come.⁵⁷⁵ In other words, a necessary degree of disadjustment of any given context forms the condition for the coming of justice in a future that exceeds it and may call it into question, following a reiterative chain of infinite finitude. A contextual disadjustment in a time out of joint that must undermine any conceptions and phantasies of identity as self-presence, whether of the marks of an inheritance (i.e. works), the indebted, other-directed subjects of “its” reception or the ethos formed around the collective sharing of pre-individual funds. It is precisely to ward off the disavowal of an essential breach of identity that Benjamin, as we saw, employs the grafting gesture of a saving citation – *Rettung* as the matrix of justice – in the service of an active dehiscence of identity, prising open the sedimented phantasms and rogue abuses of time by the tendentially sovereign self-same. Similarly, the messianic structure of a precarious gesture of ‘repair’ as the restrained appropriation of an inheritance that demonstratively leaves open a place for future transformative participation qua response-ability, as I have identified it at work in the overtly exappropriative performance practice of Goat Island and Every house has a door, perhaps seeks to follow as close as possible the aporetic program of an impossible justice by its tendency towards a maximum limit of respect before the singularity of the re-inscribed and a concomitant retreat before the coming of “its” future transformation. Whereas the rhetoric of participation, as I have privileged it throughout, is more likely to evoke the Derridian theme of a democracy-to-come, it is nevertheless Derrida’s closely related analysis

⁵⁷⁵ Additionally, as the specification of the re-worked inheritance as that of an ‘inheritance of injustice’ here indicates, the latter perhaps expresses a more explicit and concrete concern with the question of justice in the context of an effort at retrieving, as Fritsch puts it with reference to a possible way of reading Benjamin’s conception of the messianic, ‘the voice of the nameless’ that requires ‘a resistance to the rulers in the present’ [Fritsch, 168]. I will briefly return to this aspect of the work in a little more detail in the Postscript to these reflections.

of the distinction between law and justice as justice-to-come that must here be foregrounded. Both are in any case, as Derrida reminds us, inextricably linked, as in the verbless phrase of *Specters of Marx*: “[f]or the democracy to come and thus for justice,”⁵⁷⁶ The shift towards a

⁵⁷⁶ Derrida glosses the inextricability of democracy- and justice-to come in the following paragraph from *Rogues*. The passage also briefly relates the irreconcilability of justice as justice-to-come with a desire for all communitarian adjoinments, to which it must necessarily pose a threat: ‘In *Specters of Marx* the expression “democracy to come” is inextricably linked to justice. It is the *ergo* or the *igitur*, the *thus* between “democracy to come and justice”: “For the democracy to come and thus for justice,” as a verbless phrase puts it in *Specters of Marx*. This gesture inscribes the necessity of the democracy to come not only into the axiomatic of the messianicity without messianism, the spectrality or hauntology, that this book develops, but into the singular distinction between law and justice (heterogeneous but inseparable). This distinction was first developed in *Force of Law* and was further elaborated in *Specters of Marx* in the course of a discussion of the Heideggerian interpretation of *dike* as gathering [*Sammlung/Konzentration, Zerstreung*], adjoining, and harmony. Contesting that interpretation, I proposed aligning justice with disjointure, with being *out of joint*, with the interruption of relation, with unbinding, with the infinite secret of the other. All this can indeed seem to threaten a community-oriented or communitarian concept of democratic justice’ [Derrida, *Rogues*, 88]. For Derrida there is no ‘now us’ in the ‘as one’ of community. Instead, in the irreducible now of the event, there is, a coming together in secret. The condition for any sharing is that there is something non-sharable, an absolute secret, cut off from any bond yet conditioning its possibility. It is a consensus, Derrida suggests, if it still is possible to say so, of the fact that the singular is singular and the other other, an affirmation of the fact that everything that exists shares the unsharable. [Derrida & Ferraris, 58]. The necessary threat posed to the communitarian ‘as one’ by an essential decomposition of the indivisibility of the ‘at once’ in Derrida’s aligning of justice with the disjointed gathering within contexts that are always open and overdetermined resonates with Hixon’s account of the theatre as a privileged space for the facilitated *recognition of unknowing*. In the exposed present of a theatre of interruption, Hixon asserts, ‘those watching become aware of themselves watching and the others in the room watching’ [Goulish & Hixon]. ‘Perhaps this is one of the remaining powers of the live event,’ she continues, ‘a recognition of each other, however uncomfortable that may be. [...] A performance emerges that provides a place of recognition – *a place of recognition as acknowledgement of the unknowing of events, people, time, and its passing*’ [Goulish & Hixon, my emphasis]. In Derrida’s discourse, but also perhaps in Benjamin’s (for instance, in the ‘*secret rendez-vous* between generations’ and of course in the already encountered formulation of the

focus on the messianic structure of an impossible justice as justice-to-come here imposes itself through the specificity of the appropriated archival material. For what is saved and relaunched and thus put before the outstanding 'judgement' of an audience in *Testimonium* are a selection of documented victim testimonies in criminal cases and those of workplace negligence based on the law reports of US court cases between 1885-1915. Or better and what is more, what is here saved or relaunched are not the law reports themselves but a previous gesture of their relaunching, namely, the two out-of-print volumes of poetry *Testimony: The United States (1885-1915) Recitative* by Charles Reznikoff that constitute the primary source material of the performance. To be sure, neither the law reports nor Reznikoff's poetry are here 'saved,' as in the privileged scenario of Benjamin's conception of *Rettung*, from a sedimented valorization as heritage, but from the threat of historical oblivion.⁵⁷⁷ Yet *Testimonium*'s counter-archival force might be said to

'secret signal of the to-come that speaks from the gesture of the child'), the unknowingness of an out-of-joint time becomes 'the infinite secret of the other' that rejects belonging and the putting in common of family, nation and tongue, as well as, as we might here put it, that of an audience, however conventionally situated in a particular time and place. Thus put in the idiom of Derrida, what Hixon's formulation seems to evoke is a spectral 'bond between singularities – the bond that links what will not be linked' [Derrida, *Negotiations*, 4]. Or else, 'a community that does not constitute itself on the basis of a contemporaneity of presences but rather through the opening produced by [...] allegoresis – that is, the interpretation of a text not given, not closed in on itself, an interpretation that itself transforms the text. We would have, then, a community of writing and reading – a community that would be bound by a testament to the law that is neither given in advance nor understood in advance' [Derrida & Ferraris, 24-5]. 'I have no misgivings about this community,' Derrida adds with a formulation that here reiterates the messianic disruption of (theatrical) presence, 'it's just that there is something that would always make me hesitate to call it 'community' – namely, that the force of the future that has to be at work in it has to be a force of disruption no less than a force of integration, a force of dissension no less than a force of consensus' [ibid].

⁵⁷⁷ Although what at first here seems obvious in as far as what is saved from historical neglect cannot at the same time be saved from a sedimented valorization by tradition, must perhaps immediately be complicated in this particular instance. For having been refused the theatrical rights to any extract from Reznikoff's *Testimony* from the

remain demonstratively weak. Its delicate and precarious efforts at counter-archival saving clearly seek to expose an essential non-sovereignty that keeps to a minimum any tendential abuse of time through the explicit appeal to a coming participation as the condition of justice-to-come. In doing so, as we will see, it models itself on the very gesture it repeats. For in “citing” and responding to Reznikoff’s critically neglected collection of poetry and interweaving it with the outlines of a portrait of the author, *Testimonium* seemingly adds the name of Charles Reznikoff to those that he himself sought to rescue from oblivion. Yet beyond following his endeavor to ‘save voices omitted from the history books,’ Hixon and Goulish are furthermore concerned with demonstratively repeating Reznikoff’s model *Haltung* of relaunching, namely, that of a *sobriety of style* as a precarious modality of saving.

The sober style of Testimony

Hixon and Goulish identify Reznikoff’s model as a ‘generative constraint,’ that is, a certain withholding of ego, intention and expression in (re-)production, as well as the absence of all embellishment of an

publisher, Goulish sees himself forced, by a gesture that we might here designate as a kind of reversal of Echo’s predicament, to save and facilitate the survival of the voice of the other by the cunning of an appropriative transformation that undermines the prohibition to cite by the publisher’s copyright. These efforts are thus clearly imbued with a task of returning the transmitted closure of a work, albeit not one that forms part of a dominant tradition, to a greater state of indeterminacy. Here is Goulish’s account of this process: ‘In the wake of this legal refusal, we resolved to attempt a transformation and unfolding of those 6 pages. It became my responsibility as writer and dramaturg to revise the text. I approached the task in one respect according to a purely formal measure: no five consecutive words could remain intact from the original version. I began by considering differences between words on the page and words heard aloud. In fact, when reading publicly, Reznikoff selected and re-sequenced his poems, fashioning reading scripts that differ drastically from the sequences of the published work [...]’ [Goulish & Hixon].

appropriated material that other-directs the non-performer as guide. An expressive restraint as generative constraint that Reznikoff himself identified with the sober style of testimony. Here, sobriety as a modality of (re-)presentation surely becomes another way to describe the appropriative restraint of what Goulish elsewhere designates as the non-virtuosity of non-performance: the artist as facilitator, guide, puppet. In other words, sobriety describes a limit tendency of an impossible retreat before an inappropriable singularity that must, in order to be saved and relaunched, paradoxically be appropriated. A brief look at Reznikoff's original text palpably reveals the generative force of such a self-set constraint of expressive restraint. By comparing Reznikoff's poems to the historiographic documents they are based upon, Richard Hayland is able to reveal the minute, most calculated of changes and additions to the historical records.⁵⁷⁸ Actively withholding any additional emotion, commentary or judgment, Reznikoff's poetry therewith seeks to remain within the register of testimony itself, namely, as Hixon puts it, that of a sober, 'ruthlessly straightforward' style recounting the many 'brutal, irresolvable moments of ethical crisis' without accompanying judgment, and emotional effect. For instance, merely the unrecorded colour of hair of fourteen year old factory worker Amelia is added for the smallest of effects – as she '[...] stood at the table, her *blonde* hair hanging about her shoulders' – before feeling it getting caught *gently*, as Reznikoff continues to describe the scene, zooming in on and slowing it down with a word and impression that once more is not to be found in the official records, by the shaft of a wire stitching machine,

wound and winding around it,
until the scalp was jerked from her head,

⁵⁷⁸ Charles Bernstein 'Charles Reznikoff's "Amelia": A case study by Richard Hyland'. Accessed online April 2015.
<http://jacket2.org/commentary/charles-reznikoffs-amelia-case-study-richard-hyland>

and the blood was coming down all over her face and waist.⁵⁷⁹

It is with regards to the sobriety of his style that Reznikoff was willing to accept for his poetry the label of Objectivism, which he idiosyncratically defined as ‘a poetic inflection of the objective register required of courtroom testimony’.⁵⁸⁰ One must follow the rules with respect to testimony in a court of law, he says, as Hixon relates, that is, evidence to be admissible in a trial cannot state conclusions of fact but must state the facts themselves’.⁵⁸¹ In other words, one must wrest the externals of an event, however horrific, from any emotion, commentary or judgment, which are left for a reader to provide him- or her-self. Hixon, who emphatically relates her admiration for Reznikoff’s model restraint, his ability to withdraw before the other in order to construct rather than express emotion, as we saw, expresses a similarly ambition for a sober approach towards the treatment of material within the composition of the performance. ‘I have always found the way forward by restraint and by the particular,’ she says, ‘ – the particulars of a walk, a fall, a specific name, a death or saying goodbye’.⁵⁸² Here as elsewhere then, the company’s treatment of historiographic materials in its persistent engagement with the archive echoes the movement of Benjamin’s conception of a citational practice of *Rettung* as the matrix of justice. In a gesture of resending what has barely been received, a neglected inheritance is saved and sent on, ex-appropriated, exposed before the coming of other respondents.

In the context of the relaunched testimonies, the generative constraint of a sobriety of style further doubles up as the suspension of a rush to judgment. As such it here recalls the afterlife of the Hölderlinian conception of caesura as we have seen Weber locate it in Benjamin’s writings on Epic Theatre’s practice of interruption precisely around the

⁵⁷⁹ Charles Reznikoff, *By the Water of Manhattan*. (New York: Charles Boni Press 1930), 76.

⁵⁸⁰ Goulish & Hixon.

⁵⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁸² *ibid.*

terminology of a certain sobriety. Unsurprisingly, in *Testimonium*, the employment of a sobriety of style will be similarly associated with a compositional structure that employs interruption, separation and gaps as its overriding principle. Finding itself breached at the joints, repeatedly and temporarily halting the forward thrust of the action, the performance unfolds in fits and starts, leaping across the openings of gaps within a continuously interrupted spatio-temporal composition.⁵⁸³

Far from a transparency of transitions between mere alternations of representations that move seamlessly towards their final conclusion,

⁵⁸³ 'Matthew:

Stephen delivers a file to Bryan at the table. The delivery interrupts Stephen's movement sequence. Bryan opens the file and immediately begins to read the first testimony, involving the day laborers crowded into a boat in a pre-dawn icy harbor. Theo enters, sets up his drums, and sits behind them. Bryan resumes reading. The boat strikes a large ice floe and begins taking water.

Men begin to shout,
ankle-deep in water.
The man at the wheel turns
now with his flashlight:
-everybody turning and everybody pushing;
-those near the windows
try to break the windows,
in spite of wire mesh in the glass;
-those near the door
are now in the river.
They are in the river.
They reach for the ice floe,
-their hands

Lin:

Theo begins drumming an off-balance beat. Did he interrupt Bryan? Is the story finished? What will happen to the men in the icy river? Tim and Bobby enter with their guitars. The first song has already begun, exploding out of the first testimony as a kind of protest against the irreversible nature of the facts.

I used the scythe like a corkscrew.
I used the corkscrew like a wedge.
I used the wedge like a hammer
Because any tool is also a hammer
As any rule is subject to its matter'.

[Goulish & Hixon]

interruptions of continuity expose isolated fragments before an audience piecemeal, severed from the flow of empty and homogenous clock time or the linear pull of teleological conclusions. Confronted with the thus exposed fragments, Hixon relates, 'those watching become increasingly aware of themselves watching and the others in the room watching'.⁵⁸⁴ Moreover, in *Testimonium*, the clearly framed and separated parts are not merely severed from linear continuity, but further belong to three clearly separated strands of media the performance puts to work: recital, movement and music. Discussing the effect the clearly separated blocks have on the viewer, Goulish observes that 'the blocks never blend – all juxtaposition, no accompaniment. Our audience/*jury* then has another *responsibility*,' he says, namely, 'to assemble the parts. As one observer noted in a post-show conversation, meaning can be construed in how the parts meet, in *the gaps and leaps* between them. Lin might say that one can also construct emotion this way' (my emphasis).⁵⁸⁵ The formal disjointure of *Testimonium*'s composition, its structural open-endedness and appeal to the response of an audience is, as Goulish's above likening of the audience to a jury hints at, here closely linked to the context of its material, re-rehearsing a concern with the relations of testimony, law and justice as they were already put to work in the two volume's of Reznikoff's *Testimony*. What distinguishes a theatre from a courtroom, Goulish reflects in this context, is that the jury of an audience is merely introspective, with 'no power to convict but only to consider'.⁵⁸⁶ In other words, the place of the theatre remains demonstratively open qua disjointure to the future as a promise of justice to come. For '[o]ne difference between a courtroom and a theatre,' as Goulish continues with a formulation that here must evoke the discourse of Derrida, 'might be analogous to the difference between law and justice'. Reznikoff, Goulish suggests, attempted to place his poetry into the *breach* between law and

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ Goulish & Hixon, my emphasis.

⁵⁸⁶ Goulish & Hixon.

justice, “with absurd hope of restoration and furious repair”.⁵⁸⁷ ‘Our performance,’ he continues, ‘like his poetry, requires the space of the reader, or audience, the introspective jury, whose necessary attention charges and completes the event’.⁵⁸⁸ Yet this charge of attention, this retrospective and introspective consideration of what has been exposed before the eyes and ears of readers, must here best not be described as an act of completion. For, by following the demonstrated model of Reznikoff’s *Haltung*, placed in the breach between law and justice that exposes the essential crack [*Sprung*] of any given judgement, the performance as model of inheritance turned towards the future no less than the past must appeal in turn to a modality of participation that follows the aporetic program of a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible as the condition of responsibility. Following this model, any given audience does not complete the received. Instead, they become temporary caretakers of a precariously transmitted inheritance, taking up the task of a responsive and responsible reading and *Stellungnahme* by becoming its heirs or legatees in turn. The audience, ‘singular noun for an irreducibly heteroclitite stand-in,’ ‘stands-in for the others [...],’ re-sending what has been addressed to them, putting off appropriation as final judgment, or else, rehearsing the future as the promise of justice to come.⁵⁸⁹ Put differently, instead of completing the received, the audience is in turn set the task of a spectral inheritance that must greet [*salut*] the other in the sense given to this French term by Derrida. Derrida employs the notion of *salut*, which is able to add the sense of greeting or salutation to that of saving and salvation, in order to draw out the irreconcilability of the necessary (unconditional) exposure to the coming of time and the hope for a final salvation.

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.* I will return to a brief discussion of hope in the Conclusion of my Thesis. It should be clear that I would have reservations designating it as ‘absurd’ and in the pursuit of ‘restoration’.

⁵⁸⁸ Goulish & Hixon.

⁵⁸⁹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 341.

If to the notion of *salut* as *Retten* and *Heilen* we were to add the sense of *salut* as *Gruss* or *gruessen* [...], and if, [...], one were to separate as irreconcilable the notion of *salut* as greeting or salutation to the other from every *salut* as salvation (in the sense of the safe, the immune, health, and security), if one were to consider the greeting or salutation of the other, of what comes, as irreducible and heterogeneous to any seeking of *salut* as salvation, you can guess into what abysses we would be drawn.⁵⁹⁰

And yet salvation, *Rettung*, repair is not altogether out of the question. Instead, it must be differently construed. Namely, precisely as what is never assured and completed but only able to facilitate a precarious survival. Although '[t]he religious notion of salvation,' as Hägglund asserts, 'is [...] emphatically negated.'

[...] Derrida writes [...] that salvation is not "out of the question" but should rather be understood as something that is never assured. These apparently contradictory claims become consistent if we apply [a] distinction between immortality and survival. Insofar as salvation is understood as the absolute immunity of immortality, it is out of the question. There can be no such salvation, since nothing can happen without the greeting of an other that can come to compromise any immunity. However, insofar as salvation is understood as a survival that saves one from death by giving one more time to live, it is not out of the question. It is rather a precarious possibility that always can "be refused, threatened, forbidden, lost, gone" because of the infinite finitude of time ("the endlessness of the end that is never-ending"). [...] ⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰ Derrida, *Rogues*, 114.

⁵⁹¹ Hägglund, 131

Postscript:**Labor Trouble, Machine Age, Property: Remembering The Voice of the Nameless in History**

He will call this part Machine Age.

He has read through court transcripts: testimonies.

He has distilled the words and forged these poems.

These poems that are not poems.

Who was Bernadette?

He will not let her disappear.

He will not let her words burn away into ash.

Machine age.⁵⁹²

As already indicated, another way of emphasizing *Testimonium's* relation to the question of inheritance and justice seems possible. One that bespeaks no longer a sole or privileged concern with a general attitude of expropriative restraint in view of a maximum (if limited) respect before the singularity of an absolute past and future, but a more specific endeavor of brushing history against the grain. An effort that, never so much as explicitly, yet nevertheless implicitly goes far beyond a self-proclaimed interest in making amends for the critical neglect of certain source materials but more radically might be said to 'free the present for a memory of the downtrodden in history' and somewhat quietly 'seize the political chances of the day and 'rescue' the images of the past that most concern the present'.⁵⁹³ 'Reznikoff's *Testimony*,' Hixon relates,

makes irregular use of intertitles in the form of categories:

SOCIAL LIFE

DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES

LABOR TROUBLES

⁵⁹² Goulish & Hixon.

⁵⁹³ Fritsch, 161-2.

CHILDREN
PROPERTY
MACHINE AGE
STREETCARS AND RAILROADS
SHIPPING

Of these, we decided to concentrate on LABOR TROUBLES,
MACHINE AGE, and PROPERTY'.⁵⁹⁴

The categories in general, but even more so the particular selection, inscribe in elliptical form the testimonies of human suffering into a historical trajectory of industrial progress as evidence of Benjamin's famous claim that '[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.' For '[a] heritage, Benjamin insists, owes its existence "not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who created them, but also the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. [...]"'.⁵⁹⁵ To avoid a second victimization of the "anonymous" dead at the hands of the survivors, *Testimonium* might thus be said to stand within a critical historiographic tradition that calls for 'a "memory of the nameless" rather than a memory of the dead in general, so as to resist 'a process of cultural-historical transmission [...] that dissimulates both past oppressions and contemporary domination'.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ Goulish & Hixon.

⁵⁹⁵ Fritsch, 161.

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid.*

An Amateur's Courage – Cunning and High Spirits for the Task of Inheritance that Remains

In retrospect, perhaps the figure of the amateur can be seen to proliferate throughout this writing, whether in the form of the artist, the child, the allegorist, the plotter, the assistant [*Gehilfe*], the creature, Echo or indeed Walter Benjamin. The decisive trait that allows these different incarnations of the figure of the amateur to participate in what they love and desire, of proffering a critical response [*Stellungnahme*] in spite of a lack of a secure *Stellung* [position, status, employment] would be that of courage [*Mut*], which, as Benjamin relates with regards to the Fairy Tale, dialectically splits into cunning and high spirits [*Unter- und Übermut*].⁵⁹⁷ It is the courage to contribute to the socio-political construction of the ethos in spite of an absence or lack of the securities of the proper that here mark out the figure of the amateur. Barred from the participatory task of inheritance by its monopolised, instrumentalized and increasingly sealed transmission, the amateur revolts against his or her alienation, expropriation and reduction to the consumerist experience of life as the ephemeral flux of an industrially produced flow of artifactuality.⁵⁹⁸ The

⁵⁹⁷ 'The wisest thing – so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times and teaches children to this day – is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spiritis. (This is how the fairy tale polarizes *Mut*, courage, dividing it into *Untermut*, that is, cunning, and *Übermut*, high spirits.) [Walter Benjamin, 'Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows', *Illuminationen*, 385-410. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002), 404].

⁵⁹⁸ 'The amateur is not a consumer. Contact between the amateur's body and his art is very close, imbued with presence. That's what is beautiful about it, and that's where the future lies. But here things open onto a problem of civilization. Technical development and the evolution of mass culture reinforce the division between producers and consumers to a

lack of *Stellung* that bars him from contributing to the social production of value becomes the precarious resource and hope for a new conception of the task of inheritance as the socio-individual re-work of mourning.⁵⁹⁹ The counterstroke against the lack of *Stellung* and the relegation to the passivity of consumption comes in the form of a *Haltung* that *resists* the monopolized flow of cultural transmission in order to un-seal it, that is, open it to the possibility of transformation qua participation. The temporal lag of a *resistance* exposes the interrupted transmission as essentially breached, swelling under the virtual intrusion of other *possibilities*. In other words, the amateur's *Haltung* is an effort to render cultural inheritance appropriable. 'For what is the value of all our culture

frightening extent. We are a consumer society, and not at all a society of amateurs' [Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice. Interviews 1962-1980*, 217].

⁵⁹⁹ If the amateur is a figure that here predominantly arises in a context of resistance to monopolist capitalism's tendencies towards the expropriation of experience [*Erfahrung*] – and thus from the dissolution of pre-industrial, non-similar traditions – a notable exception to this dynamic imposes itself within the context of the German baroque as it has been one of our themes. For Benjamin, as we saw, portrays the latter precisely as a crisis of tradition as the crisis of tradition's monopoly over the social organisation of life. In this context, it is the dissolution of the prevalent eschatological narratives of theology and their institutional organisation by the Church that leads 'to the problematic situation of an isolated self and its difficult relation to the community' that calls for the cunning and high spirits of the amateur [Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 168]. The vacuum left behind by the departure of a monopolist organisation of the social paves the way for the emergence of the latter (allegorist, plotter) to become the model of a new economy of contribution. By adopting an attitude of allegorical theatricalization in the production of social significance, the baroque "amateur" begins to experiment with new forms of socio-individual appropriation in which, as we might put it, 'the relation to self and the relation to world are articulated together [...] [Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, 246]. The baroque amateur thereby seeks to build, to paraphrase Stiegler, 'a sustainable libidinal economy and does not expect [the Curie] to put it in place' [Bernard Stiegler, 'Amateur', *Ars Industrialis*.

<http://arsindustrialis.org/amateur-english-version/>. Accessed February 2016. Stiegler's sentence actually reads: '...and does not expect industrial society to put it in place'].

[*Bildungsgut*, more literally: the goods of education],’ Benjamin asks, ‘if it is divorced from experience?’⁶⁰⁰

As a response, as we might put it, to a difficult situation of isolated individuals and their relation to the community, the amateur’s hopeful experiments arise – without ever becoming fully erect – as a consequence of a mourned loss of a more active culture of contribution. Benjamin unfolds this mournful narrative as a socio-economic development that dissociates the ‘goods’ of tradition(s) from the *possibilities* of their socio-individual appropriation. What Benjamin mourns is the loss of experience [*Erfahrung*] as ‘a form of appropriation in which the relation to self and the relation to world are articulated together and which simultaneously transforms the appropriated and the appropriator’.⁶⁰¹ The acquisition of experience [*Erfahrung*] through the becoming present of the past by a dynamic process that defies their metaphysical opposition – alongside that of living and dead memory (*anamnesis* and *hypomnesis*) – could thus be said to describe a relay movement through which, as Stiegler says, the ‘living and dead compose without end’.⁶⁰² Within this dynamic process, *Erfahrung* would be the product of the labour of such compositions. What has been lost, therefore, is not merely the specific, situated, specialised know-how (to live) passed on through the generations that is as yet unstamped by technological and industrial drives to similitude, but more importantly, the participatory possibilities of its on-going transformation by a labour of appropriation that must double up as that of a response. What has been lost, in other words, is responsibility before an inheritance brought on by a loss of the response-ability of its transmission. Benjamin describes this process as that of a loss of experience within capitalist modes of production (from artisanal production to machine labour) and consumption (from use-value to commodity fetish), as well as an increasingly instrumentalised

⁶⁰⁰ Benjamin, ‘Erfahrung und Armut’, 292.

⁶⁰¹ Thomas Weber, ‘Erfahrung’ in *Benjamin’s Begriffe*, ed. Michael Opitz and Erdmut Wizisla, 230-259. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2000), 246.

⁶⁰² Stiegler, ‘Anamnesis and Hypomnesis’, no pagination.

transmission of memory and know-how (the decline of the story and the rise of industrial flows of information). With recourse to Benjamin, Thomas Weber fittingly sums up this parallel dissolution of experience as follows:

As the social and technical conditions of production increasingly fall out of people's memory and experience [*Merk- und [...] Erfahrungswelt*] with the commodity-form, historical phenomena become "inaccessible" [*"unnaahbar"*] within cultural history [*Kulturgeschichte*]. The latter goes hand in hand with a loss of an awareness that cultural goods [*Kulturgüter*] "not only owe their emergence [*Entstehung*] but also their transmission to a continuous social labour by which, moreover, those goods themselves are processed [*verarbeitet*], that is, transformed".⁶⁰³

Seeking to bring the ostensibly transparent, "inaccessible" flows of transmission of cultural history to a halt, the *Haltung* of the amateur renders them memorable qua strange [*merk-würdig*]. In doing so, he or she facilitates the becoming opaque of the medium of transmission, prising open its contextual closure and exposing it as essentially breached: demonstratively leaving room for his or her own as well as the coming of other's participation.⁶⁰⁴ To ward off the stultifying transmission of a sealed inheritance, the amateur must put to the test, again and again, by a labour of appropriation that takes the form of rehearsal. Benjamin, to be sure, does not strictly employ the term rehearsal to describe the necessarily transformative labour of appropriation but one that comes very close to it, namely, *Übung*, the task of practicing, training, exercising or taking lessons. If in the realm of labour processes *Übung* describes a more artisanal, participatory,

⁶⁰³ Thomas Weber, 'Erfahrung', 255.

⁶⁰⁴ The difference between a closed, transparent and an open, opaque means of transmission is for instance elaborated in Benjamin's distinction between the passive consumption of information and the story's call to participation. See Benjamin's essay 'The Story Teller'.

transformative mode of skill acquisition before or against that of the conditioning drill [*Dressur*] of capitalist modes of production, in the context of cultural history it might describe a modality of inheritance and reception as socio-individual co-production before or against the sealed transmissions of memory industries in the service of what Bernard Stiegler calls the control society. The loss of *Erfahrung* springs from the loss of *Übung* as the technique of its acquisition. With the rise of industrial, monopolist capitalism, *Übung* or rehearsal must make way for the stultifying expropriations of drill and control.

Although Benjamin's concept of experience thus construed would be closely linked to the transformative aspects of its acquisition through rehearsal, in the context of the narrative of its loss he nevertheless seems tempted to stress the aspect of its relative permanence. As a result, those passages in which he laments the loss of *lasting* experiences against the background of an immense and monstrous expansion of technology over mankind, perhaps form the apotheosis of one side of what Samuel Weber calls the 'double (or "cracked") tone' of Benjamin's thinking and writing, split between melancholy and mourning on the one hand, engagement and hope on the other.⁶⁰⁵ 'Where has it all gone?' Benjamin asks in his lament of a time during which one exactly knew what experience constituted. 'Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? Where do you still hear words that *last, and that pass from one generation to the next like a precious ring?*'⁶⁰⁶ Yet as the essay 'Experience and Poverty' seems to closely follow the programme of a double tone, split between a mournful lament of tradition and a call for high spirited improvisations in its wake, one might suspect that Benjamin's stress on the lasting aspects of experience over those of its transformative survival through participatory transmission is in parts employed for the rhetorical effect of their contrast. Indeed, a similar observation can at times be made at the other side of the spectrum of a cracked tone, namely, in those passages where Benjamin wants to be done with

⁶⁰⁵ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, 119. See footnote 228, p.86.

⁶⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Erfahrung und Armut*, 291 & 731, my emphasis.

experience and inheritance altogether. Yet a more nuanced reading of the relation between what is sadly mourned *and* paradoxically affirmed with high spirits seems possible. By calling for the radical affirmation of the loss of tradition, habit, security and the possibility 'to hold tight' [*Festhalten*] that 'has become the monopoly of a few powerful people,' Benjamin rejects the lasting aspect of more or less reified products of experience whilst nevertheless seeking to restore and radicalize – perhaps relaunch – the dynamic, participatory, transformative processes that previously brought about their acquisition. Put differently, the counterstroke against the security and steadfastness of a *Stellung* that has become the monopoly of the few and powerful, is not the latter's restoration, but the search for renewed possibilities for transformative participation from an affirmed position of limited security. Thus, Benjamin's call for an avowal and affirmation of the 'poverty of experience' describes a modality of inheritance as the dynamic process of a reworking of its transmission that avoids reification into lasting 'products' of experience. It is this desire to participate without *Stellung*, the hopeful affirmation of a poverty of experience that must 'make do with little,' 'construct out of little,' that I am here associating with the cunning and high spirits of the amateur and a politics of rehearsal. The hope that it conjures is never that of the restoration of a mourned security of tradition, of more or less possessable and communicable experiences, but of a radical commitment to the task of inheritance through its perpetual reworking in the absence of the securities of the proper. 'To make do with little,' which was perhaps also an aspect of the method of self-writing Michel Foucault identified in the Greco-Roman practices of keeping a treasure-like assemblage of rehearsable marks in the notebook as *hupomnēmata* – a modality of appropriation, as we might here put it, in which the relation to self and the relation to world are articulated together by the simultaneous transformation of *what* is appropriated and *who* appropriates – without ever becoming too fixated

on what one knows. Not to erase one's traces, as Benjamin also likes to quote Brecht, but to avoid their reified accumulation.⁶⁰⁷

In the comfort of the bourgeois interior, Benjamin says, a maximum of habits accumulate and suffocate the occupants of such plush apartments. Thus, at the end of 'Experience and Poverty,' he calls for a very different way 'to make oneself at home' [*sich einrichten*], that is, to construct an ethos in the affirmed absence of familiarity, security and identity. It is the effort of 'making [oneself] a home away from home' [*Einrichtung*], to 'set oneself up' [*sich einrichten*] anew and with little, whilst avowing an essential process of self-deconstruction.⁶⁰⁸ Benjamin non-fortuitously employs the very same term – *Einrichtung* – in the context of his analysis of Epic Theatre, where the place upon which one must 'take one's place' [*sich einrichten*] becomes that of the theatrical stage, or more precisely, the podium of Epic Theatre. What the latter context brings home, so to speak, is that the call to *Einrichtung* in the absence of the securities of the proper and property entails a becoming theatrical of the house and home and a subject's being-at-home-with-itself. The latter must give up a passage to the outside, which prohibits a simple opposition of inside and outside, private and public. For 'the space of the theatrical scene,' upon which one must install oneself [*es gilt, sich einzurichten*], as Weber puts it, 'is no longer simply an interior space, since it is always directed outward, away, toward others.'⁶⁰⁹ 'The self is never therefore simply "at home" on a podium, or on a stage[,] ' Weber continues. 'Perhaps,' he finally goes on to suggest, 'the stage can come to stand for a place in which one is always already placed, without being fully at home or definitely positioned'.⁶¹⁰ To be thus positioned in the absence of a security of *Stellung* is also the *Haltung* of the amateur, who takes up a pose and attitude that makes do with little and never fully comes to rest (for instance, on what he or she comes to know) as it perpetually and demonstratively appeals to the coming of the other's

⁶⁰⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Erfahrung und Armut*, 294.

⁶⁰⁸ *ibid*, 296.

⁶⁰⁹ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 246-7.

⁶¹⁰ *ibid*, 68.

response qua theatrical iterability as response-ability. In Derrida's account, as we saw, to be thus exposed to the coming of time is never simply a matter of choice but an ultratranscendental condition of life qua survival. Yet by affirming and aggravating certain auto-deconstructive processes of the laws, goods or products of an inheritance, the ethico-political bearing of the amateur is nevertheless able to counter all limited but nonetheless threatening tendencies towards their closure. For the amateur, the crisis of tradition, which he or she meets with a cracked sentiment of mourning and high spirits, becomes the only chance to keep alive the task of its perpetual reworking.

In designating the place for a more or less precarious *Einrichtung* no longer simply as a stage but as a podium, Benjamin seeks to radicalize this scene of exposure through the podium's more emphatic appeal to others.⁶¹¹ For in Benjamin's account, the decisive trait of the podium is that it is no longer separated from the audience by the chasm of the orchestra pit. 'Although the stage is still distinct from that of the audience, "still elevated,"' Weber relates, 'it functions more as a "podium" than as a sacred space'.⁶¹² 'On this podium,' Benjamin concludes, 'one must find one's place [*gilt es, sich einzurichten*]'.⁶¹³ If the orchestra pit sought to separate players and theatre-goers, as Benjamin puts it, like the living from the dead, the podium appears 'as a site where the living confront the dead'.⁶¹⁴ A confrontation that here might also be described as the relay movement between past and present by which the living and dead compose without end for which the stage as podium becomes a paradigmatic place without *Stellung*. 'Whatever else Benjamin's notion of *Einrichtung* may entail,' Weber states, 'it refers to the relation of the

⁶¹¹ Samuel Weber describes the difference of stage and podium as follows: 'In being raised above the horizontal, it [the podium] is positioned to appeal to others. This is true of stages in general, but to the extent that a stage is also a podium its relation to its addressees has become more emphatic. It becomes a site from which others are not just addressed, but enjoined. In the presence of a podium, spectators are expected to do more than just observe' [ibid].

⁶¹² *ibid.*

⁶¹³ Walter Benjamin, 'Was ist das epische Theater (1)', 7.

⁶¹⁴ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 69.

living to the dead, of the present to the past – and hence also of both to the future'.⁶¹⁵ Thus, to make oneself at home away from home on the stage as podium is to “inhabit” the paradoxical temporality of rehearsal by a gesture of repetition that maintains a simultaneous reference to the past and to the future.

In ‘Experience and Poverty,’ Benjamin further develops, albeit in elliptical fashion, the strange temporality of such an *Einrichtung* and links it to the figure of hope. There, the proponents if not examples of what I am here calling the amateur – Bert Brecht, Adolf Loos, Paul Klee, Paul Scheerbart – ‘reject the traditional, solemn, noble image of man, festooned with all the sacrificial offerings of the past[,] to [...] turn instead to the naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present’.⁶¹⁶ Benjamin therewith links the rejection of the securities of tradition in the present with an image of hope for the future. A similar sentiment returns at the very end of the essay. Here, in contrast to the possibility ‘to hold tight’ [*Festhalten*] that ‘has become the monopoly of a few powerful people,’ Benjamin evokes the necessity of most but also the particular capacity of some, ‘to install oneself [*sich einzurichten*] – beginning anew and with few resources’.⁶¹⁷ The latter are able to do so, Benjamin says, with laughter, that is, as we might here put it, with the courage of cunning and high spirits.

In their buildings, images and stories, mankind is preparing to outlive culture, if need be. And the main thing is that it does so with a laugh. This laughter may occasionally sound barbaric.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience and Poverty’, *Selected Writings Vol 2.2*, ed. Michel W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al, 732-738. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 2005), 733.

⁶¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Erfahrung und Armut*, 296.

⁶¹⁸ Earlier in the essay Benjamin declares his intention to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarianism to designate an affirmative attitude towards the poverty of experience.

Well and good. May the individual from time to time give up a little humanity to the masses, who one day will repay him with compound interest.⁶¹⁹

Although the crisis of tradition is unmistakably the condition for the hope that opens with the increased possibilities for its future reworking, Benjamin is here perhaps too quick in wanting to offer guarantees through the trade-off of a present “barbarism” for a future interest. For the newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present might always turn out to have been a monster. A monstrosity, however, which even if it remains a danger, is precisely what carries hope in the absence of all future guarantees. The monstrous child, like ‘the call for a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*, of the reason *to come*,’ would thus carry the good and the bad, the chance and the danger, ‘[...] bear every hope, to be sure, although [remaining], in itself, without hope.

Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness, and the *salut* of salvation. Not foreign to the *salut* as the greeting or salutation of the other, not foreign to the *adieu* (“come” or “go” in peace), not foreign to justice, but nonetheless heterogeneous and rebellious, irreducible, to law, to power, and to the economy of redemption.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁹ *ibid*, 296.

⁶²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, xiii.

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